‘Tickling the senses with sinful delight’: the pleasure of reading comedies in early modern England

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In the introduction to *Shakespearean Sensations* (2013), Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard foreground the degree to which early modern antitheatricalists’ anxieties about the theatre are couched in descriptions of sensory affect. They cite Stephen Gosson’s complaint that plays’ ‘straunge consortes of melody [...] tickle the ear’, the actors’ ‘costly apparel [...] flatter[s] the sight’, while their ‘effeminate gesture[s] [...] ravish the sence’ and their ‘wanton speache [...] whet[s] desire too inordinate lust’.¹ The final item on Gosson’s list of sensory dangers, and its consequence, exemplifies what Craik and Pollard go on to demonstrate through further examples from the corpus of antitheatrical writing: namely, that ‘[a]ntitheatricalists’ concerns about plays’ physical and emotional consequences centred especially on their potentially aphrodisiac effects’.²

These are, crucially, plays in performance. Although Craik and Pollard state that their volume’s ‘particular aim [...] is to consider together the sensations aroused by reading and playgoing’, neither they nor their contributors consider the sensations that might be aroused by encountering plays on the page.³ It is my aim in this chapter to do precisely that, with particular focus on printed comedies: the genre of which, as Philip Stubbes points out a year after Gosson, ‘the matter and ground is love’, meaning that they are most likely to produce the same aphrodisiac effects that the antitheatricalists fear in performance.⁴ Where performed comedies supposedly produce a titillating pleasure that relies on the stimulus of the external senses, printed comedies offer a pleasure that relies on the workings of what was, in the period, conceived of as an ‘internal sense’ – the imagination.⁵

Antitheatricalists routinely argued that printed drama was less sensually overpowering and therefore less dangerous than performed drama; what I hope to demonstrate is that, on the contrary, the material contexts of playreading and the role played by the imagination may have enabled a fuller submission to the ‘sinful lusts of the flesh’ than did the playhouse.⁶ Furthermore, I argue, a variety of dramatic paratexts appear to both create and respond to a

market desire for printed comedies as repositories of the type of erotic pleasure that antitheatricalists feared audiences would experience in the theatre. That such a motivation for playreading existed is confirmed by the early seventeenth-century manuscript commonplace book of William Drummond of Hawthornden, which I discuss in my conclusion. Craik and Pollard point out that ‘early modern writers who discussed how it felt to experience [plays and poetry] shared a conceptual and discursive vocabulary’ but fail to consider the experience of readers who encountered plays *as* poetry (rather than performance).⁷ In this chapter, I place pressure on the way in which the crossover between playgoing and playreading markets established by scholarship may go hand in hand with a similar crossover in the motivations and responses of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English playgoers and playreaders encountering comedies on stage and on the page.⁸

When Gosson considers the relative demerits of comedy and tragedy, he finds comedy particularly perturbing because its sensory affect inheres in the provision of pleasure, and pleasure is what leads to moral incontinence. As he puts it, ‘[c]omedies so tickle our senses with a pleasanter vaine [than tragedies] that they make us lovers of laughter, and pleasure, without any meane, both foes to temperance’ (C6^r). The quality of this pleasure, and the quality of the moral incontinence, can be inferred from Stubbes’s description of the genre’s recurring subject matter. It is not simply love that forms the ‘matter and ground’ of comedies, but sex (‘bawdrie, [...] whordome, adulterie’, as Stubbes puts it), and the genre’s stock characters are those in search of it: ‘whores, queanes, bawdes, scullions, Knaves, Curtezans, lecherous old men, amorous yong men, with such like of infinit varietie’ (L7^r). Despite the fact that he is writing before the heyday of the early modern professional theatre, Gosson’s description remains superficially apt well into the seventeenth century, which sees the London stage peopled with Dutch courtesans, honest whores and cunning lovers, engaged in losing both labour and maidenheads in the pursuit of love.⁹

As Craik and Pollard correctly identify, the concern for the antitheatricalists is that the erotic subject matter of comedies will have an aphrodisiac effect upon audiences. William Prynne in his 1633 *Histrio-mastix* describes ‘those enchanting, powerfull, overcoming sollicitations unto lewdnesse’ that occur when ‘the Bawdes, the Panders, the Lovers, the Wooers, the Adulterers, the Womans, or Love-sicke persons parts are lively represented’ on the public stage (Y3^v), and Gosson warns that ‘vice is learned with beholding, sense is tickled, desire pricked, and those impressions of mind are secretly conveyed over to the gazers, which the plaiers do counterfeit on the stage’ (G4^r). The amorous emotional states of the embodied characters can be involuntarily adopted by the spectators over the course of a performance: it is unsurprising that the antitheatricalists repeatedly stress the fact that playhouses and brothels share

a common clientele.¹⁰ Much of what Gosson calls the ‘sinfull delight’ (G2’) of seeing a comedy performed, it is clear, is imagined as stemming from its bawdy or amorous scenes’ provision of a pleasurable titillation to the audience.

Despite the fact that in certain formulations of early modern sense theory ‘titillation’ could constitute a sense in and of itself, for both playwrights and antitheatricalists this pleasure was conceived of as being created largely by the visual and aural stimuli of performance.¹¹ The epilogue to Phineas Fletcher’s *Sicelides*, performed in 1615 at King’s College, Cambridge, confirms the dual importance of engaging the senses of sight and hearing, beginning:

As in a Feast, so in a Comedy,
Two Sences must be pleas’d, in both the Eye.
In Feasts, the Eye and Taste must be invited,
In Comedies, the Eye and Eare delighted:
And he that onely seekes to please but either,
While both he doth not please, he pleaseth neither[.]¹²

The pleasure of attending a performance of a comedy – which, as I have argued above, was often construed as an erotic pleasure – inhered in the stimulation of the senses of sight and hearing. This stimulation is naturally described in antitheatrical rhetoric as a dangerous enticement to sin. Gosson, for instance, portrays the effect of hearing metrical verse thus:

Because the sweete numbers of Poetrie flowing in verse, do wonderfully tickle the hearers eares, the devill hath tyed this to most of our playes, that whatsoever he would have sticke fast to our soules, might slippe downe in suger by this intisement, for that which delighteth never troubleth our swallow[.] (D8^v)

It is worth noting that even though Gosson is describing the effect on an audience of the aural stimulus of verse, he cannot help dressing his point in figurative language that evokes two further senses, those of touch (the verse ‘tickle[s] the hearers eares’) and taste (the devil’s words are swallowed with as much delight as sugar). The depiction of performance becomes one of sensory overload, in which the combination of stimuli is such that the audience is ‘ravish[ed] [...] with varietie of pleasure’ (E1^v). Elsewhere antitheatrical rhetoric fixates on the dangers of what is *seen*: John Rainolds, for instance, in his 1599 *Overthrow of Stage-Plays*, refuses to allow for the remove of mimesis, and expressly condemns the cross-dressing of boy players for the emotions it has the ability to incite. Rainolds asks his correspondent, William Gager, if he can ‘accuse [himself] [...] of anie wanton thought stirred up in [him] by looking on a beautifull Woman? If you can; then ought you beware of beautifull boyes transformed into women by putting on their raiment, their feature, lookes and facions.’¹³ It is the *sight* of the boy players impersonating women that is a spur to wanton thoughts: in the theatre, as in other areas of early modern discourse, sight is at the top of the hierarchy of the senses.¹⁴ This is why the printer’s

address to the 1620 quarto of J.C.'s *The Two Merry Milkmaids* can claim that the comedy 'was made more for the Eye, then the Eare; lesse for the Hand, then eyther'.¹⁵ The sensual pleasures inherent in this 'Pleasant Comedie' lay, according to the printer, in seeing and, to a lesser extent, hearing it performed – the printed book which the reader holds in his or her hand is not the play's intended incarnation.

The absence of sensory stimulation inherent in silent, solitary reading is precisely what causes Prynne to find printed plays a more acceptable evil than performed plays. '[W]hen a man reads a Play', he states:

he ever wants that *viva vox*, that flexanimous rhetoricall Stage-elocution, that lively action and representation of the Players themselves which put life and vigor into these their Enterludes, and make them pierce more deeply into the Spectators eyes, their cares and lewde affections, precipitating them on to lust: yea, the eyes, the cares of Play-readers want all those lust-enraging objects, which [...] Spectators meet with in the Play-house[.] (6C2^v–6C3^r)

For Prynne, the lack of speech and action is the printed play's main asset: when a playtext no longer possesses the 'life and vigor' that actors give to it, it can no longer affect the senses that are most susceptible in the playhouse, and is far less likely to 'precipitat[e] [its readers] on to lust'. Yet Prynne reckons without the power of the imagination, understood by early modern writers such as Robert Burton to be itself a sense, albeit an 'inward' one.¹⁶ Because the imagination functions through the translation of signals received by the external senses, the imaginary acts required in reading are often described using the vocabulary of external sensory affect.¹⁷ In the subsequent section, I argue that the identity of the language used to describe response to 'lively represented' mimetic action and to that printed on the page invokes an identity of sensory experience – and that the material context of the reader's engagement with the play may in fact involve a more complete abdication of self in the pursuit of erotic pleasure than does the spectator's.

In 1655, the scholar and divine Meric Casaubon published his *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasm*, in which he discusses the pleasure of reading. For Casaubon, this pleasure is sensory. It rests largely in the type of figurative language central to much dramatic writing, which creates what he calls 'paper pictures'; crucially, in Casaubon's account, these have the same visual sensory appeal when they consist of words on the page, as when the things they describe are visibly present.¹⁸ Quoting Cicero to support his argument, Casaubon remarks that 'every Metaphor (and so of the rest [of the rhetorical figures]) that is proper and natural, exposeth the things that are spoken of to the senses; especially to that of the eyes' (N3^r). Regardless of whether the things are 'spoken of' or encountered through silent reading, the sense which they affect is predominantly that of sight. This is because, as Casaubon puts it, 'a man may see inwardly, as

well as outwardly': describing his experiences of reading the vivid figurative language of the classical authors, he notes, 'I do not only phansy to my self, that I see those things that they describe; but also find in my self (as I phansy) the very *same* content and pleasure that I should, if my eyes beheld them' (N4^r; my emphasis). This equivalence of sensory pleasure created by imagining the things described with one's 'inward eye' is also invoked by certain dramatic paratexts. Robert Chamberlain's commendatory verse which prefaces Richard Brome's 1640 comedy *The Antipodes* describes the power of reading to 'transport' the reader:

thy Book, being in my hand,
Hurried my Soule to th'Antipodian strand,
Where I did feast my Fancy, and mine Eyes
With such variety of Rarities
That I perceive thy Muse frequents some shade,
Might be a Grove for a Pierian Maide.¹⁹

Chamberlain goes still further than Casaubon: deploying a metaphor of taste which serves to highlight the sensory experience of playreading, he removes the contingent 'if', and declares simply that both his imagination *and* his eyes are feasted by his reading of Brome's play. His eyes do not feast on the letters printed on the page, but on the 'variety of Rarities' made present through the creation of 'paper pictures'.

The power of printed plays to influence the senses to the same degree that they do in performance is asserted by the couplet entitled 'The Stationer to Dramatophilus' that appears on the title page of the 1631 edition of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *A King and no King*. Punning on the play's title, it declares 'A Play and no Play, who this Booke shall read, | Will judge, and weepe, as if 'twere done indeed'.²⁰ The 'Booke' is 'no play' (as the century progresses, the word is used more and more to denote performance only, while 'work' or 'poem' describes a print incarnation), and yet it is, because the text's ability to affect the reader intellectually and emotionally will cause him or her to respond with judgement and grief, just as at a performance with the full range of sensory stimuli identified by the antitheatricalists. The written word's influence on the imagination is stressed still further by John Ford in his contribution to the commendatory verses that preface Philip Massinger's 1629 *The Roman Actor*. Ford's praise of Massinger inheres in his claim that the actions of Paris:

meerly were related
Without a Soule, Untill thy abler Pen
Spoke them, and made them speake, nay Act agen
In such a height, that Heere to know their Deeds
Hee may become an Actor that but Reades.²¹

While Ford begins by lauding the play in performance, by the final line he is making a claim not for the equivalence but the *superiority* of reading to spectatorship. What Ford asserts is that Massinger's play is of such a quality that it will enable the reader not merely to identify with Paris (the 'Actor' of the final line and the play's title), but, for the duration of the reading, to *become* him. This is more than assuming the 'impressions of mind' of the characters that one watches onstage, as Gosson feared audiences would do: this is a total abandonment of self enabled by complete engagement with the dramatic narrative, something that is, paradoxically, only enabled by the *lack* of an actor to personate Paris on stage. How can the spectator imagine *himself* Paris when confronted by an actor who is, for the duration of the performance, clearly the embodiment of the character? Only when reading the play can his imagination fully take hold and enable him to identify himself not *with* Paris, but *as* Paris.

That such an immersive dramatic reading experience was conceived of as furbishing at least one category of readers with an erotic pleasure which surpassed that of spectatorship is indicated by Richard Brathwaite's 1638 conduct book, *A Nursery for Gentry*. One of Prynne's reasons for preferring playbooks over performance is that the former 'may be read without using or beholding any effeminate amorous, lustfull gestures, complements, kisses, dalliances, or embracements; [...] any lively representations of Venery, whore-dome, adultery, and the like, which are apt to enrage mens lusts' (6C2ⁿ). Yet as Casaubon and the dramatic paratexts discussed above aver, readers are just as capable of 'beholding' the amorous scenes of a play in their imaginations, despite the absence of the titillating 'lively representation' of performance. What Brathwaite implies in the following description of young men reading 'Idle pamphlets' (which almost certainly include plays) is that these readers are also imaginatively 'using' the 'lustfull gestures, complements, kisses, [and] embracements' about which they read.²² Brathwaite describes the reading preferences of 'voluptuous' young gentlemen, who are

altogether for Stories of Love; where every line workes such moving impressions in their unsteady fancies: as they reduce every period of Loves discourse, to a Sceane of Action; wherein they wish themselves Prime-actors, to close in a personal re-greet, with so light and sensuall a Relation.²³

'Stories of Love', as Stubbes has identified, are the dominant subject matter of comedies, and the likelihood that the young men's reading material includes drama is further implied by Brathwaite's deployment of a theatrical metaphor: the power exerted by the written word upon the young men's 'unsteady fancies' enables the transformation of the textually encountered 'period[s] of Loves discourse' into 'Sceane[s] of Action', in which, as in the verse by Ford quoted above, the readers can imagine themselves 'Prime-actors'. Lacking a concrete visual referent in the body of the actor, playreading enables what playgoing does not: the opportunity not to vicariously experience the amorous emotions

enacted by those on stage, but to imaginatively 'close in a *personal* re-greet' with the characters depicted in scenes of love-making, to 'feel', as Craik puts it in her discussion of Brathwaite's *Nursery*, 'as though they are participating in them as central protagonists'.²⁴

As Brathwaite points out, even a silently read textual 'Relation' of a 'Story of Love' can be 'sensuall'. That the erotic pleasure produced by this sensuality can in fact be amplified by the context of private reading is testified by seventeenth-century descriptions of the role of the imagination in the pathology of love-sickness. Lesel Dawson in her work on the subject notes that while writers in the early modern period 'held erotic obsession to be a real and virulent disease', they also acknowledged that the lover's 'agonies are simultaneously experienced as extreme pleasure'.²⁵ This pleasure most often inheres in imagining the object of one's desire, an activity that is facilitated by privacy. The section of André du Laurens's 1599 *Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight* that deals with 'melancholie which commeth by the extremitie of loue' notes that the love-sick 'lov[e] solitarines, the better to feed & follow [their] foolish imaginations'.²⁶ They also love reading plays: Burton in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* lists 'play-bookes' among the reading material of 'Inamoratoes', and when Richard West declares in the commendatory verse which prefaces the 1640 edition of Jacques Ferrand's *Erotomania* that 'Playes are the Sores of Love, this Book the Cure', it is clear from the context that the plays he is referring to are printed, not performed.²⁷ The internal sense of the imagination, crucial to the creation of pleasure in both activities, is activated to its fullest extent when the reader/lover is alone, his or her fixation on the text unimpeded by external distractions. Thus when Prynne notes that 'Stage-playes may be privately read over without any danger of infection by ill company [...] without giving any ill example, without any encouraging or maintaining of Players in their ungodly profession, or without participating with them in their sinnes' (6C2"), his observation is countered by contemporary writing that holds that it is precisely the solitary nature of the readerly encounter with the amorous playbook that enables the imagination to take full flight.²⁸

Participation in the pleasurable 'sinnes' depicted by actors of comedies did not have to take place in the playhouse: as the clergyman Anthony Burgess warned the 'Christian reader' of his 1658 treatise on original sin, 'many times sinne is acted by the Imagination with delight and content, without any relation at all to the external Actings of sinne.' The 'conceits of [...] lust' that were the offerings of many early modern comedies and which Burgess ordered his reader to shun were, according to contemporary discourses on the imagination and erotic pleasure, just as likely to 'defile' solitary playreaders as they were playgoers – if not more so.²⁹ The seventeenth-century physician Thomas Fienus explicitly states that 'the imagination is fitted by nature to move the appetite and excite the emotions': in the next section of this chapter, I want

to consider some of the paratextual rhetoric in pre-Restoration quartos of commercial comedies which seems to imply that publishers and playwrights acknowledged this fact, marketing printed comedies as repositories of erotic pleasure, an emotion created by the sensory power of the imagination.³⁰

When Thomas Nabbes dedicates his 1638 *Tottenham Court: A Pleasant Comedie* to William Mills, he writes that if Mills will 'vouchsafe the reading of it, [he] will find (after the light title) a light subiect, more gravely drest then the vulgar perhaps expected'.³¹ As it is hardly the purely descriptive 'Tottenham Court' that constitutes the 'light title', it is clear that the expectations of 'the vulgar' are created by the conventional phrase 'A Pleasant Comedie', which appears on numerous title pages of commercial comedies printed prior to the Restoration. The adjective 'pleasant' is rarely appended to other dramatic genres, and an examination of the sensual connotations of the verb 'please' as it occurs in other comedies' paratexts helps to clarify what exactly it was that 'the vulgar' may have hoped for when their expectations were confounded by the 'grave dress' of *Tottenham Court*.

In the epistle that prefaces Edward Sharpham's 1607 comedy *The Fleer*, the printer casts the play as a book 'to make you laugh and lie downe too, if you please'.³² 'Laugh and lie down' is proverbial, and often has sexual connotations: it is used, for instance, in the bawdy exchange between the female 'Merry Beggars' and their suitors in Richard Brome's 1652 *A Jovial Crew*, in which a passage of innuendo culminates with the women being told that they will 'laugh and lye down | When [their] bellies are full'.³³ In the epistle to *The Fleer*, the normally formulaic 'if you please', when used in conjunction with the first half of the sentence, seems to be advertising a pleasure that is to do with erotic stimulation: if the reader is pleased by the comedy's titillating subject matter, he will need to 'lie down'. Fienus held that the emotions created by the sense of the imagination could have a physical effect upon the body, and in hinting at the sexual quality of the pleasure that may arise from reading, the epistle implies that the physical alteration in the reader's body may be that typically produced by sexual arousal.³⁴

Given that it is most noticeably male bodies that exhibit physical alteration as a result of imaginatively produced erotic pleasure, it is unsurprising that one of the most common ways of advertising playbooks as repositories of such pleasure is to metaphorically construct them as female.³⁵ Such a strategy can be found in the anonymous epistle to Thomas Middleton's 1608 *The Family of Love*. Lamenting the time that has elapsed between the play's first performance and its subsequent publication (a lag of perhaps five years), the epistle's writer explains his concern in these terms: 'For Plaies in this Citie are like wenches new falne to the trade, onelie desired of your neatest gallants, whiles the'are fresh: when they grow stale they must be vented by Termers and Cuntrie chapmen.'³⁶

In equating playbooks with prostitutes, the epistle explicitly invokes a sexual desire for the printed play, the link reinforced by the orthographical pun in 'Cuntrie'. Thus when the writer declares in the sentence that follows, 'I know not how this labor will *please*', the type of reading pleasure invoked – as in the epistle to *The Fleer* – is rhetorically linked with the sexual desire of the preceding simile. The verb 'please' when deployed in proximity to other sexual metaphors assumes its erotic connotations, and the ways in which a 'pleasant comedy' is conceived of as pleasing its readers may have more to do with the provision of a titillating erotic pleasure created by the sensual stimulation of the imagination than the conventional phrase seems to imply.³⁷ This is particularly the case if 'comedy' is a generic index of a bawdy subject matter, as Stubbes, for instance, holds it is, and as playwrights such as Middleton openly affirmed: see, for example, his titling of the epistle to the 1611 *The Roaring Girl*, 'To the Comicke Play-readers: Venery, and Laughter', which promotes sex over humour as the most immediately obvious attribute of the comic genre.³⁸

The paratextual sexualization of printed comedies is most evident in the prefatory materials of plays whose titles name their female protagonists. Thus 'F.T.' in his contribution to the commendatory verses prefacing Richard Brome's 1632 *The Northern Lass* further develops the image of the playbook as prostitute when he begins his verse to Brome by exclaiming, 'What! wilt thou prostitute thy *Mistresse* (Friend) | And make so rich a Beauty common[?]' He continues: 'What end | Do'st thou propose? Shee was thine owne, but now | All will enioy her free', before concluding that Brome must have 'tri'd her, found her chast, | And fear'st not that Shee'll lewdly be embrac't'.³⁹ The verse's conclusion does not quite contain the common anxiety about the ungovernable circulation of a multiplicity of print copies in the public sphere, which is akin to the period's pervasive anxiety about women's chastity, and despite the assertion that *The Northern Lass* will not be subjected to 'lewd embraces', the commendatory verse that follows it, by 'St. Br.', casts the play not just as an object of desire but of *incestuous* desire, 'St. Br.' addressing Brome thus: 'Although I call you by a Brothers name, | I must confesse (nor doe I feare the shame) | I am in love with your faire Daughter, this.'⁴⁰

In another eponymously female play, John Fletcher's 1610 *The Faithful Shepherdess*, Fletcher takes pains to stress that his rationale for publishing the play is *not* to 'ravish kinde Atturnies, | in their journies'.⁴¹ This assumes that other printed comedies – perhaps most often those with female titles – intend to do exactly that, and implies that the rhetorical construction of playbooks as erotically desirable intersects with an understanding of them as objects that offer to their male readers a pleasurable 'ravishment', defined by the OED as 'the transportation of [the] mind with the strength of some emotion; the filling with ecstasy, intense delight, or sensuous pleasure; the entrancement, captivation, or enrapturing'. In Gosson's conceit, it is 'effeminate gesture' that

‘ravish[es] the sence’ in performance, but in Fletcher’s, it is the playreading lawyers’ imaginative engagement with less lofty comedies than *The Faithful Shepherdess* that provides them with such ‘sensuous pleasure’.

As Craik reminds us, ‘pornography’, certainly in the early modern period, is ‘a matter not so much of textual content but readerly approach’.⁴² Although the dramatic paratexts discussed above seem to imply an expectation that reading printed comedies could, through engaging the internal sense of the imagination, produce an emotion that equated to an erotic pleasure, they do not prove that early modern readers actually approached them in this way. In the final section of this chapter I want to consider the example of an early seventeenth-century reader who appears to have treated printed comedies as precisely the locations of sensually stimulated erotic pleasure that their paratexts took pains to construct them as.

One of the aspects of playreading that makes it preferable, in Prynne’s opinion, to attending a performance, is that ‘he that reades a Stage-play may passe by all obscene or amorous passages, all prophane or scurrill Iests, all heathenish oathes and execrations even with detestation’ (6C2^v). This type of selective skim-reading is a bowdlerizing inversion of the utilitarian method of reading taught in English grammar schools well into the seventeenth century, a hangover from humanism that involved privileging focus on a text’s noteworthy parts over interpretation of its whole.⁴³ Gosson asserts that ‘whatsoever such Playes as containe good matter, are set out in print, may be read with profite’ (‘but cannot be playd, without a manifest breach of Gods commaundement’): the ‘good matter’ that inheres in printed plays can be ‘read with profit’, even picked out in the same way that readers were encouraged to pick out worthy sententiae in their non-dramatic reading, while that which is objectionable can be passed over (E6^r).⁴⁴ Numerous readers’ marks in extant early modern playbooks demonstrate readers pausing at rhetorically striking or aphoristic passages that are ‘of some speciall excellency, or use, worthy the noting’, as the pedagogical theorist John Brinsley encouraged students to do in his popular *Ludus Literarius, or The Grammar Schoole* (1612).⁴⁵ However, just as often, marginal marks accompany precisely the types of ‘obscene and amorous passages’ which Prynne believed playreaders could and should pass by.⁴⁶ Using these marks to extrapolate reader preference or motivation can be problematic: it is often impossible to know who made them, or when, or why. However, when the passages they accompany are transcribed by a named reader into a roughly dateable commonplace book, they form part of a new textual creation that reflects more clearly the generic similarities between the passages that have appealed sufficiently to the reader to render them worthy of extracting and revisiting. The accumulated dramatic extracts in the manuscript commonplace book of the Scots poet William Drummond of Hawthornden demonstrate quite clearly that the scenes and passages in the

printed comedies he read that appealed to him most were those of a bawdy, titillating nature, and his transcription of them into a location that facilitated repeated revisiting hints at the sensory effect they may have held for him.

Drummond was born in 1585, and died in 1649. Throughout his life he read widely and voraciously, accumulating a large library, much of which is still intact and housed by the University of Edinburgh – including his marked-up quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Love's Labour's Lost*.⁴⁷ The manuscript lists he compiled of the books he owned and read demonstrate that he had a predilection for drama that extended well into adulthood: what is striking about his reading from his younger years, however, is his clear preference for comedy over other dramatic genres, which may intersect with Brathwaite's view that 'Stories of Love' (and thus comedies) are the preferred reading material of youths.⁴⁸

Of the 12 plays from which Drummond copies extracts into his commonplace book (MS 2059 in the National Library of Scotland), 10 are comedies.⁴⁹ Seemingly transcribed in the years 1609–10, lines and passages and sometimes entire abridged scenes cover 23 folios of his commonplace book, scrawled in a large untidy secretary hand.⁵⁰ Many of them are accompanied by a residual marker of a humanist pedagogical training, the marginal gloss or keyword. The glosses thus give away Drummond's favourite theme: of those that are legible (some recede into the book's binding so as to be unreadable), the only one that is repeated is 'women', which appears at least eight times.⁵¹ Considered in conjunction with the frequency of glosses such as 'madenhead', 'adulterie', 'courses of Loue' and 'cupids laws', Drummond's playreading priorities become clear.⁵²

Drummond exhibits a prurient interest in scenes or metaphors of an overtly erotic nature. He repeatedly pauses over passages that mention maidenheads: in the section of extracts from John Day's *Law Tricks*, the lines 'upon her finger wore her Madenhead' and 'Arbors with sweet violet Beds | that hath beene prest to death w^t madenheads' are overlined for emphasis; in the section of transcriptions from Middleton's *A Mad World My Masters*, the gloss 'madenhead' accompanies the line 'fouls then ar maides to locke from mē y^t treasure | wich death wil plucke & neuer yeeld thē pleasure' (although interestingly, these two lines are scored through with a diagonal line, as though Drummond at a later date no longer approved of their sentiment).⁵³ In the section containing extracts from Day's *The Isle of Gulls*, he transcribes almost the entirety of the interaction between the characters of Violetta and Hippolita in which they speculate about what the experience of losing their virginity will be like.⁵⁴ In this innuendo-heavy scene, Violetta recounts a dream she has had of the stages of her wedding, from courtship to occupation of the marital bed, and her annoyance at awakening from the dream just prior to the marriage's consummation: 'Lord how it chaft me that I wakt so soone, | One minuts dreaming longer, I had tride, | The difference twixt a virgin and a bride.' The scene

deliberately builds to a titillating climax which it then fails to deliver, and it is hard to resist the temptation to read a note of sexual frustration in the firmly scored vertical line in the margin next to the passage quoted above, which is conflated in Drummond's rendering with Hippolita's response, 'Otwould ha' vext a Saint, my blood would burne | To be so neere, and misse so good a turne' – perhaps a moment when the sensually stimulated erotic pleasure of playreading was interrupted.⁵⁵

When he transcribes a passage such as the character of Fuller's lengthy speech from Thomas Heywood's 1602 *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife From a Bad* in which he describes his courtship and eventual conquest of a former lover, it is impossible to know whether Drummond's reading of the speech – which ends with an image of the lovers lying on the woman's 'wanton bed' – involves the erotic pleasure of imagining himself a 'Prime-actor' in the scene.⁵⁶ The speech's final couplet is, "Now sweeting kisse me, having time and place" | So clings me too her with a sweet imbrace': it can only be guessed at whether deploying the internal sense of the imagination created for the young Drummond a pleasurably titllating 'Sceane of Action' in which he himself enacted the 'lustfull gestures [...] kisses, [and] embracements' described by the dramatic dialogue. I have suggested that the proliferation of such passages in Drummond's commonplace book – rendering it an anthology of dramatic writing that certainly could, in Craik's formulation, be read pornographically – imply that he did. By juxtaposing manuscript evidence of reader response with the printed discourses that theorize and construct this response, conclusions that might be drawn through separate consideration of both types of evidence are strengthened.

Drummond, I argue, seems to read comedies in the way certain dramatic paratexts offered them up to be read, which seems to correspond to the way Brathwaite and other writers assumed they would be read, which seems to involve the sensory stimulation, via the imagination, of an erotic pleasure equal or greater to that which the antitheatricalists believed was experienced in the playhouse. When the printer of *The Two Merry Milkmaids* complains that the sensory affect of the printed play – which technically involves only the sense of touch as the reader turns its pages – will be inferior to the visually and aurally stimulating experience of performance, he underestimates the potential sensuality of 'paper pictures' and the potency of the internal sense of the imagination in the creation of an erotically pleasurable comic playreading.

Notes

- 1 *The schoole of abuse* (1579), B6v.
- 2 Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard, 'Introduction: Imagining Audiences', in *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, ed. by Craik and Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1–25 (p. 14).
- 3 Craik and Pollard, p. 8. In a growing corpus of criticism on early modern reading and physiological affect, plays remain a largely unexamined genre, although Lucy Munro does consider briefly the ability of printed comedy to move its readers to laughter in 'Reading Printed Comedy: Edward Sharpham's *The Fleer*', in *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. by Marta Straznicky (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), pp. 39–58 (p. 42). Recent work that focuses more broadly on early modern reading and physiological affect includes Craik's *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Helen Smith's "'More swete vnto the eare | than holsome for ye mynde': Embodying Early Modern Women's Reading', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 73 (2010), 413–32; and, providing an overview of the topic, Adrian Johns's chapter 'The Physiology of Reading: Print and the Passions', in *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 380–443.
- 4 *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), L7r; hereafter cited in the text.
- 5 See Chapter 8 of this volume, where Aurélie Griffin gives an account of the distinction between the external and internal senses, as articulated by Thomas Aquinas.
- 6 It is William Prynne in his 1633 *Histrion-mastix: The Players Scourge* who says that of 'all the sinfull lusts of the flesh [...] Stage-Playes are the chiefe' (B2r). Prynne holds that, while it would be preferable not to read plays at all, to 'read a Play-booke' is nevertheless not as dangerously corrupting as to 'compose, or act, or see a Stage-play' (6C2r). *Histrion-mastix* is hereafter cited in the text. Gosson, too, had asserted in his 1582 *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* that 'whatsoever such Playes as conteine good matter, are set out in print, may be read with profite, but cannot be playd, without a manifest breach of Gods commaundement' (E6r); hereafter references to Gosson's work are to the *Playes Confuted* rather than *The Schoole of Abuse*, and are cited in the text.
- 7 Craik and Pollard, p. 8. For a discussion of the paratextual elevation of commercial playbooks to the more esteemed genre of 'poetry', see Wayne Chandler, *Commendatory Verse and Authorship in the English Renaissance* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), pp. 112–15.
- 8 On the crossover between playgoing and playreading markets, see Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 52.
- 9 John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* was first performed in 1605; Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *1 The Honest Whore* in 1604; Alexander Brome's *The Cunning Lovers* in 1638; William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1595; and Thomas Heywood's *A Maidenhead Well Lost* in 1633. Dates and author attributions follow DEEP.

- 10 See, for instance, Stubbes, who complains that as often as men 'goe to those howses where Players frequent, thei go to Venus pallace' (L7v).
- 11 See Natalie Eschenbaum's discussion, in Chapter 6 of this volume, of both Robert Burton and Francis Bacon's acknowledgment of Joseph Scaliger's designation of titillation as the 'sixth [external] sense'.
- 12 *Sicelides* (1631), L4v.
- 13 *The Overthrow of Stage-Playes* (1599), E3v.
- 14 Robert Burton's 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy*, for instance, points out that of the 'fiue outward senses [...] Sight is held to bee most pretious, and the best' (C1r).
- 15 'The Printer to the Reader', in *A pleasant comedie, called the two merry milke-maids; or, the best words weare the garland*, by J.C. [John Cumber?] (1620), A2r.
- 16 The three 'inward senses' identified by Burton are common sense, 'phantasie' or imagination, and memory (C1r).
- 17 A discussion of the 'standard beliefs' regarding the way the function of the imagination relies on the external senses can be found in L.J. Rather, 'Thomas Fienus' (1567–1631) Dialectical Investigation of the Imagination as Cause and Cure of Bodily Disease', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 41 (1967), 349–67 (pp. 352–53).
- 18 Meric Casaubon, *A treatise concerning enthusiasme, as it is an effect of nature, but is mistaken by many for either divine inspiration, or diabolical possession* (1655), N4v; hereafter cited in the text.
- 19 'To the Author on his Comedy, *The Antipodes*', in *The Antipodes*, by Richard Brome (1640), A4r.
- 20 'The Stationer to Dramatophilus', in *A King, and no King*, by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher (1631), A2r.
- 21 'Upon Mr. Massinger His *Roman Actor*', in *The Roman Actor*, by Philip Massinger (1629), A4r.
- 22 Peter Stallybrass argues that early modern play quartos belong among the slim, ephemeral publications termed 'pamphlets': see 'What Is a Book?' (plenary paper, Centre for Material Texts Inaugural Conference, University of Cambridge, 2010).
- 23 *A suruey of history: or, a nursery for gentry* (1638), T2r–v; 2Y1v.
- 24 Craik, p. 116 (my emphasis); and further on Brathwaite's discussion of reading in the *Nursery*, pp. 115–34.
- 25 *Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 2, 7.
- 26 *A discourse of the preservation of the sight* (1599), R3r.
- 27 Burton, Z2r; West, 'On this Learned Treatise Love–Melancholy', in *Erotomania*, by Jacques Ferrand (1640), b3r–c1v (b3v).
- 28 For a discussion of the physical and material conditions of 'private' reading in early modern England, see Sasha Roberts, 'Shakespeare "creepes into the womens closets about bedtime": Women Reading in a Room of Their Own', in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580–1690*, ed. by Gordon McMullan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 30–63.
- 29 *A Treatise of Original Sin* (1658), A3r; 2Z4v; 3A1r.
- 30 Fienus quoted in Rather, p. 356.
- 31 'To the Worshipfull William Mills, Esquire', in *Totenham Court: A pleasant comedie* (1638), A3r.

- 32 'To the Reader and Hearer', in *The Fleire* (1607), A3r.
- 33 The full exchange involves the men declaring that they are 'Merry and lusty', 'can hold out no longer' and that '[t]his night' they will 'lye together' with their lovers (*A Jovial Crew; or, The Merry Beggars* (1652), G3v). Although the line about filling their bellies is literal given the subsequent conversation about food, it also recalls Celia's taunting accusation in *As You Like It* that Rosalind wishes to know who is writing her love poetry 'so [she] may put a man in [her] belly' (3.2.200).
- 34 See Rather, p. 353.
- 35 Wendy Wall discusses the early modern publishing industry's gendering of texts as female and the rhetorical sexualization of book-buying and reading in *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- 36 'To the Reader', *The famelie of loue* (1608), A2r. The date of the first performance is taken from *DEEP*.
- 37 Fred Schurink, in his discussion of the use of the root 'pleas-' and its cognates on the title page of John Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578; reprinted multiple times into the 1630s), also notes that it suggests an 'intimate relationship between the pleasure of love and the pleasure of reading', and implies that 'reading is almost a substitute for love'. See 'The Intimacy of Manuscript and the Pleasure of Print: Literary Culture from *The Schoolmaster* to *Euphues*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485–1603*, ed. by Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 671–86 (p. 681).
- 38 *The Roaring Girle* (1611), A3r. I have repunctuated the epistle's title for sense: it reads in the 1611 quarto, 'To the Comicke, Play-readers, Venery, and Laughter.'
- 39 'To his approved Friend M. Richard Brome on his *Northern Lasse*', in *The Northern Lass* (1632), A3r.
- 40 St. Br., 'To his ingenious Brother M. Rich. Brome, upon this witty issue of his Brayne, the *Northern Lasse*', in *The Northern Lasse*, A3v. Julie Sanders notes in her modern edition that 'St. Br.' is unlikely to be a blood relative (an otherwise unlocatable 'Stephen Brome'), and may instead be the physician Stephen Bradwell, a friend of Thomas Heywood. The incestuous desire for the playbook invoked by the verse is thus a deliberate rhetorical construction. See 'Preliminary and paratextual materials to the 1632 quarto', in Richard Brome, *The Northern Lass*, Modern Text, ed. by Julie Sanders, *Richard Brome Online* www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome [accessed 2 August 2012].
- 41 'To the inheritour of all worthines, Sir William Scipwith', in *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1610), ¶1v.
- 42 Craik, p. 117.
- 43 For an overview of the contexts and extant evidence of this type of reading, see William H. Sherman's introduction to *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 3–24.
- 44 The most famous advocate of the noting of 'commonplaces and maxims' as one reads is Desiderius Erasmus in his 1512 treatise on rhetoric, *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum commentarii duo*. See 'Copia: Foundations of the Abundant Style (De duplici copia verborum ac rerum commentarii duo)', trans. and annotated by Betty I. Knott, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. by Craig R. Thompson, 79 vols

- (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–), xxiv, 279–659 (p. 638).
- 45 *Ludus Literarius, or The Grammar Schoole* (1612), G3v.
 - 46 See, as an example, the number of overtly bawdy lines picked out by an early reader of Edward Sharpham's *Cupid's Whirligig* (1611) in a British Library copy of the play (BL 643c10).
 - 47 On Drummond's life and library, see *The Library of Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed. with an introduction by Robert H. MacDonald (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971).
 - 48 These lists, dated by Drummond himself, are to be found in Hawthornden MSS 2059 (fols. 359–67) and 2060 (fols. 122–23) held in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
 - 49 They are *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife From a Bad* (attributed to Thomas Heywood); Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *I The Honest Whore*; George Chapman's *All Fools* and *Sir Giles Goosecap*; John Marston's *Parasitaster*; John Day's *The Isle of Gulls* and *Law Tricks*; Dekker and John Webster's *Westward Ho*; and Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters* and *Your Five Gallants*. If Drummond's dating of his reading lists is taken at face value, it is most likely that the editions from which he transcribes were all printed prior to 1611.
 - 50 These dates can be inferred from the appearance of the excerpted plays in the manuscript lists Drummond compiled of the books he read in the years 1606–14 (see Hawthornden MS 2059).
 - 51 On fols. 209r; 214r; 219r; 220v; 221v; 223v; 346v; 347v of Hawthornden MS 2059.
 - 52 For example on fols. 221v; 345v; 348v of Hawthornden MS 2059.
 - 53 Hawthornden MS 2059, fols. 210v; 221v. The originals of these lines are found at C3r; C4v of *Law-trickes or, Who would haue thought it*, and D2v of *A mad world, my masters* (both 1608).
 - 54 Hawthornden MS 2059, fols. 223v–224r. The interaction between Violetta and Hippolita is at D2v–D3v of the 1606 edition of *The Ile of Guls*.
 - 55 Quotations are taken from *The Ile of Guls* (1606), D3v.
 - 56 *A Pleasant conceited Comedie, wherein is shewed how a man may chuse a good Wife from a bad* (1602), B4r.