George Washington University

Reading Lists of Plays,
Early Modern, Modernist, Postmodern

BRUCE R. SMITH

I

WITH A PLAY ON "SIGN," HERE'S AN ASSIGNMENT. Please read carefully the following eleven lists. At the end of each, try to tell what it means. Time is important, but there is no time limit. We'll begin with an easy one:

<div align="center">

List 1
tragedy, comedy, pastoral
pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical
tragical-comical-historical-pastoral

</div>

How did you do? This one may be a little harder:

<div align="center">List 2</div>

Corpus Christi cycle plays, saints' plays, morality plays
Senecan tragedies, Roman comedies
interludes—Tudor, Marian, Edwardian, Elizabethan, moral, humanist, and other
courtly masques, civic entries, countryhouse entertainments
St. George plays, sword dances, the Fool's wooing rite, Robin Hood plays, plays
    in which the men of a village, town, or city dress up in costumes, take sides,
    and spend several hours taunting each other with speeches and thwacking
    each other with sticks

Looser in formal definition, more varied in venue, broader in social range than the strictly literary genres in list 1, these are, of course, all modes of dramatic activity in sixteenth-century England. *Just when did you realize that? Was it at the end of the first line? At the end of the second? Within a particular line? At the end of the entire list? What effect did Polonius's catalogue of genres in list 1 have on the way you read list 2?*
   Since lists are something we're more likely to associate with shopping for groceries than with thinking about drama, perhaps we should pause a moment and consider what goes on as we read them. We tend to read lists rapidly, more rapidly perhaps than any other kind of text. Especially when the list is one we've made ourselves, we know what the subtext is even before we take the text itself in hand. How these particular items hang together doesn't have to be spelled out. Lists, a linguist might say, are radically paratactic. Connections among the items exist primarily in the writer's mind, not in the marks he or she makes on a piece of paper. Usually it's enough just to "scan" a list; we don't have to "read" it as we would a more complicated text. The lists in this assignment ask for more than that. I invite you to read and re-read them slowly. Think of them as puzzles. Or, better still, as poetic texts.

What, for instance, is the subtext here?

<div align="center">List 3</div>

historical chronicles
Latin plays by Plautus, Terence, and Seneca
Italian *novelle*
already successful plays by other playwrights unprotected by copyright
Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans Compared Together*
pamphlets on voyages to the New World
Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*

If you answered "works that have been identified as sources of Shakespeare's plots," you're learning to read the signs. If you noticed that these items follow roughly the chronology of Shakespeare's career, you've begun to turn signs into sentences. Now try testing the paradigms of list 3 against another list of texts:

<div align="center">List 4</div>

Plato's *Timaeus*, Aristotle's *Ethics*, Seneca's dialogues and epistles
the Bible
the Book of Common Prayer
Montaigne's essays
pamphlets on usury
perhaps (if *Notes and Queries* is to be believed) ninety-eight
    percent of the moral and philosophical books published
    before 1616 in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin,
    and possibly German and Greek

Can you detect the period style? These reputed sources of Shakespeare's ideology, like the sources of his plots in list 3, may be implicit in the scripts that Shakespeare wrote, but as explicit reading lists, as bibliographies of texts that a serious student ought to know, lists 3 and 4 are both products of distinctively modern ways of reading, thinking, and writing about drama.

By its very name, *Quellenforschung* proclaims its origins in nineteenth-century philology as practiced in German universities and in American graduate schools modeled after them. So, too, with the survey of dramatic activity in list 2. Sir E. K. Chambers in *The Elizabethan Stage* could think of "stage" in much less constricted terms than Polonius because pioneer anthropologists like Sir George Frazer had pointed the way in studies of ceremonies, rituals, and magic rites in geographically remote cultures. The distinctions among genres in list 1 may be as old as Aristotle, but in the twentieth century, Genre has formed one of the keystones in the edifice of modernism. It has guided the close scrutinies of formalist "new critics" no less decisively than it has provided a cosmic blueprint for the typology of Northrop Frye.

The remaining seven lists are texts of another sort. Although it is I, a twentieth-century professor of English, who have gathered these words together, arranged words into lines, and grouped lines into stanzas, these seven lists are not really *my* lists. They are implied by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers of play texts, by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witnesses to plays in performance, by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antagonists of plays, players, and playing. The subtext in each case is theirs, not mine or yours. To find those subtexts out, we should read these

lists with critical self-consciousness. We should try to be objective, to forget *our* ways of relating drama to other forms of human activity and concentrate instead on imagining *theirs*. Within each list we should pay attention to two things at once: not only to what the individual items have in common with each other, and what that tells us about early modern views of drama, but also to the cumulative statement those items seem to be making when taken in sequence. That is to say, we should try to read within, between, and among the lines. So also between and among whole lists. The result of such objective reading should be a more subjective understanding of what plays were like to the people who wrote them, acted them, saw them, read them, and wrote about them in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Descending from the empyrean of Germanic philology, we find ourselves in the first of these early modern lists with our feet firmly on the ground:

<div align="center">List 5</div>

   a bishop's palace, several churches, some walled gardens, a main
      road out of town
   the shops of artisans and merchants who cannot or will not join
      closed-shop trade unions and exclusionary guilds
   a bearbaiting arena, pits for cockfighting, theaters for the presenting
      of plays
   brothels

To make sense of these items, to see the whole, requires a kind of knowledge and a way of making connections that are not traditionally within the jurisdiction of English Literature. To the citizens of London who left behind work and duty on the north bank of the Thames, theatergoing was part of the physical, economic, political, and social geography of Southwark.

Even less familiar to twentieth-century students of Shakespeare are the connections implicit here:

<div align="center">List 6</div>

   a quart of ale split among four friends
   a plug of tobacco split among three
   a mug of beer for oneself
   a one-sheet printed story, love lyric, or moral poem to read and sing
      to oneself, to read and sing to others, to paste up on the wall,
      to get by heart, to use as waste paper
   the privilege of standing shoulder to shoulder with a thousand other
      people and watching men and boys in disguise as they tell
      jokes; as they give fine speeches; as they feign to argue, fight,
      and die, to love and to marry, to forgive and to retire; as they
      break into song, dance, and a comic routine

What can these things have to do with one another? What does a plug of tobacco have in common with going to a play? As disconnected as they may seem to us, they are all things that cost a penny at the time Shakespeare was writing for the Globe.

Similar challenges to twentieth-century ways of thinking about drama are posed by this list:

<div align="center">List 7</div>

   rogues, vagabonds, sturdy beggars
   fencers, bear-wards, common players in interludes, minstrels, jugglers
   peddlers, tinkers, and petty chapmen

If we can fix the items in this list of legal vagrants with respect to each other, can we also fix them with respect to items in other lists? *What, for example, might rogues, fencers, and peddlers have to do with the categories of persons in the list that follows?*

List 8

poets
pipers
players
jesters
and suchlike caterpillars of a commonwealth

The value judgment being made here about *people*, signalled as much by the speaker's contemptuous *p*'s as by his metaphor of insidious parasites, is made even more explicit by the modifiers in the following list of *acts*:

List 9

effeminate mixed dancing
dicing
stage plays
lascivious pictures
wanton fashions
face-painting
health-drinking
long hair; love locks; periwigs; women's curling, powdering, and
    cutting of their hair
bonfires, New Year's gifts, May games, amorous pastorals, lascivious
    effeminate music, excessive laughter, luxurious disorderly
    Christmas-keeping, mummeries

"Effeminate," "lascivious," "wanton," "amorous," "excessive," "luxurious": these are *not* adjectives commonly heard today in connection with Shakespeare's plays in college courses or in reviews of productions in the press. Similarities between the entertainers of list 8 and the entertainments of list 9 are perhaps clear enough. *What are the differences? Is one list simply a translation of persons into actions? Or might there be another way of drawing distinctions at work?* In fact list 8 comes from a sixteenth-century academic's dismissal of public theater; list 9, from a Puritan salvo delivered less than a decade before the theater buildings of Southwark were finally knocked down.

Interconnections among lists are even less easy to decipher in this example:

List 10

the Royal Exchange
the Tower
Whitehall Palace, with a tour of its treasures
the Temple
a visit to one of the Southbank theaters for "an excellent performance of
    the tragedy of the first emperor Julius Caesar"
a cockpit, with a stop to see a fight, to converse with the master of the
    establishment, and to look over his birds
a bearbaiting arena, with a stop to see a match between a dog and a bear
a tour of assorted inns, taverns, and alehouses, with close inspection of
    the women who frequent them

a visit to Walter Cope's house, "stuffed with queer foreign objects in
        every corner"
the law courts
Billingsgate Market
St. Paul's Cathedral

What might these geographical locations have to do with the list of texts that follows?

List 11
the draft of an autobiography
a letter from a client on the subject of marriage
collections and rules about casting out spirits, discovering
        lost or stolen goods, the state of persons absent, the
        cause of death
a "bocke of Plaies and Notes therof . . . for common
        policie," put together by the author as a memorandum
        of four visits to the theater
some notes on the writer's name and genealogy
a code of Hebrew letters for writing things down so that no
        one else can read them
a poetical dialogue with Death, written during a grave illness

And there's an end.[1]

II

Here, a new beginning. Let us now try to tell what these lists mean, taken
altogether. You might first want to read the lists again, paying attention this
time to the way plays, players, and playhouses are represented in all the lists,
as well to how different the modern lists, numbers 1 through 4, seem after
having read the lists from Shakespeare's own time and place. What do we
find when we try to sum things up? One likely effect of paying close

---

[1] The sources for the eleven lists are these: (1) *Hamlet*, 2.2.387–90, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Alfred Harbage, gen. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), p. 948; (2) E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923); F. P. Wilson, *The English Drama, 1485–1585*, ed. G. K. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969); J.M.R. Margeson, *The Origins of English Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Alan Brody, *The English Mummers and Their Plays: Traces of Ancient Mystery* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959); (3) Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Methuen, 1977); Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1957–75); (4) Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York: Collier, 1966); (5) J. C. Visscher, *Londinum Florentissima Britanniae Urbs* [engraving] (Amsterdam, 1616); Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988); (6) William Ingram, "How Much Wit Is a Groat's Worth?" (paper delivered at the 1990 annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America); (7) *An Acte for the punishement of Vacabondes and for Releif of the Poore & Impotent* (1572), rpt. in *The Elizabethan Stage*, Vol. 4, pp. 269–71; (8) Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Salzburg: Institüt für englische Sprache und Literatur, 1974), pp. 69–137, with Kinney's reminder, pp. 26–37, that Gosson wrote not as a Puritan but as a humanist academic; (9) William Prynne, *Histriomastix* (London, 1633), sigs. 8ᵛ–9ʳ; (10) Thomas Platter, *Thomas Platter's Travels in England 1599*, trans. Clare Williams (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 153–74; (11) MS Ashmole 208, as itemized in William Henry Black, *A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue of the Manuscripts Bequeathed unto the University of Oxford by Elias Ashmole* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1845), col. 169.

attention to so many discrete objects is *deconstructive*. How can we hope to give an account of so many separate items? The problem is in the gaps, both within lists and between lists. Each list individually is made up only of the names of things. Where are the verbs that might connect those nouns and turn them into actions? Only one minimal predicate seems to be implied: "is like." Even more elusive are the verbs that might connect one list with another. Each of the separate lists represents a different mode of discourse, a different way of talking about drama, and superficially at least there seems to be little common ground among them.[2]

Tellingly, the most deconstructive of the lists are those farthest from the Sorbonne of the 1960s, the lists toward the end: the geographical (5), economic (6), social (7 and 8), and moral (9) lists, the list of London sights seen by the Swiss traveler Thomas Platter (10), the list of manuscript papers left behind by the astrologer and quack doctor Simon Forman after a later and less happily concluded dialogue with Death (11). We can give these eleven lists the period label "early modern" only by understanding that term in two distinct ways. Lists 1, 2, 3, and 4 reflect categories that *we* have projected onto the drama of a period and a place that we have defined as Early Modern England. Genre (list 1), mode (list 2), narrative sources (list 3), and philosophical sources (list 4) are modern, in fact modernist, ways of understanding literary texts as autonomous objects. The later lists are early modern in a different sense. They are implied in written statements made by people living then and there. They speak for lived experience. Between the two groups of lists, the gazetteer of Southwark landmarks in list 5 forms a kind of axis. On the surface it would seem to catalogue an objective reality, a set of geographic facts that once were *there* for anybody to see. At the same time, list 5 codifies subjective meanings, economic and social discriminations, that we are only just now beginning to recover and to understand.[3] With lists 6 through 11 we move into ever more subjective, and to us ever more alien, ways of conceptualizing drama.

No less important than the deconstruction of meaning that these lists effect is the invitation they hold out for *constructing* meaning. By picking up the separate pieces and setting them side by side in new ways, we can find out links among the fragments that may suggest *new* meanings—new to us if not to our sixteenth- and seventeenth-century informants. In that critical act of fragmenting and recombining, we are turning early modern lists into postmodern lists—and opening up for ourselves more intimate access into the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.[4] If we are going to

approach public-theater drama in early modern England as if we were cultural anthropologists, we need to heed the lesson that professional anthropologists themselves have learned in the past ten years and make sure that *our* ways of categorizing and systemizing academic knowledge do not blind us to the ways in which our early modern informants talk about the lived experience of a play. In a word, we need to let our informants be *subjects*.[5] We need to let the "we" of academic discourse include "them." We need to map out the "imaginative space" to which drama seems to belong in the minds of contemporary observers and pay careful attention to the other forms of expression and experience that are lodged in the same place.

The particular realities represented in each of our lists—formal, philosophical, geographic, social, economic, legal, academic, religious, autobiographical—make sense only when taken altogether. The history of a culture, as Raymond Williams has argued, is more than the sum of its parts. Particular activities, particular institutions, particular cultural products must be seen in relationship to each other, as "elements in a whole way of life." A key word in Williams's model is "pattern":

> it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful
> cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns,
> which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto
> separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an
> unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned.[6]

By insisting on the whole—and on the *idiosyncrasies* of that whole in different cultures—Williams manages to negotiate both Hegel and Marx, the Scylla and the Charybdis of cultural analysis. Which is finally in control of culture, Hegel's ruling ideas or Marx's material circumstances? In Williams's view neither reductive alternative, the philosophical or the economic, can stand as a total explanation for what a culture is and how it works.

III

"Imaginative space": to illustrate what I mean by that term let us consider some examples closer to ourselves in time than drama on the London stage in 1600. Dickens's novel *Bleak House* was first published not as a complete book but in nineteen installments that appeared monthly between March 1852 and September 1853. For a nineteenth-century reader these little booklets bound in blue paper belonged, in the first instance, to the physical

parts of early modern culture in England that were learned and internationalist), and (3) to suggest a chronological sequence that connects with modernism and postmodernism.

[5] In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), seven anthropologists, a linguist, and a literary critic reflect on the methodology, politics, and ethics of academic discourse about other cultures. On the hazards of posing questions and the inescapable distortions in writing up answers, see especially Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places," pp. 27–50; Renato Rosaldo, "From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor," pp. 77–97; James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," pp. 98–121; and Stephen A. Tyler, "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document," pp. 122–40.

[6] "The Analysis of Culture" (1961), reprinted in Tony Bennett, Graham Martin, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader* (London: Batsford, 1981), pp. 43–52, esp. p. 47.

space of a tobacconist's shop. They insinuated themselves into the reader's consciousness amid consumables for the nose and the mouth as well as the eyes: cigars, pipe tobacco, sweets, newspapers. Within the blue wrappers the reader encountered, month by month, not only Dickens's changing story and H. K. Browne's changing illustrations but a largely unchanging frame of advertisements for other periodicals and books, for pocket-size folding raincoats, for skin creams and hair tonics, for Crosse & Blackwell relishes, for grandiose beds from Heal's. Taken together, Dickens's narrative and the capitalistic consumables that were iconicized around it constitute just the kind of "imaginative space" I am describing, one that is altogether different from encountering *Bleak House* by itself in the Oxford Dickens or embedded in scholarly commentary in the Norton Critical Edition. Since many of the wonders of technology, convenience, and vanity depicted in the advertisements of those nineteen monthly installments could be inspected firsthand at the Great Exhibition going on at the same time, it is tempting to see in *Bleak House* a shadowy, back-street countertype to the Crystal Palace.[7]

For us, some more familiar examples lie at hand. What do these items have in common: poems by James Merrill, $1,000 Steuben Glass paperweights, short stories by John Updike, reviews of performances of arcane eighteenth-century operas at Indiana University, cartoons by George Booth, advice on where one should be in Manhattan on a given night at a given hour to hear the best jazz? Disparate as they may be as representations of human experience, these texts, images, and objects define the imaginative space of the *New Yorker*. Taken together, they inscribe a widely recognized image of American high culture in the 1990s.

Or consider this list: apothegms from Thomas Jefferson, H. L. Mencken, and Calvin Coolidge; the story of a seventy-five-year-old woman whose womb has been carrying a mummified foetus since 1927; four-million-year-old Miracle Power Crystals available by mail for a $1.00 handling charge; advice on raising children; news of the latest sighting of Elvis Presley; the Honest Person Award of the week. Disparate as they may be, these texts, images, and objects define the imaginative space of the *National Enquirer*. Taken together, they inscribe a widely recognized image of American popular culture in the 1990s.

Thomas Platter's travel account offers several sixteenth-century examples of the same kind of semiotic inventorying. On his visit to Whitehall Palace, Platter first saw the summer house, then paused in "a chamber built over the water" to copy down some of the chivalric emblems and mottoes that lined the walls. Concerning the chamber itself or the view it commanded over the river, Platter has nothing to say, but he dutifully transcribes and translates all his notes on the emblems. His account of the rest of his Whitehall tour is just such list-making:

> This fine, but unfortified palace, contains the queen's wardrobe, (Garde Robe) where she keeps her clothes and jewels which are worth an immense sum.

---

[7] For these observations about *Bleak House*, I am indebted to my colleague John Glavin, who told me about Robert Tracy's paper on the connections between *Bleak House* and the Crystal Palace exhibition (delivered at the Dickens Conference held at the University of California at Santa Cruz in July 1988) and who later sat down with me and examined a run of all nineteen installments of *Bleak House* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1852–53) housed in the Special Collections Department of the Joseph Mark Lauinger Library at Georgetown University.

Besides other curiosities I saw an immense whale rib in this palace. Likewise a delightful garden; the apartments contained many beautifully worked tapestries, almost as if they were painted.

There hung in the long room a portrait very artfully lengthened by perspective, of which I took back an engraving to Basel.

We were also shown the Queen's library containing many books written in Latin with her own hand, very clearly indeed. For she can speak this tongue as well as French, Italian and Spanish.

In some of the apartments I saw small positive organs, virginals, which she played, daintily appointed couches, also numerous clocks, cunningly wrought in all sizes. I saw too in this palace an Indian bed, with Indian valance and an Indian table, if I remember rightly. Amongst many portraits from life, I noticed particularly one of a young girl and the Elector [of Saxony], in genuine old fashioned guise.

A picture of a Dutch cook with fruit was also very lifelike and artistically painted.[8]

If all the objects Platter saw still existed today, they would be divided up among the British Library, the National Gallery of Art, the Museum of Natural History, and various departments of the Victoria and Albert Museum. To Thomas Platter and other foreign visitors to London in the sixteenth century, they were all one kind of thing: curiosities worth seeing in Whitehall Palace. As art objects they may have been made in different media, but in economic value and in cultural function they were all alike. They were rare, they were fabulously expensive, and they communicated one thing above all else: the power of a monarch.

Or consider Platter's long list of what he saw in Walter Cope's house. Cope himself showed Platter and his companion around:

. . . he led us into an apartment, stuffed with queer foreign objects in every corner, and amongst other things I saw there, the following seemed of interest.

1. An African charm made of teeth.
2. Many weapons, arrows and other things made of fishbone.
3. Beautiful Indian plumes, ornaments and clothes from China.
4. A handsome cap made out of goosefoots from China.
5. A curious Javanese costume.
6. A felt cloak from Arabia.
7. Shoes from many strange lands.
8. An Indian stone axe, like a thunder-bolt.
9. Beautiful coats from Arabia.
10. A string instrument with but one string.
11. Another string instrument from Arabia.
12. The horn and tail of a rhinoceros, is a large animal like an elephant.
13. A fan made out of a single leaf.
14. Curious wooden and stone swords.
15. The twisted horn of a bull seal.
16. A round horn which had grown on an English woman's forehead.
17. An embalmed child (Mumia).
18. Leathern weapons.
19. The bauble and bells of Henry VIII's fool.
20. A unicorn's tail.
21. Inscribed paper made of bark.

[8] pp. 164–65 (cited in n. 1, above).

22. Indian stone shears.

23. A thunder-bolt dug out of a mast which was hit at sea during a storm; resembles the Judas stone.

24. A stone against spleen disorders.

25. Artful little Chinese box.

26. Earthen pitchers from China.

27. Flying rhinoceros.

28. (Caterpillar) Hairy worm, sidopendra.

29. Flies which glow at night in Virginia instead of lights, since there is often no day there for over a month.

30. A small bone implement used in India for scratching oneself.

31. The Queen of England's seal.

32. Turkish Emperor's golden seal.

33. Porcelain from China.

34. Falcon's head made of fine feathers.

35. Many holy relics from a Spanish ship which he [Cope] helped to capture.

36. A Madonna made of Indian feathers.

37. A Turkish pitcher and dishes.

38. An Indian chain made of monkey teeth.

39. A sea-halcyon's nest, sign of a calm sea.

40. A pelican's beak, the Egyptian bird that kills its young, and afterwards tears open its breast and bathes them in its own blood, until they have come to life.

41. A mirror which both reflects and multiplies objects.

42. Crowns made of claws (ungulis).

43. Heathen idols.

44. Saddles from many strange lands; they were placed round the top of stands.

45. Two beautifully dyed Indian sheepskins with silken sheen.

46. Remora. A little fish which holds up or hinders boats from sailing when it touches them, likewise another species called "torpedo" which petrifies and numbs the crews' hands if it so much as touches the oars.

47. A sea mouse (mus marinus).

48. Numerous bone instruments.

49. Reed pipes like those played by Pan.

50. A long narrow Indian canoe, with the oars and sliding planks, hung from the ceiling of this room.

He possessed besides many old heathen coins, fine pictures, all kinds of corals and sea-plants in abundance.[9]

Even our highly refined systemization of knowledge might not be able to find niches for some of the things Platter saw in Walter Cope's house. In what kind of museum would we place dessicated fireflies? or that trick mirror? In the sixteenth century, however, these diverse items added up to a single coherent image, an image of learned curiosity that did not yet separate numismatics, biology, oriental art history, and anthropology as distinct categories of knowledge. In just the same way, I propose, drama in early modern London belonged to categories of experience that were different from the categories we are apt to make even in our most theoretically sophisticated moments of new historicist relativism.

---

[9] pp. 171–73. On collections like Cope's see Amy Boesky, " 'Outrageous Fruits': Commissioning Nature for the Museum of Man," forthcoming in *English Literary History*, 1991.

What kind of map of the imaginative space of drama can we make when we compare these sixteenth-century lists? What are the concerns that interconnect them? Lists of buildings in Southwark, lists of things that cost a penny, lists of ways of making a living that the government sought to suppress, lists of artistic practices held in contempt by a literary academic, lists of things hated by Puritans, lists of sights worth seeing by foreign visitors, lists of private matters worth writing down and remembering—what do these things have in common? What are the verbs that are implied between these sets of nouns? Can we construct for the theaters of Shoreditch, Southwark, and the Blackfriars a cultural equivalent to the image of princely magnificence displayed in Whitehall Palace or the image of learned curiosity crammed into Walter Cope's chambers? What we want to know, in essence, is this: with what other kinds of cultural practices, with what other sorts of subjective experience did drama communicate in early modern England?

It is easier, perhaps, to note what is *not* on these lists: the very things we as late-twentieth-century readers are likely to be most interested in talking about. On none of the lists is there any direct concern with aesthetic values, with dramaturgy, with iconography, with issues in the history of ideas, with gender conflict, with the collusion of politics and art. What, then, *are* the common denominators? Some of the items *within* lists, though not quite the words we would use, do make sense to us immediately: "fencers, bear-wards, jugglers," for example, or "poets, pipers, players, jesters." *What happens, however, when we cross lists? Are there items that seem to crop up more than once? Are there cognates that suggest how one mode of discourse may be connected with the others?*

Take, for example, a penny from the commodities list (6), cockpits from the geographical list (5), fencers and bear-wards from the legal list (7), dicing and stage plays from the Puritan list (9), and bearbaiting from the tourist list (10). These items constitute a category of game, of contest, of choreographed violence to which drama, too, was understood to belong. To us the "raw" violence of cockfighting may seem impossibly remote from the "cooked" subtleties of *King Lear*. However, John Aubrey's notes on the sport, set down fifty years or so after Shakespeare's death, "read" cockfighting as a species of *human* drama in terms not at all unlike those Clifford Geertz has used in analyzing cockfighting on Bali. The interest in every one of Aubrey's observations is in how spectators use the cocks as ciphers for some sort of contest among themselves. Schoolboys, for example,

> continue that Custome still: and have their Victors; that is, he whose Cock conquers or beates the rest, is Victor, and *eo nomine*, he hath the Priviledge, during that Lent, to save what Boy he pleases from Whipping.[10]

Cockpits, fencers and bear-wards, dicing and stage plays, bearbaiting, play-watching, commodities available for one penny—arranged this way,

---

[10] "Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme" in *Three Prose Works*, ed. John Buchanan-Brown (Carbondale: Univ. of Southern Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 131–304, esp. pp. 138–39. Compare Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 412–53. The anthropological distinction between "the raw" and "the cooked" is one of Lévi-Strauss's versions of Saussure's linguistic distinction between *la parole* and *le langue*. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), and "Linguistics and Anthropology" in *Structural Anthropology*, 2 vols., trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), Vol. 1, pp. 67–80.

excerpted from the separate modes of discourse in which they usually figure and set down side by side, these items read less like a set of nouns conjoined by "is like" and more like a sequence of active verbs: "pay," "fight," "thrust," "bite," "kill." Analytical names turn into actions; objects, into subjective experiences.

Let us try a second cross-list code-switch. Brothels from the geographical list (5), lascivious pictures and wanton fashions from the Puritan list (9), taverns and alehouses from the tourist list (10), beer and tobacco from the price list (6), the letter from a female client on the private-papers list (11): these items suggest a syntax of sensuality in which drama, too, makes sense. What these items seem to verbalize is something like "pay," "lust for," "delight in," "enjoy," "taste," "love." At quite the opposite extreme are the private notes on divination and the reflections on "common policie" (11), the moral broadside ballad (6), St. Paul's Cathedral (10), perhaps even the Bishop of Winchester's Palace and the Church of St. Mary Ovary. These suggest a third cross-list linkage, a category of spiritual edification that likewise subsumes drama. The actions here pull in the opposite direction from the actions invited by sensuality: "pay," "stop," "take heed," "confess," "repent."

If we search the early modern lists for any "literary" category with which drama communicates, we discover only one. Peddlers and petty chapmen, pipers and jesters, amorous pastorals, St. Paul's Cathedral and the printing shops in its precincts, a poetical dialogue with Death, and penny broadsides all suggest a strong connection between drama and ballads. Certain links between ballads and stage drama have been recognized since Thomas Percy put together his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765 and devoted a separate section to ballads that tell the same stories as certain of Shakespeare's plays. Hyder Rollins's long article in *PMLA* in 1919 and C. R. Baskervill's *The Elizabethan Jig* of 1929 make the external connections among ballads and plays even clearer: popular ballads are often alluded to in plays; ballads and parts of ballads are sometimes incorporated into plays; danced ballads were customarily performed at the end of plays.[11] At the end of *Julius Caesar*, Platter recalls, "they danced very marvellously and gracefully together as is their wont, two dressed as men and two as women."[12] The thought of Caesar rising from the dead to play Singing Simpkin to Brutus' Bluster—and finishing it all off with a four-in-hand with Calphurnia and Portia—exhausts even Polonius's genre-naming powers.

These external links among ballads and plays, notable as they may be, are less interesting, I think, than the more subtle connections that our early modern lists suggest. On a number of fronts—cost, academic contemptibility, Puritan objectionableness, sensuality, morality—ballads and drama belonged to the same sphere of imagination, and within that sphere the communication between them was greater than the communication between drama and any other kind of printed text. Several facts—that is to say, several written, printed, and reprinted facts—underwrite such an

---

[11] "The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad," *PMLA*, 34 (1919), 258–339; and *The Elizabethan Jig and Related Song Drama* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1929), esp. pp. 164–218.
[12] p. 166.

assertion. Only broadside ballads begin to approach playscripts in sheer numbers. Between 1552 and 1594 broadside ballads constitute the largest category of entries in the Stationers' Register. Especially during the first half of the sixteenth century the people who wrote and published playscripts often wrote and published ballads as well. (Rollins's ballad index to the Stationers' Register credits Richard Edwards, John Heywood, and Thomas Preston with three published ballads apiece.) The printers who published ballads and those who published playscripts were often one and the same. Finally, to buy a broadside ballad and to buy a standing-place at the Globe cost exactly the same thing: one penny.[13] It is no happenstance that Cleopatra, in the same breath, fears not only a squeaking actor who will boy her greatness but "scald rhymers" that will "ballad us out o' tune." Like plays, printed ballads mediate across all kinds of divisions in early modern English culture: oral and literate, popular and elite, native and foreign.

If Roger Chartier's findings in *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* can be generalized at all to early modern England, we should not take academic contempt for ballads at face value any more readily than we do academic contempt for playscripts.[14] Sir William Cornwallis—member of Parliament, friend of Ben Jonson, and imitator of Montaigne—reveals in his *Essayes* one reason why so few printed ballads have survived:

> All kinde of bookes are profitable, except printed Bawdery; they abuse youth: but Pamphlets, and lying Stories, and News, and two penny Poets I would knowe them, but beware of beeing familiar with them: my custome is to read these, and presently to make use of them, for they lie in my privy, and when I come thither, and have occasion to imploy it, I read them, halfe a side at once is my ordinary, which when I have read, I use in that kind, that waste paper is most subject too, but to a cleanlier profit. . . .

The whole point of Cornwallis's essay "Of the observation, and use of things" is that good is where you find it. And that general truth he extends to pamphlets and ballads:

> I see in them the difference of wits, and dispositions, the alterations of Arguments pleasing the world, and the change of stiles: this I have in despight of him, be he never so ignorant: and if hee hath any thing good among such store of ill, why that is mine too.[15]

From ballads Cornwallis moves on to a detailed consideration of Plutarch's *Lives.*

These objective facts about the communication between ballads and plays suggest to me that there was a strong subjective communication between them, too. Intertextuality *between* ballads—if that is not too grand a term for how balladeers milked the market—is well documented. Surviving speci-

[13] Hyder E. Rollins, *An Analytical Index to the Ballad-Entries (1557–1709) in the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1924), p. 1.

[14] Trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), "Publishing Strategies and What People Read, 1530–1660," pp. 145–82.

[15] (London: Edmund Mattes, 1600), sigs. I7^r–I7^v.

mens and entries in the Stationers' Register are rife with instances of ballads that imitate, extend, refute, moralize, or satirize other ballads. The same kind of intertextuality is familiar to us in the theater. *King John, The Taming of the Shrew, Hamlet,* and *King Lear* are all instances of Shakespeare's having done to a preexisting play what balladeers so often did to a preexisting ballad. There is, I propose, a similar intertextuality between ballads and plays. Percy's *Reliques* collects ballads inspired by *Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice,* and *Lear,* as well as a ballad whose chronological, generative, and commercial relationship to one other Shakespeare play is less certain.

In February 1594 John Danter entered in the Stationers' Register his copyright for "a booke intituled *a Noble Roman Historye of TYTUS ANDRONICUS*"—a play that turns out, in print, to be Shakespeare's—and, in the very next entry, his copyright for "the ballad thereof."[16] If we trust our sixteenth-century informants, it may not be as clear as we imagine which—the play or the ballad—was considered a "residual" of which. The question seems all the more open when we *listen* to ballads rather than *read* them:

This aural version of the first stanza of the verses that Danter printed shows how ballads, like plays, were above all else *performance* texts. Titus speaks, or

---

[16] *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London; 1554–1640 A.D.,* 5 vols., ed. Edward Arber (London: privately printed, 1875), Vol. 2, p. 644. On the questions surrounding the connections between ballad and play, see G. Harold Metz, "*Titus Andronicus*: Three Versions of the Story," *Notes and Queries,* 233 (1988), 451–55.

[17] Or, if you prefer: "You noble minds, and famous martiall wights, / That in defence of native country fights, / Give eare to me, that ten yeeres fought for Rome, / Yet reapt disgrace at my returning home," as reprinted in Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry,* 3 vols. (London: J. Dodsley, 1765), Vol. 1, p. 204. I have transcribed Percy's text into phonetic symbols using Charles Barber's paradigms for conservative Stage 1 in *Early Modern English* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), pp. 288–338. The tune "Fortune My Foe" I have transcribed from Claude M. Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and Its Music* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1966), p. 227.

rather sings, as a dramatic personage. He *is* the ballad. Whatever discrepancies there may be in length and complexity between ballad and play, the performance circumstances are the same ontologically complicated affair. In both cases the consumer, depending on his literacy and his purse, could be audience or performer—or both. In flogging "Titus Andronicus's Complaint" a petty chapman might act out the ballad just as the Lord Chamberlain's Men acted out Shakespeare's play. Once a purchaser had bought John Danter's broadside sheet, he or (the possibility is interesting to consider) she could "perform" the ballad himself or herself as he or she read—in effect taking on the imaginative identity of Titus and making it his or her own in a similar but even more concentrated way than when he or she read John Danter's printed quarto of Shakespeare's script. The "I" of a song invites imaginative complicity even more insistently than a play with its diversity of characters and points of view.[18] We may be inclined to think of Shakespeare's play in terms of the classical world of Seneca and Latin tragedy; most observers of the play in its original performance were, I believe, much more likely to think of it in terms of the ballad world of "Titus Andronicus's Complaint." The first-person personage in the ballad of Titus establishes an audience and a cultural context for the story that are quite specific—and that are remote indeed from Oxford or Cambridge undergraduates gathered to celebrate the holidays by hearing a Senecan tragedy. "Noble minds, and famous martiall wights" who had fought abroad and "reapt disgrace" and penury after returning home constituted a visible and troubling social presence in London in the years during and after the wars in the Low Countries.[19]

The gruesome events that unfold in the ballad, as in the play, attest to what may be the most important thing that stage plays share with ballads: the primacy of the story. To say that about ballads and stage plays in early modern London is to say no more than Aristotle is reported to have said about tragedy in fifth-century Athens. Epic, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambs, and poetry written to be performed with flute and lyre are all species of *imitation.* Though the means (rhythm, speech, and/or melody) and the mode (narrative, dramatic, or mixed) may be different in each of these genres, the object being imitated is the same: "those who imitate imitate men in

[18] The peculiar power of words accompanied by music to draw the listener into close identification with the first-person singer, despite differences in circumstance or even gender, is noted by Mark W. Booth, *The Experience of Songs* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 14–17. My distinction between the ballad-monger as performer and the purchaser as performer parallels Natascha Würzbach's use of speech-act theory to distinguish two "levels" of communication in ballads, the "jongleur-level," in which the singer's role is defined by the situation of performing and selling the ballad, and the "conventional enactment," in which the singer's role is defined by the fiction and the structure of the text. See *Anfänge und gattungstypische Ausformung der englische Strassenballade 1550–1650* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1981), pp. 56–73, with a brief summary of the whole book in English, pp. 441–43.

[19] G. B. Harrison, *An Elizabethan Journal: Being a Record of Those Things Most Talked of During the Years 1591–1594* (London: Constable, 1928), reprints a proclamation against vagrant soldiers issued in 1591 (pp. 72–73) and notes a collection in Parliament for returned soldiers (pp. 221–24), as well as relief efforts for maimed soldiers (pp. 233, 245). On the queen's problems with equipping and paying soldiers in these wars, see R. B. Wernham, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe 1588–1595* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 152–53, 167–80, 559–68.

action."[20] Aristotle seems to have recognized a vital link between epic and tragedy, between storytelling in verse and the impersonation of human action in drama. Any aesthetic judgment we might feel compelled to make about the disparity between Homer and the versifier of "Titus Andronicus's Complaint" should not blind us to the two storytellers' similarities, particularly the way both are situated at the interface between oral tradition and new technologies in their respective cultures—writing in the case of Homer, printing in the case of the balladeer of Titus Andronicus.[21] This intuitively compelling but logically hard to demonstrate connection between storytelling and tragedy, between the oral tradition of ballads and the scripted drama of the public stage, was recognized more than a hundred years ago by John Addington Symonds in his *Renaissance in Italy*. Symonds was puzzled why sixteenth-century Italians, so ingenious in other genres, had been so conspicuously incapable of producing serious plays with anything like the vitality of Elizabethan drama.
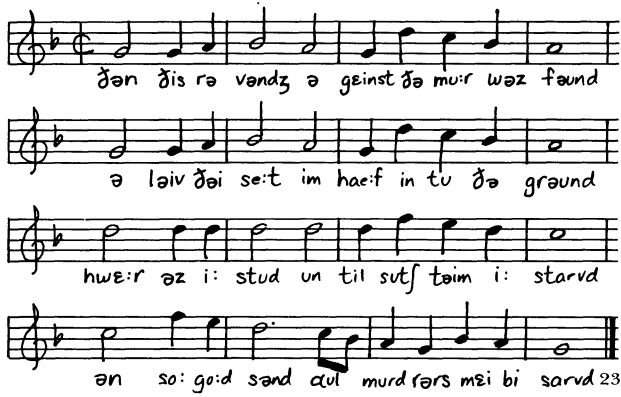
> In connection with this inaptitude of the Italians for tragedy, it is worth noticing that their popular poetry exhibits but rare examples of the ballad. It abounds in love ditties and lyrics of the inner life. But references to history and the tragedies of noble families are comparatively scarce. In Great Britain, on the contrary, while our popular poetry can show but few songs of sentiment, the Border and Robin Hood ballads record events in national history or episodes from actual domestic dramas, blent with memories of old mythology. These poems prove in the unknown minstrels who produced them, a genuine appreciation of dramatic incident; and their manner is marked by vigorous objectivity. The minstrel loses himself in his subject and aims at creating in his audience a vivid sense of the action he has undertaken to set forth. The race which could produce such ballads, already contained the germ of Marlowe's tragedy.[22]

As we might expect from the cross-circuits we've traced out among our lists, the penny ballad of "Titus Andronicus's Complaint," like the penny experience of Shakespeare's play in the theater, is a fantasized indulgence in sensuality and violence. The adultery of the empress and the Moor, the murder of Caesar's son, the rape and mutilation of Lavinia, the slaughter of Titus's three sons, the revenge Titus wreaks by killing the empress's sons and serving them up to her in pies—the demonic litany of horrors draws the listener in, and on. The ballad of Titus Andronicus may be a penny-licensed lapse into sensuality and violence; it is also their exorcism. Like most broadside ballads, "Titus Andronicus's Complaint" concludes its conjuration of ghastly deeds with a moralization that would lay them to rest. Though killed by his own hand in the next-to-last stanza, Titus keeps up his first-person presence to the end:

---

[20] *Poetics*, 1447a8–48al, trans. Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. 15–17, esp. p. 17. As Else points out, the *Poetics* as we have it is apparently a document of reported speech, perhaps the notes of a student who heard Aristotle lecture (p. 2).

[21] On ancient Greece see Jack Goody, *The interface between the written and the oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 57–109. On early modern England see David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 1–18; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 117–38; and Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its nature, significance and social context* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 16–24, 244–71.

[22] 7 vols. (New York: Henry Holt, 1888), Vol. 4, pp. 119–20.

ðən ðis rə vəndʒ ə geinst ðə muːr wəz fəund
ə ləiv ðəi seːt im haeːf in tʊ ðə grəund
hwεːr əz iː stʊd ʊn til sʊtʃ təim iː starvd
ən soː goːd sənd ɔul murd fərs mεi bi sarvd 23

As a gesture of closure, this final stanza no more does justice to the story's crimes than such gestures do in most scripts for the public stage. Subjective sensations so intense cannot be turned into object lessons quite so easily. In ballads, as in stage plays, the *Finis* often comes quickly. More often than not we are left with an unsettling disparity: between story and moralization, between sensuality and spirituality, between the immediacy of physical violence and the detachment of moral judgment. Especially when we take the hearers' imaginative complicity into account, when we try to reconcile the third-personness of the moralization with the first-personness of the dramatic "I," the story seems too big; the moralization, too small to contain it. What seems to distinguish Shakespeare's scripts from those of his rank-and-file contemporaries—Robert Greene, say, or Thomas Dekker—is the artfulness with which Shakespeare's scripts draw that tension out.

Sir William Cornwallis catches this disparity between sensation and sentiment in his account of how he watched and listened as ballad-sellers performed their wares:

> I have not been ashamed to adventure mine eares with a ballad-singer, and they have come home loaden to my liking, doubly satisfied, with profit, & with recreation. The profit, to see earthlings satisfied with such course stuffe, to heare vice rebuked, and to see the power of Vertue that pierceth the head of such a base Historian, and vile Auditory.
> The recreation to see how thoroughly the standers by are affected, what strange gestures come from them, what strained stuffe from their Poet, what shift they make to stand to heare, what extremities he is driven to for Rime, how they adventure their purses, he his wits, how well both their paines are recompenced, they with a filthy noise, hee with a base reward.[24]

Profit and delight are not so neatly aligned here as Horace had in mind.

---

[23] "Then this revenge against the Moore was found / Alive they sett him halfe into the ground, / Whereas he stood untill such time he starv'd: / And soe God send all murderers may be serv'd" (Percy, Vol. 1, p. 209).
[24] sig. I7ᵛ.

While he is taking his recreation, Cornwallis steps back to an ironic distance from the crowd, but when it comes to applauding the profit he seems to forget his gentlemanly detachment. Or does he? The power of virtue and the rebuking of vice strike an odd contrast with "course stuffe," "vile Auditory," and "filthy noise"—not to mention the poet's "base reward." "Filthy" is a most curious way of describing the sounds that a ballad-singer makes. One of the word's primary associations in early modern English was rather with forbidden lusts: with incest, sodomy, and bestiality. Likewise with "vile" and "base." All three terms could designate not only a social category of person but a moral category of sexual act. Or perhaps Cornwallis's sense of smell when he *heard* ballads was diverted by the circumstances in which he customarily *read* them.[25] A similar stench seems to have been in Ben Jonson's nostrils when he penned the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*. Though the fair of the play's title is to take place on the stage of the Hope in Southwark, not in the precincts of St. Bartholomew's church in Smithfield,

> yet thinke, that therein the *Author* hath observ'd a speciall *Decorum*, the place being as durty as *Smithfield*, and as stinking every whit.[26]

Taking pleasure, finding a moral, paying a penny: what connects these actions with one another? Are they synonyms? Homologues? Items in a series? If items in a series, in what order? The couplings that Cornwallis makes, so casually and so inconsistently, in his remarks about ballads parallel those suggested by our early modern lists about drama. The imaginative space of drama in early modern England seems to be inscribed by a number of *competing* discourses: economic, sensual, agonistic, spiritual. To look for a totalizing system within that imaginative space is to miss the point. Drama on the public stage seems to have been a way of playing out incongruities and negotiating differences. In sixteenth-century terms the experience of a play, like the experience of a ballad, seems to have been something like "pay—enjoy—fight—take heed" or "pay—lust for—thrust—repent" or "pay—love—kill—confess." If these verbalizations seem impossibly reductive (imagine "pay—love—kill—confess" as an index of *King Lear*), let us remember that what these verbs describe is not the verbal object itself but the seeing, the hearing, the feeling through, the thinking about, and the remembering of that verbal object. As a way of talking about someone else's subjective experience, they probably say just enough.

---

[25] In defining "filth" in its concrete sense ("Foul matter" [2]), the 1933 edition of the *OED* distinguishes "Putrid matter, corruption, rottenness" (2.a) from "Uncleanly matter, dirt" (2.b). Both sixteenth-century illustrations of "Putrid matter, corruption, rottenness" have reference to the human body. Under "filthy" the *OED* distinguishes definitions that are literal ("besmeared or defiled with filth" [1]), moral ("obscene" [3]), and social ("contemptible, low, mean, scurvy" [4, obsolete]), as well as one obsolete application of the literal meaning that includes all three ("*The filthy parts*: the private parts"). Among the scales of high and low according to which "base" is reckoned are society (6), the natural world (8), and morality (9). "Vile" is similarly conjugated: "despicable on moral grounds" (1), "physically repulsive, esp. through filth or corruption" (3), "of little worth or account; mean or paltry in respect of value; held in no esteem or regard" (4, said of persons as well as of things). Cornwallis could be thinking of evacuation and still be thinking of illicit sexual behavior. Sodomy was so abhorred in early modern England, Arthur N. Gilbert argues, because it touched off a *combination* of deep-seated fears: of sexuality in general, of animality, of anality ("Conceptions of Homosexuality and Sodomy in Western History," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 6, 1 and 2 [1980–81], 57–67).

[26] *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), Vol. 6, p. 17.