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Theorizing Audience and Spectatorial Agency

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CHAPTER 2

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THEORIZING AUDIENCE AND SPECTATORIAL AGENCY

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BETSY BOLTON

AUDIENCES are a problem, and Georgian theatre audiences are more of a problem than many.[1] Records may yet yield more than we know, but there remain many questions about Georgian audiences that we may never be able to answer. We don't know how a statistically significant sample of individual spectators responded to topical allusions or scandalous references. We don't know how permeable in practice were the social boundaries attributed to pit, box, and gallery. We still don't even know what constituted a 'good' house or what defined a 'brilliant' audience—though Judith Milhous notes that some of this evidence lurks in the highly variable theatre account books.[2] To some extent, then, we are left with truisms. Theatre historians generally agree that audiences grew larger and less sophisticated over the course of the long eighteenth century, and that they also grew quieter or more 'polite' during that same period.[3] Media theorists, for their part, argue that theatre audiences in general are 'simple audiences', defined by being in the same place at the same time, as opposed to the geographically distributed 'mass audience' addressed by television, or the temporally distributed 'diffuse audience' addressed by new digital media.[4] As simple audiences, Georgian theatregoers retained a direct relationship to actors and theatre managers, influencing repertoire and performances with their expressions of approval and disapproval.

[1] Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 1.

[2] Judith Milhous, 'Reading Theatre History from Account Books', in Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (eds.), *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 101–31.

[3] See for instance Edward Langhans, 'The Theatre', in Deborah Payne Fisk (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5.

[4] Abercrombie and Longhurst, *Audiences*, 4.

Of course truisms exist to be challenged. Given that Georgian theatre audiences rioted roughly once each decade between 1730 and 1770, threatened to riot in the 1790s and rioted again in 1809,[5] how much 'quieter' did they actually become? 'Sophisticated' is another word that begs more careful definition. The proportion of courtiers in the audience certainly dropped over the course of the century, but audiences familiar with not only the extant repertoire of tragedy and comedy but also the strengths and weaknesses of reigning actors—audiences that could 'read' multiple layers of social, political, and theatrical satire in an apparently simple farce or evening's playbill—these were surely something more or different than 'unsophisticated'. Finally, one might question whether the distinction between 'mass' and 'simple' audiences was as clear-cut in the Georgian period as it appears today. By the middle of this period, the mass(ive) audiences that London theatres drew constituted the largest public gatherings legally allowed. Full houses may have been hard to achieve, but three thousand spectators made for an immense crowd, especially after the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795 banned gatherings of more than fifty people in other contexts. Moreover, Georgian theatre audiences behaved in many ways we associate with the mass audience of television: according to theatrical texts and scenes in novels, Georgian spectators ate, drank, slept, and conversed freely at the theatre; until 1788, they also left the theatre with impunity, receiving back the price of admission even after the start of the mainpiece play.[6] Ien Ang's description of television as 'desperately seeking the audience' surely applies equally well to the Georgian theatre.[7] Even a full house did not guarantee full attention or a fair hearing: there seems to be general agreement that some spectators came primarily to hiss a new play, and many accounts show a significant portion of the audience paying more attention to themselves than to the stage.

Conversely, to the extent that generalities about the gradual taming of the audience appear true, we might want to know more about how such generalities came to be seen as true—and the answer to that question might help us understand more clearly how mass audiences or mass publics came to be constructed as well. How, then, did Georgian theatre audiences come to understand themselves as a corporate entity, especially a corporate entity bound by certain constraints on its behaviour? Throughout this chapter, I will argue that Georgian audiences were made, not born: they were co-produced, in part through descriptions offered up in theatrical prologues, epilogues, scenes, and prefaces.[8] The construction of an evening's entertainment invited Georgian audiences to

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[5] See Heather McPherson, 'Theatrical Riots and Cultural Politics in Eighteenth-Century London,' *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 43.3 (Fall 2003), 236–52.

[6] Leo Hughes, *The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971), 70.

[7] Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[8] I borrow the notion of co-production from science and technology studies, where the term refers to the ways science shapes and is shaped by social identities, institutions, discourses, and representations that describe them. More generally, Sheila Jasanoff argues that 'knowledge and its material embodiments are at once products of social work and constitutive of social life.' Sheila Jasanoff, *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and the Social Order* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2–3.

participate in a heterogeneous fantasy of communal identity, and theatrical paratexts—prologues and epilogues in particular—repeatedly present audiences that are fixated by the scene of theatre itself: the scene of the Town coming together to be mirrored on the stage. Together, players and audience constitute one another through a loverly narcissism, an *egoïsme à deux*, that equates spectators with a simulacrum of themselves.[9] By presenting audiences with a mirror of themselves, prologues and epilogues effectively teach the audience to desire itself in a mode of representative, often chastised, communal identity.

Georgian spectators were not, however, merely the passive observers and recipients of these theatrical portraits. A significant number of individual spectators also took an active role in the process of co-producing the audience, engaging in activities recent media theorists might describe as cultural convergence and overflow.[10] Spouting clubs, as figured onstage and reported offstage, featured theatrical fans mimicking favorite actors and actresses in delivering prologues and epilogues that define the audience: these spouting clubs thereby disrupted not only the boundaries of the theatre but also its conceptual limits. Even as spouting might seem to challenge both the norms and the dominance of the professional theatre, however, modes of convergence and overflow as represented in discourse about spouting only heighten the fixation of spectators upon the stage, intensifying the power of celebrity culture and shifting the focus of spectatorial agency from dispute and discontent to personal mimicry.

Examining the co-production of theatrical audiences both within and without the London theatres suggests that the Georgian audience, like the bourgeois public sphere defined in opposition to its materiality, may have always been a site of communal fantasy as well as communicative reason, of personal particularity as well as of universal types, of performance as well as critique: a space, in short, of spouting.

LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE

Mimesis was the dominant Georgian trope for the relationship between theatre and audience: what appears onstage should reflect the audience or it fails in its most fundamental task. As the prologue to *The Honest Yorkshire-Man* (Haymarket, 1735) put it, 'The Great, the Good, the Wise in every Age | Have made a moral Mirrour of the Stage'.[11]

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[9] The phrase 'egoïsme à deux' is conventionally attributed to Germaine de Stael but without specific reference. The term simulacrum is indebted to Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[10] Will Brooker, 'Living on Dawson's Creek: Teen Viewers, Cultural Convergence, and Television Overflow', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4.4 (Dec 2001), 456–72. For a more fluid account of convergence, see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

[11] Henry Carey, *The Honest Yorkshire-Man. A Ballad Farce* (London: W. Feales, 1735), prologue.

Yet taking this mirror literally in any simplistic sense left spectators open to mockery. George Colman the Elder's epilogue to John Hoole's *Timanthes* (Covent Garden, 1770), spoken by Mary Bulkley, offers a partial mirror to the audience as it addresses its conclusion to the ladies in the playhouse: 'The theatre's a mirror, and each play | Should be a very looking-glass, they say'.[12] Sliding from the trope of theatre-as-mirror to play-as-lady's-looking-glass quickly degrades the metaphor from moral reflection to flattered vanity: a playwright can win favour, Colman suggests, by presenting unrealistically perfect female figures, for the ladies in the boxes will override the judgement of the critics in the pit:

> His looking-glass reflects no moles or pimples,
> But shews you full of graces, smiles, and dimples.
> If you approve yourselves, resolve to spare,
> And critics! then attack him, if ye dare.

Setting the ladies against the critics, Colman's female speaker ironically opts for commercial success over literary quality (the pimple/dimple rhyme underscores the dry humour). This narrow application of the theatre-as-mirror assumes a complete and fairly simple structure of identification. 'If you approve yourselves, resolve to spare': you can't damn the play without rejecting this flattering portrait of yourselves. But this simplistic model of identification operates as a joke on the ladies and the playwright alike: both are gently mocked, the ladies for purportedly accepting physical flattery in place of moral mimesis, the playwright for offering flattery and seeking commercial success rather than critical acclaim. The epilogue complicates structures of identification in another way as well: in speaking the epilogue, Mary Bulkley maintained the gentleness associated with the character she had played (Cephisa) while also stepping out of her role enough to discuss that character. What kind of a mirror does Bulkley-as-epilogue offer the ladies? The mirror of a Greek maiden or that of a Georgian actress? Or something in between the two?

To unpack Georgian theatrical reflexivity, the trope of the theatre as mirror, requires something different than, or in addition to, say, Jacques Lacan's account of the mirror stage. Transitivism may apply, as we shall see below, but what happens onstage does not threaten to fragment the audience with its own apparent totality, the way a baby's mirror image seems the coherent antithesis of the infant's incoherent body and drives. Instead, an evening's entertainment at the Georgian theatre was famously incoherent. The composite playbill of Georgian theatre, ranging from the prologue through the mainpiece, the epilogue, and the afterpiece, and often through additional entertainments such as dancing or singing, attempted to fill the theatres by appealing to divergent tastes; the result is perhaps closer to a twenty-first-century experience of television than it is to a twenty-first-century experience of theatre. In their work on television, Horace

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[12] George Colman the Elder, 'Epilogue' to John Hoole, *Timanthes: A Tragedy* (London: T. Becket, 1770).

Newcomb and Paul Hirsh argue that a 'viewing strip' composed of programmes with different politics, emotional palettes, and tonalities constitutes the right unit of analysis.[13] Drawing attention to the composite productions of the eighteenth-century stage, Daniel Ennis and Judith Slagle similarly note that 'our discipline has not yet come to grips with the idea that *Jane Shore* plus *What D'Ye Call It* (23 February 1715) results in a new, real (albeit temporary) dramatic creation, just as *Jane Shore* plus [Charles] Dibdin's *The Wives Revenged* (31 October 1778) results in a different audience experience'.[14] For Newcomb and Hirsh, a focus on the viewing strip highlights 'contradiction and confusion rather than coherence', framing television as a forum in which issues of cultural concern can be debated and explored, and the same might well be said of Georgian theatre.

Still, the trope of theatre as mirror assumes spectators will identify with what they saw upon the stage. But what kinds of options for identification exist in a context of contradiction and confusion? Within psychoanalysis and film theory, discussions of fantasy offer (disputed) alternatives to fixed or constrained structures of identification. In *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis argue that

> Fantasy...is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene although, in the earliest forms of fantasy, he cannot be assigned any fixed place in it...As a result, the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a desubjectivized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question.[15]

This passage, singled out by a number of prominent film theorists, is particularly intriguing in its suggestion that a subject may be represented not in a fixed place or by a stable character, but rather in a sequence of images or in the syntax, the ordering, of that sequence. Teresa de Lauretis points out that this theory can be misapplied to suggest that all spectators can freely choose any subject position in a representation: she cautions against 'equating representation with fantasy', arguing that to do so is to 'collapse the social into the subjective'.[16] Two hundred years distant from Georgian theatre audiences, we can only analyse representations and social subjecthood, refraining from

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[13] Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch, 'Television as a Cultural Forum', in Horace Newcomb (ed.), *Television: The Critical View*, 5th edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 509–10.

[14] Daniel James Ennis and Judith Slagle, 'Introduction', in Ennis and Slagle (eds.), *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain-raisers, and Afterpieces: The Rest of the Eighteenth-century London Stage* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 17.

[15] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', reprinted in Riccardo Steiner (ed.), *Unconscious Phantasy* (London: Karnac, 2003), 133.

[16] Teresa de Lauretis, 'On the Subject of Fantasy', in Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds.), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 82–3.

claims about individual subjectivity and fantasy. But approaching Georgian theatre pro-gramming with this model of fantasy in mind invites us to attend more closely to the sequence of entertainments offered and to the syntax of that sequence—a syntax articu-lated most explicitly in prologues, epilogues, and metadramatic scenes and gestures.

Attending to prologues and epilogues in terms of the syntax or ordering logic with which Georgian audiences were invited to identify tends to highlight processes of dis-pute and negotiation over the fixities of social rank. While Georgian theatrical space emphasized social ranks, prologues and epilogues invoked those ranks mostly to unify or override them by resolving staged disputes. Like the viewing strip of television analy-sis, Georgian theatrical programming provided a forum in which issues of cultural con-cern could be debated and explored; long pre-dating psychoanalytic models of fantasy, Georgian theatre nonetheless invited spectators to identify not just with a single sub-ject position, but also with the explicitly articulated and frequently staged negotiations among different elements of the audience.

Samuel Foote's prologue to his farce *The Author* (Drury Lane, 1757), for instance, presents spectators' divergent desires for representative identities as a nearly insoluble problem for the playwright:

> But then the Taste of every Guest to hit,
> To please at once, the Gall'ry, Box, and Pit;
> Requires at least—no common Share of Wit.
>   Those who adorn the Orb of higher Life,
> Demand the lively Rake, or modish Wife;
> Whilst they, who in a lower Circle move,
> Yawn at their Wit, and slumber at their Love.
> If light low Mirth employs the comic Scene,
> Such Mirth, as drives from vulgar Minds the Spleen;
> The polish'd Critic damns the wretched Stuff,
> And crys,—"'twill please the Gall'ries well enough."
> Such jarring Judgments who can reconcile,
> Since Fops will frown, where humble Traders smile?[17]

Foote defines the audience as a jumble of 'jarring judgments' and diverging tastes—the playwright who can reconcile these discrepancies deserves recognition for his wit. We might add that the manager who can keep filling the house with such a diverse group of spectators will find financial rewards for his cleverness. But the audience as addressed by Foote also had a stake in seeing these 'jarring judgments' reconciled: the Town came to the theatre to see itself made whole. *E pluribus unum.* If Georgian theatre was desper-ately seeking an audience, at least from the vantage point of the stage, the nation was also desperately seeking a mirror that might offer it a coherent shape.

Indeed, if one were to project a fantasy of origins for the Georgian audience, that fan-tasy might be articulated as an unlikely primal scene of nation building: a celebrity actor

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[17] Samuel Foote, *The Author; A Comedy, of Two Acts* (London: R. Francklin, 1757), prologue.

alone onstage in front of a mass audience, describing that audience to itself in terms of comic, sometimes patriotic types. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson famously attributed to eighteenth-century print-capitalism one key mechanism by which people imagine the nation united in 'homogeneous empty time': the ritual of reading a newspaper which one can imagine others reading at the same time helps create the virtual community of the nation.[18] In place of this print-based virtual community, eighteenth-century theatres offered a concrete microcosm of the nation in an audience simultaneously embodied and (in prologues and epilogues full of scolding, flattering, mocking, and imploring) most emphatically imagined. The epilogue to Richard Cumberland's *The Brothers* (Covent Garden, 1770), recreates the nation of politicians, writers, and brokers within the walls of the playhouse, offering to all a refuge from the strains of reality, as long as all approve the play:

> The mobbing Vulgar, and the ruling Great,
> And all who storm, and all who steer the State;
> Here should forget the Labours of the Day,
> And laugh their Cares, and their Complaints, away.[19]

Other prologues, epilogues, and topical theatre pieces portrayed familiar social types, from fine ladies and gentlemen to country boys, sailors, and so on; national distinctions were also drawn. For instance, Colman the Younger's *British Loyalty; or, a Squeeze for St. Paul's* (Drury Lane, 1789), an address celebrating George III's recovery from insanity, offered 'a graphic description of the humours and perils of a condensed crowd: parts of the address are put into the phraseology of an Irishman, a Scotchman, a Welshman, a Jew, an old man of 92, and a loyal Sailor'.[20] Such pieces imaginatively constructed the nation out of character types representing its component parts: the humours and perils of a condensed crowd.

All together, the syntax of an evening's entertainment at the Georgian theatre invited spectators to participate in a fantasy of communally embodied, public identity.[21] But if the stage mirrors the audience, the mirrors provided by the Georgian theatre are those of the funhouse—as likely to refract as to reflect their subject. Prone to caricature and typecasting, the theatre as mirror reflects the imagined community of nation as a hodge-podge of comic exaggeration: a pantomime public or pantomime nation, a community still in process of negotiation.

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[18] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections On the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 26.

[19] Richard Cumberland, *The Brothers, A Comedy* (London: W. Griffin, 1770), epilogue.

[20] John Britton, *The Autobiography of John Britton, F. S. A.*, 3 vols. (London: printed for the author, 1850), i. 92.

[21] Of course, individual spectators might or might not accept this invitation. Unfortunately, space does not allow a fuller consideration of playbills' general syntax.

PUTTING THEATRE BACK IN THE
PUBLIC SPHERE

Classic public sphere theorists tend to contrast the theatre and the public sphere, though in practice the two may have been closely interwoven. According to Jürgen Habermas, 'the bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor'.[22] Habermas distinguished the theatre from the bourgeois public sphere of rational-critical debate: while coffeehouses supported 'a kind of social intercourse that, far from pre-supposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether', the theatres were 'still part of a different type of publicity in which the "ranks" (preserved still as a dysfunctional architectural relic in our theater buildings) paraded themselves, and the people applauded'.[23] In short, Habermas sees theatres reinforcing the social divisions that coffeehouses could be said to obscure.

In practice, however, the theatres disputed any fixed boundary between the stage and the coffeehouse. Actor-playwright Charles Macklin's farce *The Covent Garden Theatre; or, Pasquin Turn'd Drawcansir* (Covent Garden, 1752), written and performed for a benefit night and featuring Macklin in the lead role, insisted on the overlap of theatre, coffeehouse, and debating society. Even the title of the farce blurs those boundaries, for *Pasquin* was the title of a 1736 farce by Henry Fielding, Alexander Drawcansir was Fielding's pseudonym in the *Covent Garden Journal*, while Macklin's farce includes a lecture against Sharpers which builds on the popularity of Fielding's popular pamphlet, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers* (1751).[24] The title alone suggests Macklin mimicking Fielding's move from stage mimicry (of Robert Walpole's ministry) to print journalism as a way of shaping the public sphere. Within Macklin's farce, boundaries between the theatre and the coffeehouse are further obscured. One of the characters presented to Pasquin as a member of the Town is 'the facetious Bob Smart, a professed Wit and Critic; no Man knows the Intrigues of the Court, the Theatres, or the City better, No Man has a finer Taste in the Belle' Letters, for he is deemed one of the best Gentlemen Harlequins in Europe, and is an Emminent Orator at the Robin Hood Society'.[25]

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[22] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Bürger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 22.

[23] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36, 38.

[24] Jean B. Kern, 'Introduction', in Charles Macklin, *The Covent Garden Theatre, or, Pasquin turn'd Drawcansir* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1965), i–vi (iii). Quotations from the play use this edition.

[25] Macklin, *Covent Garden Theatre*, 17–18.

This Bob Smart is presented in terms of his bourgeois public sphere credentials: he is a critic, and a member of the era's most famous debating club (the Robin Hood Society)—but he is also a paradoxical 'Gentleman Harlequin', based, presumably on the facetious character of the poet Christopher 'Kit' Smart. Once introduced, Smart demands of Macklin/Pasquin, 'what is the Nature of this Farce of yours? have you any Smart, ridiculous, droll Fellows in it ha! . . . Igad if they are like me I'll engage they'll make the public laugh.—for by all that's drole I always Set the Coffee House in a Roar when I am there, he! don't I . . .'.[26] Smart names himself as an appropriate performer of pantomime and farce, whether onstage or in the coffeehouse: in fact, Smart's preferred stage appears to be the coffeehouse. Macklin's farce, heavily censored and performed only once, is of course offering up a satire that cannot be taken literally, but the Bedford Coffeehouse included many familiars who similarly integrated attributes of the bourgeois public sphere and the theatre. Theatrical types performed at coffeehouses and debating societies at least as much as they engaged in status-blind rational-critical debate.[27] You can take the Georgian gentleman out of the theatre, but you can't take the theatre out of the Georgian gentleman.

Bringing theatre back into the public sphere helps clarify some of the apparent paradoxes of print publics as described by Michael Warner:

> One of the most striking features of publics, in the modern public sphere, is that they can in some contexts acquire agency . . . It's difficult to imagine the modern world without the ability to attribute agency to publics, though doing so is an extraordinary fiction. It requires us, for example, to understand the ongoing circulatory time of public discourse as though it were discussion leading up to a decision.[28]

In the context of the Georgian theatre, however, spectatorial or public agency was not (only) an extraordinary fiction, but also sometimes a disastrously expensive fact. Theatre audiences expressed their desires with some frequency, calling insistently for the performance of favoured prologues, epilogues, songs, or dances; hissing, rapping, or otherwise disrupting the performance of pieces that did not meet their approval; and occasionally rioting if their demands were not respected quickly enough. Prologues and epilogues did in fact repeatedly stage an imaginary 'discussion leading up to a decision' but unlike the print publics considered by Warner, the theatrical public included in the temporality of its daily discussion a daily decision: to damn or spare the play. Negative judgement might be reasonably final—a damned play would seldom be re-presented, though it was often printed as a kind of secondary appeal to the public—but positive judgements were always only provisional: any approved play would have to submit itself

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[26] Macklin, *Covent Garden Theatre*, 19.

[27] See, for instance, the descriptions in *Memoirs of the Bedford Coffee House by A Genius*, 2nd edn. (London: J. Single, 1763).

[28] Michael Warner and Lauren Gail Berlant, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 122–3.

to judgement again and again with each subsequent performance. Prologues and epi-logues constructed theatrical public agency as producing a provisionally positive or indefinitely deferred decision.

Georgian spectators' expressions of agency were, moreover, divided among dif-ferent groups in the theatre. In prologues and epilogues, actors and actresses mod-elled onstage a set of strategies for levelling, or at least for engaging one's betters in a debate of the underdog's own choosing. Arthur Murphy's epilogue to Joseph Cradock's *Zobeide* (Covent Garden, 1771), spoken by Mary Ann Yates, briefly sum-marizes the work accomplished by the interstitial performances of prologue and epilogue:

> Now, after poison, daggers, rage, and death,
> We come again to take a little breath;
> Rally the Pit; set Belles and Beaux at odds,
> And be a mere free-thinker to the Gods; [*To the upper gallery.*
> Chat in familiar strain; the Boxes maul;
> —An Epilogue, like gaming—levels all.[29]

Mauling the Boxes, teasing or rallying the Pit, challenging the Gods with (social and theatrical rather than religious) freethinking, epilogues do not disregard social status, but they do emphatically challenge its established power.

Murphy's prologues and epilogues frequently offer up a saucy performance of inso-lence to the audience; Garrick's prologues tend more to a canny displacement of con-flict from the house to a backstage arena, where it can be resolved and re-presented. For instance, Garrick hijacked in performance William Whitehead's prologue to his play *School for Lovers* (Drury Lane, 1762). Garrick began by reciting Whitehead's lines, but then staged a scene of dispute between playwright and manager:

> Alas! Our Author dares not laugh at schools—
> Vain sense confines his humbler Muse to rules:
> He shifts no scenes—But here I stop'd him short—
> Not change your scenes? said I,—I'm sorry for't:
> My constant friends above, around, below,
> Have English tastes, and love both change and show.[30]

Garrick recreates the (perhaps imaginary) discussion for the audience, assert-ing unanimity in the audience ('My constant friends') regardless of rank ('above, around, below') against the dispute he presents as a backstage reality. Returning to

[29] Arthur Murphy, 'Epilogue' to Joseph Craddock, *Zobeide. A Tragedy* (London: T. Cadell, 1771).

[30] William Whitehead, *The School for Lovers, A Comedy* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1762), prologue 'as it is spoken by Mr Garrick'. It is notable that Whitehead included both his more sedate prologue and Garrick's mashed-up version in the printed edition of the play.

Whitehead's script to show the author maintaining his principles, Garrick again interjects his own words as he presents himself forcing the issue:

> Lord, Sir, said I, for boxes, gallery, pit,
> I'll back my Harlequin against your wit—
> Yet still the Author, anxious for his play,
> Shook his wise head—What will the critics say?
> As usual, Sir—abuse you all they can—
> And what the ladies?—he's a charming man;
> A charming piece!—one scarce knows what it means;
> But that's no matter—where there's such sweet scenes!
> Still he persists,—and let him—*entre nous*—
> I know your tastes, and will indulge them too.
> Change you shall have, so set your hearts at ease:
> Write as he will, we'll act it as it *you* please.

Garrick moves the dispute from the stage to the audience, staging and thus pre-empting critical abuse as he also parodies vapid support from the ladies. Re-enacting for the virtual author the imagined response of the ladies to the play, Garrick encompasses within his miniature one-man show two separate areas of dispute: the manager versus the playwright, and the ladies versus the play (but in favour of the scenes). Garrick's conclusion more emphatically constructs a broader alliance: between the pandering theatrical manager and the audience wanting low theatrical effects rather than noble drama, both united against the aesthetically upright author. Ceding the moral high ground of aesthetic purity to the author, Garrick attempts to acquire audience approval for staging practices designed to appeal to a broader range of tastes. Representing backstage negotiations, the prologue invites spectators to identify with a narrative of dispute and reconciliation: competing interests resolved by the canny figure of the prologue.

THEATRICAL CELEBRITY:
AN ACTOR IS BEING BEATEN

In their reliance on the persona of the celebrity actor, Georgian prologues and epilogues are positioned precisely at the intersection between the bourgeois public sphere's 'utopias of self-abstraction' and its 'mass-cultural public sphere' that can only display but not recuperate a 'humiliating positivity of the particular'.[31] Michael Warner suggests that the self-alienated mass subject responds to the gap between these

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[31] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 162, 169, 166.

two modes of publicity in two ways. First, 'the mass public sphere…surround[s]…the citizen with trademarks through which she can trade marks, offering both positivity and self-abstraction'. Second, multiple genres of mass publicity (horror, assassination, terrorism, sports) show that 'the transitive pleasure of witnessing/injuring makes available our translation into the disembodied publicity of the mass subject'.[32] In the Georgian theatre, prologues and epilogues (as well as meta-dramas and responses to audience disruption) at once mingle positivity and abstraction in ways that anticipate the trademarks of mass publicity and expose the underlying violence and vulnerability of negotiated power.

In prologues and epilogues, an actor injures the audience by judging his betters: mauling the boxes, as Murphy puts it, an epilogue levels all. This injury is permitted, however, by the conventions of the theatre: the trope of the theatre as moral mirror licenses the actor to speak truth to power, and the act of judgement abstracts the actor-as-vagrant into the mouthpiece of the poet and a figure for the theatre as a whole. (Collections of prologues and epilogues often carefully record both the author of the speech and the actor who delivered it, as if to make both inhere in the words on the page.) At the same time, however, the actor is a celebrity, defined by his or her own positivity, though unlike the 'humiliating positivity' excluded from the bourgeois public sphere, celebrity positivity operates like a trademark, distinguishing the star from all lesser mortals. Yet the celebrity actor's very freedom, both to enjoy and to set aside the residual particularity marking the boundary of the bourgeois public sphere, also exposes him to the violent resentment of an audience that periodically discovers itself through its performance of agency-as-destruction. Prologues and epilogues, usually performed by a single actor confronting the entire audience, mark the collision of two kinds of asymmetry: the physical vulnerability of the actor to the audience, and the imaginary captivation of the audience by the actor. These brief performances, working to forestall any negative expression of spectatorial agency, produce an oddly oscillating equation between the (positive, particular) figure of the metadramatic speaker and the (disembodied) public produced by the actor's address.

Garrick's prologue and epilogue to John Brown's *Barbarossa* (Drury Lane, 1754) highlight the importance of celebrity in the use of character types to shape (and criticize) the theatre audience as a public. Strikingly, these brief pieces were singled out for praise in magazine verse on the basis of their moral efficacy—and in some print versions of the play, the prologue and epilogue are printed in two columns on the same page to underscore the conversation between them. Garrick spoke the prologue himself, in the character of a country boy, at first agog at the grandeur of the audience, but turning critical when the audience laughs at him. Henry Woodward spoke the epilogue in the character of a fine gentleman refuting the country boy's critique. Both speeches deftly manipulate the celebrity and skills of the actor. Garrick, for instance, was well known for

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[32] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 176.

having once come from the country himself: audiences could enjoy Garrick hyperbolically reprising the character of a country boy for their pleasure and edification.

> Law! what a Croud is here! what Noise and Pother!
> Fine Lads and Lasses! one o'top o't'other. [*Pointing to the
>   Rows of Pit and Gallery.*
> I cou'd for ever here with Wonder geaze!
> I ne'er saw Church so full in all my Days!—
> Your Servant, Surs!—what do you laugh for? Eh!
> You donna take me sure for one o'th'Play?
> You shou'd not flout an honest Country-Lad,—
> You're all as strange as I, and stranger too,
> And, if you laugh at me, I'll laugh at you. [*Laughing.*[33]

Garrick's country boy is simultaneously 'one o'th'Play' and outside the conventions of the theatre altogether: his simple misunderstanding of the audience is at once sexually suggestive (lads and lasses on top of each other) and socially critical (why are there more spectators for Reverend Brown's tragedy than for his sermons?). As an outsider, the boy offers up the story of his working life in place of the requisite prologue: he worked for a great man in the London corporation, whom he calls a toad-eater because of the fashion of eating turtles; then he works for a lord obsessed with gaming and prone to empty promises; then for a lady who scandalizes him with her scanty dress. 'Now I'm the Poet's Man—I find with Wits, | There's Nothing sartain—Nay, we eat by Fits'. Part of the joke of this prologue is to have Garrick-the-manager performing not only the country boy, but also the servant: the manager trades places (trades marks) with the members of the gallery, and in the process articulates the critique those spectators might implicitly be making of their betters. The joke would have gained piquancy from Garrick's ongoing struggle over control of the footmen's gallery.

Garrick's epilogue, spoken by Woodward, offers another turn of the screw:

> *Enter—speaking to the People without.*
> Pshaw! Damn your Epilogue—and hold your Tongue—
> Shall we of Rank be told what's right and wrong?
> Had you ten Epilogues you shou'd not speak'em,
> Tho' he had writ 'em all in Lingum Grecum
> I'll do't by all the Gods!—(you must excuse me)
> Tho' Author, Actors, Audience, all abuse me!
>
> *To the Audience.*
> Behold a Gentleman!—and that's enough!—[34]

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[33] David Garrick, 'Prologue' to [John Brown], *Barbarossa. A Tragedy*, 2nd edn. (London: J. and R. Tonson, 1755).

[34] Garrick, 'Epilogue' to Brown, *Barbarossa*.

The offstage dispute over who has the right to judge those of rank leads to a simple self-identification that all on its own seems to have been enough to evoke copious laughter. Woodward's commands—'Behold' and 'that's enough!'—mimic the right of nobility to command public attention and obedience. The next line continues, after the pause recorded by the dash, 'Laugh if you please—I'll take a Pinch of Snuff!'—a performance that Woodward, a highly skilled pantomime artist, must have milked for all it was worth.

Part of the humour of this paired prologue and epilogue was the combination of role and performer. According to Thomas Davies, 'the moment Woodward spoke on stage, a certain ludicrous air laid hold of his features, and every muscle of his face ranged itself on the side of levity',[35] and the *Theatrical Examiner* (1757) addressed Woodward directly to warn him that 'a certain friendship for the upper-gallery runs you into innumerable absurdities'.[36] For this prologue and epilogue, Garrick the gentleman played the country boy and servant, leaving Woodward, the friend of the upper gallery, to play the fine gentleman, condemning the upper sort he represents with accidental genteel abandon:

> I have no Ears,—yet Op'ras I adore!
> Always prepar'd *to die—to sleep—no more*!

The *Hamlet* reference shows Garrick deploying his beloved Shakespeare as a joke on nobles who can't distinguish between great British tragedy and empty opera: either one is merely an occasion for sleeping in the audience. The epilogue ends with a disavowed personal plug: proposing that the British should publicly export Shakespearean tragedy to France, the 'fine gentleman' insists that they

> Reserve alone to bless these golden Times,
> A Farce or two—and *Woodward*'s Pantomimes!

Woodward performing the fine gentleman stands revealed as Woodward the actor and pantomime artist pursuing his own interests. The final joke, though, is that the difference between these two figures is somewhat less that might be expected. The closing line allows Woodward to be both double and integrated: both a fine gentleman declaring his appreciation of Woodward, and Woodward the friend of the gallery, speaking out of self-interest in favour of pantomimes. In prologues and epilogues, the appeal to celebrity effectively punctured the fiction of the actor being coextensive with the character performed. In this case, the character—a mirror to the fine gentlemen in the audience—is rather shown to be coextensive with Woodward, the pantomime artist. Despite its opening defence of the privileges of rank, the epilogue shows gentlemen, actors, and footmen all pursuing their own private interests, unified by what in reality divides them.

The entire power relation encapsulated by this kind of celebrity performance remains volatile, stabilized only through an apotropaic performance of violence. For instance,

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[35] Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the life of David Garrick, Esq.*, 2 vols. (London: printed for the author, 1780), i. 265.
[36] Quoted in *BDA*, xvi. 264.

in the second act of Macklin's *Covent Garden Theatre*, Pasquin goes to investigate the sounds of a quarrel offstage, only to be given a drubbing by the sharper Count Hunt-Bubble:

PASQUIN: I beg Pardon—We must Stop for a moment, something extraordinary has happen'd—I'll go See what it is—Possibly Some Quarrel behind the Scenes. [*Exit: Pas.*]

COUNT: How dare You—You Rascal—A Lady's Character—knock him down—I'll teach him to bring Gentlemen's Character upon the Stage.

PASQUIN: Pray Sir hear me,—I have not done it.

COUNT: Knock him down; beat him to Mummy.

Enter Pasquin disorder'd and Bloody.

PASQUIN: Gentlemen, I hope you'll protect me—You See how I am us'd.[37]

This is, of course, a purely fictional beating, but Pasquin nonetheless appears before both his onstage and offstage audiences in all his embodied particularity, '*disorder'd and Bloody*', a non-gentleman punished for daring to satirize gentlemen's characters. Macklin/Pasquin is presented as vulnerable to a beating in his own split person. The stage blood authorizes Pasquin's demand for public protection and enables him to turn the tables on the Count and bring him before the 'Tribunal of the Public'. The 'Public' constructed by Macklin's farce promptly condemns the Count and expresses its gratitude to Pasquin, who then submits to judgement himself: 'he who was late a Iudge and Public Censor in turn, now trembles at Your dread Tribunal. The first and last Appeal of Players, Poets, Statesmen, Fidlers, Fools, Philosophers and Kings'.[38] Pasquin's submission here notably ignores the fact that he has already been judged and punished for the crime of criticizing his betters. The actor-judge has suffered for his presumption—and the beating on some level authorizes Pasquin's presumption, since the on-stage audience's response to the beating is to urge him to bring his attacker Hunt-Bubble to account—but the suffering itself is subsequently ignored, disavowed, as if the beating never happened (which, in real life, of course, it didn't).

If Macklin successfully stages his own beating apotropaically, however, not even the great manager David Garrick can always avoid a more material drubbing. The 1755 riot over *The Chinese Festival* (an afterpiece which Garrick failed to withdraw after several expressions of public disapproval) turned personal, as rioters damaged Drury Lane to the extent of four thousand pounds and even threatened Garrick's house. Upon Garrick's first return to the stage after the riot, some spectators called on him to apologize; fellow-actor Tate Wilkinson records the manager's decisive response to the threat of further spectatorial action:

he advanced with great respect, and as great firmness … He acknowledged all favours received, but unless he was that night permitted to perform his duty to the best of his

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[37] Macklin, *Covent Garden Theatre*, 50–1.
[38] Macklin, *Covent Garden Theatre*, 72.

abilities, he was above want, superior to insult, and would never never appear on the stage again.—While he was speaking all tumult ceased:—It was indeed a calm after a storm:—They seemed so struck with the truth which he asserted and addressed to them...that from the idea of censuring Mr. Garrick unmeritedly, they felt the reproach deservedly on themselves, and, like true-hearted Britons, burst into such an universal according applause, as for several minutes shook the foundations of Old Drury.[39]

Here, the transitive pleasure of injuring/witnessing rebounds on the audience, as Garrick abstracts his present self from his identity as an actor (through which he earned the financial independence he relies on to rebuke the public). Above want and superior to insult, Garrick lays claim to a status higher than that of an actor or a theatrical manager—higher, really, than a mortal man. Coinciding with himself as (self-made) gentleman, Garrick makes everyone else want to coincide with him, too: by 1783, the *European Magazine and London Review* would remark that Garrick 'was the very glass, wherein the noblest youth did dress themselves! There were no legs that practiced not his gait—there were no eyes that practiced not his looks'.[40] Performers in private theatricals hoped to unite the gentleman and the actor, but only Garrick succeeded—by exceeding the boundaries of both, once the privilege of independence was paid for, in the coin of public injury.

THE SPOUTER'S SEDUCTION

John O'Brien, one of the few scholars to consider an eighteenth-century theatrical public sphere, draws on Michael Warner's work to analyse 'the emergence of a "mass subject" who is the normative addressee of entertainment'. For O'Brien, this emergence involves questions of 'representativity': 'how could the central character of a drama...be said to represent the desires and fears of the individual spectator? And how could the figure of "the apprentice" be deployed to represent the audience as a whole?'[41] In a reading of George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (Drury Lane, 1731), O'Brien answers these questions by linking abstraction, representativity, and identification. Noting the oddly flat character of George Barnwell, the bad apprentice who becomes a murderer rather than a merchant and is hung for his pains, O'Brien suggests that 'Lillo's expectation is

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[39] Tate Wilkinson, *Memoirs of his Own Life by Tate Wilkinson, Patentee of the Theatres Royal, York and Hull*, 4 vols. (York: printed for the author, 1790), iv. 215–16.

[40] *European Magazine and London Review* (December 1783), 414–15, 414. The writer is quoting Lady Percy's eulogy for her husband, Hotspur (*Henry IV, Part 2*, 2.3.21–3).

[41] John O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690–1760* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), xxiii.

that spectators would be more able to insert themselves in Barnwell's place if he offers as blank as possible a screen for the projection of their own self-images'.[42]

Arthur Murphy's farce *The Apprentice* (Drury Lane, 1756) offers a very different response to questions of representativity and audience identification—and the title seems to suggest a conscious response to Lillo's tragedy. The hero of Murphy's farce is a frivolously bad apprentice: where Barnwell could be seduced by Millwood into fornication and murder, Dick, played by Woodward, is merely seduced into endless spouting. The seductions of the stage—his propensity to quote from popular drama at every moment, and his struggle to make life conform to the conventions of the stage—make him a comic nuisance rather than a tragic challenge to the status quo. Dick, like many of the spouters he inspired, is an amateur attempting to mimic celebrity actors in famous scenes and lines—but Woodward playing Dick is already a highly trained professional, celebrity actor brilliantly mimicking other celebrity actors. The success of *The Apprentice*, both in its first season and in its inspiration to later decades of spouters, lay not in its blankness but in its overdetermination: its excessive layering of celebrity upon celebrity, mimicry upon mimicry. Murphy's *Apprentice*, the afterpiece that filled the gap left by the rejected *Chinese Festival*, was in some ways the perfect public relations offering, emphasizing the irresistible seductions of the theatre for apprentices, girlfriends, and servants—at least the first and last of which were seen as dangerously volatile elements of the audience.

Entranced by Garrick's celebrity, many a Georgian youth apparently did attempt to recreate him- or herself as a mirror to the stage, mimicking Garrick and other famous actors and actresses. The result was real-life spouting clubs: gatherings of tradesmen, apprentices, and women acquainted with them, meeting in public houses to act out speeches and scenes from the Georgian and later the nineteenth-century stage. An excellent article by Leslie Richtie lays out a broad range of spouting practices and sketches their prevalence throughout the latter part of the Georgian period and the nineteenth century. Richtie notes that discussions of spouting clubs (both in the Georgian era and more recently) often look to Murphy's *Apprentice* 'as both the epitome of spouting practices and as a salutary satiric check to apprentices' dramatic ambitions', though spouting continued to thrive long after *The Apprentice* staged its presumed critique.[43] But even Richtie may mistake the early history of spouting, accepting retrospective claims of an early spouting boom as historical fact. I believe that rather than blocking the spread of spouting, Murphy's *Apprentice* largely created the fad, greatly hastening its expansion beyond the context of private theatricals in which it seems to have first developed. Rather than 'the spouter's revenge', Murphy's farce may be better described as the spouter's seduction. Only the latter possibility explains the degree of female participation in spouting clubs, the importance of prologues and epilogues as registered by numerous

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[42] O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, 169.

[43] Leslie Ritchie, 'The Spouter's Revenge: Apprentice Actors and the Imitation of London's Theatrical Celebrities', *The Eighteenth Century*, 53.1 (2012), 42.

print 'spouter's companions', or the paradoxical limitations on spectatorial agency implied in the apprenticeship of spouting.

Analysing the popularity of spouting from the perspective of modern media theories of convergence and overflow suggests that spouting encouraged spectators to invest their energies and agency in defining, mimicking, and thus reconfirming celebrity rather than contesting the conditions shaping the stage and its stars. As summarized by Will Brooker, 'media convergence implies cynical marketing strategies, cultural convergence a creative poaching'.[44] Spouting clubs appear to be an example of cultural convergence (fans performing theatrical speeches and scenes in taverns and amateur theatres and reproducing favoured passages in 'spouter's companions'), but they originated, I would argue, in a more cynical mediation of theatrical marketing. Media convergence played a central role in eighteenth-century theatre culture, beginning with the complimentary loan of theatrical scripts to opinion leaders, and continuing with prologues and epilogues, newspaper 'puffs', and the publication of the acting script, often with an explanatory preface. Cynicism was the order of the day. But Henry Jenkins's recent work on cultural convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence, recommends approaching media producers and consumers 'as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands'—an apt frame of reference for the world of spouting.[45]

Perhaps appropriately, then, the first stage Spouter—not an apprentice but a fine gentleman, mingling in his person the roles of critic, fan, and actor—operated right on the boundary of media and cultural convergence. The first print reference to 'spouting' that I have found appears in the text of a privately performed farce, printed in response to its harsh reception: Francis Stamper's *The Modern Character, introduc'd in the Scenes of Vanbrugh's Æsop* (1751). Stamper's preface to the play asserted that it 'would never have been offer'd in this Manner to the Publick, had not the Parties for whom it was design'd, by a very clamorous and ungentlemanlike Behaviour, denied the rest of the Audience the Liberty of hearing it'.[46] Not even private theatricals were exempt from audience disruption, in other words, not even when attendance was free. A few brief passages from the piece define 'spouting' and give us the character of 'the Spouter':

SPOUTER: …oh, it is impossible, Mr. *Aesop*, that you who understand every Thing, should not know what *spouting* is?

AESOP: *Spouting*, Sir!

SPOUTER: *Spouting*, Sir! ay, *Spouting*, Sir! come, come, don't *Hum-bug* us old Dad, but give us a Speech in *Richard*—Egad, you are naturally adapted to the Character; that Hump of yours has an admirable deal of Propriety in it. (8)

[44] Brooker, 'Dawson's Creek', 458.
[45] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 3.
[46] Francis Stamper, *The Modern Character, introduc'd in the Scenes of Vanbrugh's Æsop. As it was acted at a late private representation of Henry the Fourth, perform'd gratis at the little Opera-House in the Haymarket*, 2nd edn. (London: printed for F. Stamper, 1751), v. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text.

'Give us a Speech in *Richard*'—Spouters were noted for performing fragments of established plays at the drop of a hat. But Spouters also saw themselves as critics: 'Why there now are the Players at our two Theatres,—sad Dogs,—sad Dogs! indeed;—do you know, Sir, that these Fellows are continually pestering me to give them Instructions' (9). Aesop disputes the truth of this representation ('No, Sir, I know no such Thing'), suggesting the Spouter is more impressed with his own critical acumen than the players he affects to advise. Finally, Spouters were also associated with mimicry, particularly the mimicry of famous actors:

> SPOUTER: ...and would you believe it, Mr. *Aesop*, when (as I am often desir'd by *People* of *Quality* to do it) I have appear'd in a private Performance, the Audience have cried, there, *Now he takes off such a Player!* and, *Now he takes off such a Player!* and this arises, Mr. *Aesop*, from an undistinguishing Judgment, that cannot tell the Copy from an Original. (9)

The Spouter blames his audience's 'undistinguishing Judgment' for his lack of originality: the passage makes clear both his mimicry of established players and his desire to have that mimicry received as original talent. The Spouter's performance falls somewhere midway between private and public theatricals:

> AESOP: Then it seems you have play'd in publick.
> SPOUTER: Ay, Sir, privately as I told you.
> AESOP: In publick privately, Sir!
> SPOUTER: Ay, old Dad, I see that's a Paradox to you. (10)

The Spouter himself is untroubled by the paradox—a paradox only extended by Stamper's publication of the scene on the grounds that it could not be heard by its intended (private) audience. Stamper's scene may have been shouted down, but the printed version of what we might call his slash drama (inserting the character of the Spouter into Vanbrugh's Aesop, just as Vanbrugh had introduced characters into the context of Aesop's Fables) ran through three editions within the year.

This first appearance of the Spouter as a gentleman disrupts existing understandings of spouting as a practice of tradesmen and apprentices. Ritchie, for instance, argues that 'Spouters, with their affectionate and earnest imitations of stage actors, were temporally parallel but economically opposite to...private theatricals...Spouters aspired to the theatre...genteel amateur actors aspired only to the theatrical, and appeared at their best when enacting delicate imitations of themselves'.[47] Stamper's 'Sett of Brother Spouters', by contrast, blur the boundaries of public and private, defining themselves through their disavowed mimicry of famous actors.

Murphy's *Apprentice* provided one mechanism by which spouting moved from the upscale world of private theatricals to its historical base among apprentices and

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[47] Ritchie, 'The Spouter's Revenge', 61–2.

tradesmen.[48] Jessé Foot, Murphy's biographer, claimed that Murphy visited numerous spouting clubs as a kind of research for his farce: certainly he seems to have visited the club in Wood Street, and he also belonged to a Shakespeare club and the Bedford Coffeehouse, both of which might be considered rather loftier venues for spouting. In a review of *The Apprentice*, however, Tobias Smollett caustically noted that 'The professed aim of the author was to reform a set of apprentices...but, as this character or disposition is limited to a petty beerhouse in one of the avenues of Covent-garden, the moral of the piece cannot be very extensive'.[49] In fact, Murphy's farce disseminated the possibility of amateur theatricals far more broadly than a Cheapside spouting club could hope to do—especially since the printed script circulated the idea of spouting clubs to the provinces as well as the metropolis.

As Ritchie notes, the heyday of spouting seems to have come in the 1760s and 1770s, decades featuring multiple versions and reprints of 'Spouter's companions', collections mostly of recent prologues and epilogues associated with celebrity actors and actresses. As evidenced by this privileging of prologues and epilogues, 'Spouting created a fan-based cult of theatric celebrity that focused on individual actors' exemplarity in depicting certain sentiments, roles, and speeches'.[50] But do spouting clubs and companions offer a utopian claiming of the theatrical public sphere—or a hijacking of spectators' energy and agency (as Dick's father Wingate argues in the play)? I incline toward the latter reading. First, the effect of Murphy's farce is to extend theatricality indefinitely. Rather than attempting to reform spouting apprentices, the play travesties upper-class private theatricals by re-presenting them in working-class clothes: not just Dick the apprentice but his servant Simon and his sweetheart Charlotte have all been bitten by the spouting bug. Still more tellingly, in a later edition of the play, old Wingate himself is defined as an actor manqué, preferred over all the other spouters by the onstage audience, the bailiff Catchpole.[51] Second, spouting as fad (and thus as practice known well beyond its practitioners) kept the public focused on celebrity actors rather than liberated by the disembodied critique of the written prologue, or searching for an alternative to this implicitly violent dichotomy. Spouters do not coincide with themselves, but aspire to occupy the place of those who (only apparently) revel in such self-coincidence. Rather than a utopian space of free play, spouting clubs, like the prologues and epilogues they favoured, offered an early schooling in the paradoxes of mass media and mass spectatorship.

Within these constraints, however, spouting clubs may well have shifted some of the calibrations of the theatrical public sphere. The prevalence of prologues and epilogues in

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[48] One spouting club seems to have existed in the early 1750s, though whether it preceded Stamper's scene is difficult to ascertain.

[49] Tobias Smollett, *Critical Review; or, The Annals of Literature, by a Society of Gentlemen. Volume the First* (London: Baldwin, 1756), 79.

[50] Ritchie, 'The Spouter's Revenge', 62.

[51] For Catchpole's encomiums on Wingate as an actor, see Arthur Murphy, *The Works of Arthur Murphy*, 7 vols. (London: T. Cadell, 1786), ii. 66–7.

spouters' companions emphasizes the spouters' interest not only in celebrity actors, but also in the art of shaping audiences and their provisional agency through direct address. Richtie is surprised at the extent of female participation in spouting clubs located in taverns, but clubs begun in response to *The Apprentice*'s popularity might well follow its indulgence of female theatrics. Charlotte is more sensible than Dick, but she too spouts and strikes attitudes, and Christopher Smart's epilogue, written for Kitty Clive, suggests as many options for female spouters as for males:

> There dwells a Milliner in yonder Row,
> Well dress'd, full voic'd, and nobly built for Shew,
> Who, when in Rage, she scolds at *Sue* and *Sarah*,
> *Damn'd, damn'd Dissembler!*—thinks she's more than ZARA.
> She has a Daughter too that deals in Lace,
> And sings—O *Ponder* well—and *Chevy Chase*,
> And fain would fill the fair *Ophelia*'s Place.[52]

Finally, beyond this gender-based claim to equal opportunity, Murphy's farce makes spouting a practice through which different national character types—Irishmen, Englishmen, Scotchmen spouting 'Mockbeeth', and so on—can find common ground. Himself an Irishman whose first professional role was Othello, Murphy sketches an Irish spouter nervously claiming that role in the club:

DICK: What character do you intend to appear in?
IRISHMAN: *Othollo*, my Dear, let me alone: you'll see how I'll *bodder* 'em—Tho' by my Shoul, myshelf does not know but I'd be frightened when every Thing is in a *Hub-bub*, and nothing to be heard, but *"Throw him over"*—*"over with him"*—*"off, off, off the Stage"*—*"Music"*—*"Wont y'ha'some Orange-chips"*—*"Wont y'ha'some Non-pareills"*.[53]

At least in the early years of spouting clubs and spouting companions, the role of Othello could combine half-parodic associations with the private performance of the Delaval *Othello* at Drury Lane (1751), Murphy's own ambivalent flirtation with stage performance, and Spranger Barry's emotionally dramatic rendition of the role. Here, the Irish actor-playwright, ostensibly working to reflect his audience, presents an Irish actor reflecting on *his* audience as producing a 'hub-bub', the sound of an Irish war-cry designed to strike terror in the hearts of its listeners. This performance of the hub-bub evades syntax in favour of confusion, highlighting the chaos of vulnerability to be found on both sides of the stage, while also comically reframing the transitive pleasures of injuring/witnessing that underlie this Georgian theatrical public sphere.

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[52] [Christopher Smart], 'Epilogue' to Arthur Murphy, *The Apprentice, a Farce in Two Acts* (London: P. Valliant, 1756).

[53] Murphy, *Apprentice*, 25. The version of the play included in the collected *Works* of 1786 adds calls for 'Prologue', 'Hornpipe', and 'Roast Beef' to this hub-bub (*Works of Arthur Murphy*, ii. 37).

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