PLAYING (WITH) SPACE IN THE AUTHOR ON THE WHEEL

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ABSTRACT

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On April 18, 1785, Theatre Royal Drury Lane produced a short play entitled *The Author on the Wheel, or a Piece Cut in the Green Room*. In this dissertation, I explore the play in terms of space: fictional space, factual space, and flying space. I argue that theatre spaces continually shift in definition while transforming both places and identities. After the introduction, I include an annotated version of this never-before-published piece. Using Gay McAuley’s taxonomy of spatial function, I analyze *The Author on the Wheel* both textually and historically. In the first section of analysis, I examine the fictional spaces created in the play; these spaces utilize both backstage theatre spaces as well as theatre audience spaces. In the second section, I describe the factual spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1785. Through archival evidence, I create a picture of the theatre during this time period and present extant evidence regarding the play and the performance of the play. Finally, I investigate the flying space of *The Author on the Wheel*. In the play, characters (portraying actors) discuss the act of pelting, the phenomenon of spectators throwing objects (usually fruit) at actors performing on a stage to show disapproval. Using the theory of Ric Knowles and Stuart Hall and building on my first two chapters, I argue that the thrown object effectively moves through both the fictional space and the factual space of *The Author on the Wheel* and in doing so changes the course of both production and reception.

Throughout this study, I argue that though the fictional and factual spaces of the theatre continually shift in identity, it is the audience space that holds the most weight in late eighteenth-century London theatre and in *The Author on the Wheel*. In both of these instances, the most dramatic performances take place not on the stage but in the house. Using *The Author on the
Wheel as a case study, I aim to call attention to the ways in which spectators both receive and create meaning in the theatre through the manipulation of space.
This dissertation is dedicated to Mark, Spumoni, and Giuseppe.
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INTRODUCTION

The experience of the theatergoer is one of penetration further and further into the building until one reaches the point beyond which one cannot go, the point Iain Mackintosh does not hesitate to designate a ‘magical area,’ the place where ‘the worlds of audience and actor interconnect’… the theatre building is one that emphasizes this sense of inward progression. (McAuley 50-51)

So Gay McAuley, in her book *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, articulates the experience of the audience member who traverses the path from reality to fiction, from life to art, and from outside to inside. As the spectator travels through the theatre space moving closer and closer to the stage (the “magical area”) there exists, for McAuley, an invisible, yet highly palpable divide. The edge of the stage teeters on the brink of this divide. In many cases, separating the audience from the performers, this boundary may be further solidified by a curtain, which holds a certain psychic function. Like the ornamented lock described by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, the curtain prevents one from venturing any further. According to Bachelard, “The lock doesn’t exist that could resist absolute violence, and all locks are an invitation to thieves. A lock is a psychological threshold” (82). The psychic function of the curtain mirrors the psychic function of the locked box. Though a spectator may easily walk up on the stage and through the curtain, the heavy, imposing divide keeps the audience and performers separate. But when the curtain rises and the audience crosses yet another threshold into the inner world of the theatre, the stage space and audience space imaginatively collide. Physically, the two spaces still remain separate. But this meeting, this flashpoint of contact between performer and spectator, sparks a new life that will inhabit a new space, one that exists for a moment, and then evaporates, never again to be recreated. Theatre holds tightly to this
Bernard

unique ephemeral quality, and this is one quality that distinguishes it from other forms of communication and entertainment.

McAuley describes this meeting space created by the two parties present in the live moment as the performance space. “The divided yet nevertheless unitary space in which the two constitutive groups (performers and spectators) meet and work together to create the performance experience, is the privileged domain that I shall call the performance space” (26). Her definition of this space allows for equal participation from people occupying the spaces on both sides of the curtain; both groups meet in the space and “work together.” This idea of the performance space inspired me to look closely into these potent spaces. In this dissertation I explore the spaces that the theatre creates and fills. These spaces include both the fleeting spaces and the fixed, lasting spaces. These spaces are found in the fiction of the plot as well as the actual dimensions of the theatre. Between the two fly the identities of performers and spectators, and the path in between allows for close investigation into the meanings created both in and by these spaces. Fictional space, factual space, and flying space all collide in the performance space, and it is into these variations and configurations that I theoretically plunge.

Statement of Key Research Questions and Chapter Breakdown

In this dissertation, I delve into the corporeal and imaginative spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane theatre, circa 1785. The Author on the Wheel, or, A Piece Cut in the Green Room (an anonymously-written play performed once at Theatre Royal Drury Lane in April of 1785) serves as a textual reference point from which to consider the many applications and manipulations of space, both fictional and factual. The central three chapters provide an in-depth analysis of the spaces configured (both imaginatively and physically) by the play, and, in a larger
sense, by the theatrical event in general. The chapters cover fictional space, factual space, and what I call flying space. All these chapters use *The Author on the Wheel* as a reference point.

I have chosen *The Author on the Wheel* to occupy this central and privileged place in my work because of its deeply complex spatial negotiations in both the story and performance. This short play reveals much about not only spaces in the theatre, but also sheds light on theatre practice in the eighteenth century. *The Author on the Wheel* repeatedly proves itself to be a great resource for scholars studying the practices of eighteenth-century London theatre. In addition to information about playwrights, actors, and managers, the play provides a look (however fictional) at rehearsal and revision processes in the late-eighteenth century. Because the plot hovers in the backstage areas of the theatre, the fictional onstage and offstage spaces collide with the material theatre spaces and shift in identity to complicate the idea of a straightforward stage space which portrays “somewhere else.” Richly layered and bitingly funny, *The Author on the Wheel* allows a entrance into the meanings both produced and received by performers and spectators.

In this introductory chapter, I present a review of the relevant literature, outline my research questions, and summarize the knowledge that my study will produce. Following this chapter, I include an annotated version of the play *The Author on the Wheel*. If I am to entreat readers to enjoy my interpretations on the spatial negotiations of this play, I feel it necessary to provide the text of this rather-obscure play in its entirety. The annotated script exists as a starting point to the discussion of space in the play. It contains, in footnote form, information relevant to the play and the time period. The close textual analysis of the script occurs in prose form throughout the rest of the dissertation.

In chapter one, the chapter on fictional space as I call it, I examine the spaces created imaginatively by the play. *The Author on the Wheel* is set mainly in the green room of a theatre
but also visits two other unidentified rooms in the backstage area of the same theatre. The actors also refer to locations across London, and through this they conflate the imaginary (the fictional backstage of the theatre) with the real (the actual locations around the city of London).

According to Gay McAuley, the performance area is “always both stage and somewhere else” (28). This “physical reality/fictional place duality… is the constant dual presence of the physical reality of the performance space and the fictional world or worlds created” (27). McAuley asserts that the audience members experience both levels of space at the same time. Applying this concept to *The Author on the Wheel* reveals the complex nature of its spaces. The set of this play presents the fictional place of the backstage areas of a theatre. The dual knowledge of the stage acting as “here” (the actual stage space that the audience sees) and “somewhere else” (the backstage areas of the fictional theatre which the stage is attempting to represent) provides an opportunity to question these powerful spaces. Because the fictional place portrayed in *The Author on the Wheel* is another space in the theatre, the boundaries around what is the performance space and what is the practitioner space continually recalibrate and lead to a spatially intriguing performance and subsequent analysis of the performance.

The key research questions in chapter one include: how is space configured imaginatively in *The Author on the Wheel*? What to what places and spaces does the play refer? How does the play utilize performance space, practitioner space, and audience space textually as well as spatially? How does *The Author on the Wheel* effectively or ineffectively manipulate space for dramatic effect? How does the fictional space in *The Author on the Wheel* create meaning onstage?

In the second chapter dealing with what I call factual space I focus on the spaces in which *The Author on the Wheel* was performed. In addition to the manuscript of *The Author on the*
newspaper accounts before and after April 18, 1785 exist recording the one known performance of the play. The play was performed at Theatre Royal Drury Lane on April 18, 1785 according to the newspaper accounts and according to the catalog of Larpent plays. Little is known about this performance. There are records however of the spaces of the Drury Lane theatre during this year. Therefore, in chapter two I focus on the research detailing the known performance as well as the scholarship regarding the history and architecture of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

For the orientation of the reader, I include a very brief introduction to Theatre Royal Drury Lane architectural history here. The first Drury Lane theatre opened in May of 1663. This theatre building burned down in January of 1672. A new theatre structure, designed by Christopher Wren, was built and opened in March of 1674. This theatre lasted until it was purposely demolished; Henry Holland later redesigned and rebuilt the theatre in March of 1794. As fate would have it, the Holland version burned to the ground in February of 1809. The theatre was rebuilt yet again in 1812 and still stands today. The theatre, then, that I focus on is the second Drury Lane theatre designed by Christopher Wren. The theatre was about 111 years old at the time of the production of *The Author on the Wheel*. Drawings and figures regarding this theatre, as well as personal accounts describing the space of the theatre, exist in theatre scholarship. I use these texts and figures extensively throughout chapter two.

Key research questions of chapter two include: what did the audience of the 1785 production of *The Author on the Wheel* experience in terms of space in the Drury Lane theatre? To which spaces did the audience have access? How did class/ticket prices affect the spatial experience of the theatre at that time? What spaces surrounded Theatre Royal Drury Lane? How might the different audience members have negotiated these spaces in order to get to the
theatre? How did the act of both entering the theatre and exiting the theatre impact the theatrical experience of the spectator? How did the actual experience of the theatergoer compare to the fictional experience of the theatergoer depicted in *The Author on the Wheel*? What were the audience conventions and norms of the time? Does *The Author on the Wheel* accurately reflect a late eighteenth-century London theatre space?

In the third chapter I theorize on phenomenon of spectators throwing objects at performers on the stage (an act known as “pelting”). I call this chapter flying space. When the audience does not work together with the performers, something quite different, though sometimes equally as powerful, happens in the performance space. Audience members may disapprove of or simply may not enjoy what the performers are presenting. Because of the liveness inherent in the theatrical situation, the opportunity arises to cross yet another threshold. Earlier, I have demonstrated how Gay McAuley and Iain Mackintosh consider the stage the final threshold between performer and spectator. This threshold keeps the boundaries (at least the physical boundaries) between performer and spectator split. But the moment a spectator takes up an object and hurls it toward the stage, these seemingly sturdy walls disappear into thin air and expose the powerful, yet dangerous characteristic of the theatrical event: live bodies present together in a common space. At that moment, the moment of the throw, the object connects both worlds by triumphantly declaring the materiality of all involved. Traveling through the air on a high arc toward the second party, the projectile crosses the vacant territory between spectator and performer, between thrower and receiver, and between reality and fiction.

*The Author on the Wheel* includes a description of pelting from the points of view of the performers. Some of the key research questions for this chapter include: what objects were thrown, and what are the significant material and/or ideological elements of these objects? How
might the thrown object have altered the performance? How did the actors deal with/negotiate the thrown objects? What is the significance of a thrown object in a theatrical setting? How/why does an object’s rhetorical value shift as it passes through the air? How do thrown objects blur the boundaries between performers and spectators? How does the throw make meaning in the theatre? How does/can an object thrown from a spectator become a prop? How does the thrown object manipulate both the factual and fictional spaces (as explored in the earlier chapters) of *The Author on the Wheel*?

In the fourth and concluding chapter I consider the implication of the spectator in the role of critic. How do the spaces involved in the theatre contribute to the rise of the critic in the audience of the eighteenth-century theatre? And how does this correlate with shifting spaces? As spaces change, so do identities and meanings. The conclusion also reiterates the importance of the dialectics of the stage and their dynamic flashpoints of contact; inside/outside, fact/fiction, spectator/performer, and planned/spontaneous all present fascinating binaries in which to consider the tumultuous overlap that exists between. I provide a conclusion for the study as well as suggest avenues for further research. I summarize the key points I have made, and then posit questions that may be useful for subsequent scholars studying the space of Theatre Royal Drury Lane as well as the play *The Author on the Wheel*.

**Contributions of my Study**

This dissertation accomplishes three major tasks:

1) Provide an annotated script of *The Author on the Wheel*, a play that has not been published.
2) Explore in-depth the manipulations of space as well as manipulations of identity in the eighteenth-century Drury Lane theatre using the play *The Author on the Wheel* as a case study.

3) Theorize on the significance of the throwing phenomenon (pelting) during this time and investigate its impact on the shifting roles of the performer and spectator during the theatrical event.

Throughout this work, I work deeply as opposed to broadly. I focus on this small play that was performed only once; however, I believe, as Gaston Bachelard suggests, that through a magnifying glass the seemingly insignificant grows to magnificent proportions (155). Bachelard suggested that when one looks through a glass at something tiny, one is situated at “a sensitive point of objectivity” with which to enter into the world of the miniature (155). Though small in terms of fame or scholarship, *The Author on the Wheel* offers me a point of entry into the fictional and factual spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane. Bachelard continues, “thus the miniscule, a narrow gate, opens up an entire world. The details of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, contains the attributes of greatness” (155). I whole-heartedly agree with the botanist Bachelard describes who encouraged the readers of the *Dictionnaire de botanique chrétienne* (the Dictionary of Christian Botany published in 1851) to “study the periwinkle in detail, and you will see how detail increases an object’s stature” (as quoted in Bachelard 155). *The Author on the Wheel* is my periwinkle, and its stature still increases with every glance.

As I look closely at the spatial negotiations configured by both the play text and the play in performance, more and more corners, hallways, and hidden rooms come into view. The ways in which the spaces change and try out different roles multiply tenfold as I uncover layer under
layer of meaning. Such a close reading of a single play performed on a single day does not only reveal much about the play and the day. This work unveils the highly volatile and even dangerous situations created by constantly renegotiating spaces. Understanding the risk inherent in live theatre might be a given for many theatre scholars and practitioners. But understanding how the variations and manipulations of the theatre space increase or decrease this risk provides the scholar/artist with a greater appreciation of the ways in which inhabited space shapes meaning.

In doing this, I will be contributing significantly to the scholarly community. Since this play is not well-known, my study sheds light on this piece and reclaims a space for it in history. In addition, my work functions as useful tool for those wishing to delve into the history of the thrown object in a theatrical setting as well as the manipulations of space in the eighteenth-century Drury Lane theatre. Because of this, it becomes extremely important for me to provide a solid, well-researched work for others to employ in their own research. Creating this contribution to scholarship allows me to participate in the ongoing conversations taking place in theatre study today.

Literature Review

Theatre Royal Drury Lane, the touchstone for my analysis of space, boasts of an interesting history as briefly mentioned in the “Key Research Questions” section above. Though succumbing several times to the destructive power of the flame, the theatre has always managed to continue on and thrive as a staple of the London theatre scene. My review of literature begins, then, with materials concerning the actual theatre building, both inside and out. I am mainly concerned at this point with the literature involving the structure that existed in 1785, which was
the year that *The Author on the Wheel* was performed. However, I include reference to those materials that track the significant changes made to the building leading up to the year 1785.

Drury Lane came into being under the management of Thomas Killigrew. After the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the king granted monopolies on theatrical production to two men: William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew. Killigrew took control of The King’s Company and eventually moved into the Theatre Royal Drury Lane (Brockett 236). Killigrew’s patent remained in effect from 1663-1843, and the theatre’s place in history cannot be overstated. Without this theatre, history would have departed drastically from the route which it actually followed. Consequently, much scholarship has chronicled and analyzed Theatre Royal Drury Lane’s impact on both theatre history and London history. It is to these works that I now turn in order to review the literature pertinent to my own study.

To begin, *The Development of the English Playhouse* by Richard Leacroft provides me with necessary history regarding Theatre Royal Drury Lane. In this large volume which was published in 1973, Leacroft follows the changing shape of the English theatre structure from the churches of the medieval period to the present-day theatres. Theatre Royal Drury Lane went through several reconstructions and redesigns throughout its life in London. Because of this, the theatre standing today is not the theatre which I study in terms of space. The theatre I study (the theatre standing in 1785 for the only known performance of *The Author on the Wheel*) was designed by architect Christopher Wren. Well known for his design of such beautiful buildings as the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, Wren was chosen to design the Drury Lane theatre after the structure burned down in 1672. Leacroft documents Wren’s building design thoroughly in *The Development of the English Playhouse*. Visuals, both original drawings from the period and drawings reconstructed by Leacroft, add dimension to his written descriptions of the theatre. The
drawings of the backstage areas aid in my study fortuitously; my work deals extensively with the space of the green room. The drawings in Leacroft's book include layouts of the theatre that include green room space, as well as other practitioner spaces such as dressing rooms, scene shops, and costume rooms. Because I analyze the fictional space of the green room as presented onstage as well as the factual space of the green room that existed in 1785, this book proves invaluable for my study of these two intertwining spaces.

Leacroft's book deals with the space of several different English theatres to show the shift throughout history of English theatre design in general. However, several authors concern themselves specifically with the Theatre Royal Drury Lane theatre exclusively. Because of its importance in theatre today as well as its fiery past, Theatre Royal Drury Lane takes center stage in the following books.

One such book is aptly titled *Drury Lane: Three Centuries of the Theatre Royal, 1663-1971*. Author Brian Dobbs divides the book into four sections and focuses each section on a century (seventeenth through twentieth). The chapter entitled “Port and Anchovy Sandwiches: 1776-1800” discusses Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s entrance to the management of Theatre Royal Drury Lane in conjunction with Thomas Linley, Sheridan’s father-in-law. The intriguing title of the “Port and Anchovy Sandwiches” chapter refers to a story involving Sheridan, a playwright known for his procrastinating work style. When he wrote plays for Theatre Royal Drury Lane, Sheridan often presented the text for his plays one page at a time, and the cast regularly doubted if the conclusion would ever come. While (very slowly) composing *The Critic* in 1779, the cast enticed Sheridan into the green room; they had set up a work station for him, which included a supply of port and a plate of anchovy sandwiches (Dobbs 111). The actors locked the door, and unlocked it only when Sheridan finished the work. This anecdote alludes to Sheridan’s
personality as a manager and as an author and adds to what I am calling the factual space of the Drury Lane theatre around 1785. I realize that this factual space does not exist in absolute terms, however. The factual spaces of history come to researchers through the perspective of the subject. I believe this adds to the complexity of the many manipulations of space during the time of _The Author on the Wheel_.

If I think about the story of Sheridan locked in the green room literally, I see several interesting issues. First, the story indicates which people possessed access to the practitioner space of the green room. Obviously, the cast possessed access as well as the managers. But this story alludes to the idea that the green room could be inhabited at different times and with covert intentions (for example, the cast surreptitiously setting up the work station for Sheridan). The green room becomes not only a space for retiring between scenes and for preparing before shows, but also becomes a space in which to create and produce fictional spaces. These newly-produced fictional spaces arrived in the text of new plays and in the revisions of currently running plays. The green room shifts in function as the inhabitants shift in identity.

Illustrating this idea, _The Author on the Wheel_ is set mainly in the green room. This shows how the space was used for creating, editing, and haggling over the fictitious works that were to be presented just feet away on the main stage. The space of the green room allows for the alteration of the fictional space in the plays. Additionally in Sheridan’s story, food and wine take up space in the green room. Consumption alters the space as well. As the players consume the fare they consequently create exciting (or sometimes less than exciting) work in its place. Production and consumption factor heavily into the meaning-making process of theatre, and I explicate this idea in chapter three. For now, I will state that the “revolving door” feature of the
green room opens up avenues for my study in which I can delve into the inside/out as well as the fictional/factual nature of the theatre space.

The “revolving door” quality of the green room also spills out into the whole theatre, as we can see in Theatre Royal Drury Lane’s content as well as form. Like many theatres, Theatre Royal Drury Lane experienced a range of managers and owners throughout its long life. David Garrick was an important manager in the eighteenth century. He obtained proprietorship of the theatre in 1747 (Burnim 3). The physical building Garrick interacted with was the second Theatre Royal Drury Lane structure that was designed by Christopher Wren in 1674. This theatre was demolished in 1791 in order to create a brand-new space. (Unfortunately, the newly erected 1794 building only lasted fifteen years before flames consumed it once again.) The structure I focus on in chapter two is the 1674 version designed by Wren; *The Author on the Wheel* took place in 1785 and therefore took place in the Wren structure. However, it is important to note that Robert and James Adam executed an extensive remodeling in 1775. Due to this major renovation, the theatre that *The Author on the Wheel* played in possessed qualities that differed from the Wren-designed structure. In this dissertation, I include detailed information on this remodeled version of Theatre Royal Drury Lane in order to paint a more complete picture of the 1785 theatre.

For this information, I use a source that provides abundant and meticulous information on the various manifestations of the theatre including the Adam brothers’ remodeling. Bruce Arnold Koenig wrote “Theatre Royal, Drury Lane: an Architectural Study” as his dissertation at the University of Minnesota. In this 1978 work, he attempts to bring together a comprehensive collection of material that traces the theatre’s changes throughout its life. His dissertation includes detailed records of the alterations made by the Adam brothers. These details greatly aid
my study of the 1785 version of Theatre Royal Drury Lane. His work points to many primary sources which I consult to augment my own study. In addition, Koenig brings together a collection of drawings, some very obscure, that provide visual models for the reader to examine. He includes diagrams of the theatre at the time of The Author on the Wheel which layout the theatre spaces including the audience space, practitioner space, and performance space. Since these three spaces provide the foundation for my investigation into the fictional, factual, and flying spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane, the aforementioned visuals play an essential role in argument as well.

Koenig’s dissertation provides many facts and figures which I use in my study. In addition to these facts and figures, Allardyce Nicoll’s work The Garrick Stage provides a more ideologically-oriented description of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane structure. Nicoll’s chapter entitled “The Idea of the Mid-Eighteenth-century Theatre” starts a “journey, front-stage and back-stage, into the Georgian playhouse” (20). Acting as a tour guide, Nicoll narrates the progression of the reader/walker through the various areas of the eighteenth-century playhouse. He uses drawings to illustrate his narration, but many times he counters the historically-held interpretations of those drawings. His third chapter focuses on the individual playhouses and includes a section on Robert Adam’s 1775 Drury Lane. As manager, Garrick declared the need for remodeling and chose the Adam brothers to do the job. Though the renovation did not change the capacity of the theatre (44), the improvements changed the interior remarkably. This section fortifies my study by providing further information on the Adam version of Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

In addition, Nicoll’s chapter “Mixing with the Audience” includes descriptions of the spectators’ experiences spatially throughout the theatre building. Playgoers often risked life and
limb just to enter into the theatre. The spatial element of theatergoing in this case includes close proximity to other people, and this close proximity altered not only the spectator’s experience of the performance but the spectator’s experiences of entering and exiting the space as well. Nicoll includes accounts of theatre riots and generally dangerous situations in the theatre space, but he also describes the more common experiences spectators likely encountered. I use this source as a way to create a picture of the theatergoing experience in late eighteenth-century London from an audience member’s perspective.

The architectural history of Theatre Royal Drury Lane greatly influences my reading of The Author on the Wheel. Limited scholarship, however, exists regarding this play in particular. In one sense, this was a challenge to me in my endeavor to recreate the circumstances under which this might have been performed. On the other hand, this lack of ample scholarship provided me with an opportunity to generate new scholarship in the field of theatre history. Subsequent scholars can use my work to find out more about this particular play and late eighteenth-century Theatre Royal Drury Lane. In the following section, I review the extant literature regarding the play The Author on the Wheel.

The Author on the Wheel, or A Piece Cut in the Green Room, is a 1785 work. Theatre Royal Drury Lane manager Thomas Linley signed this 1785 anonymously-written play. In this hand-written document available on microfiche, a fictional playwright surreptitiously enters the green room in disguise in order to hear what the cast and crew performing his new play really think about his masterpiece. Scene two of the play includes a dialogue amongst the actors who tell tales of past performances in which they were pelted with various objects flying in from the space of the audience. The two actors swap stories and advice about how to avoid injury onstage. Since the play includes several depictions of theatre spaces (for example, the stage and green
room) it is a useful tool for imagining what the fictional, factual, and flying space in an eighteenth-century theatre in London would have looked like.

Several sources list *The Author on the Wheel* as an entry in lists of plays performed at Theatre Royal Drury Lane. To begin, Allardyce Nicoll’s *History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama: 1750-1800* includes this play under the category of Unknown Authors. Appendix B entitled “Hand-list of Plays, 1750-1800” represents Nicoll’s attempt to document all plays performed at the patent theatres in London. The list is divided into three sections; the first and longest list is entitled “English Plays and Operas.” Nicoll includes *The Author on the Wheel* in the first section under the heading Unknown Authors. The one known performance of this play occurred at Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1785. The manuscript gives us further information that the play was performed on April 18, 1785. This play is categorized as an entertainment and exists in the form of a manuscript in the Larpent Collection. The Larpent Collection is currently housed in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

The Huntington Library’s good fortune to hold the manuscript of *The Author on the Wheel* came about because of theatrical regulation. In the late eighteenth century, John Larpent began the collection of plays because of his occupation. Larpent acted as licenser in England from 1778-1824. As licenser, Larpent made the decisions as to whether or not to censor the plays submitted to the Lord Chamberlain as a result of the Licensing Act of 1737. Larpent owned official copies of the plays submitted to the office; after his death, John Payne Collier and Thomas Amyot bought the collection. The collection of approximately 2500 plays (one of them being *The Author on the Wheel*) was acquired in 1917 by the Huntington Library.

I first came across this play in a 2003 collection entitled *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance* edited by Susan Kattwinkel. While attempting to obtain
information on audience members who throw objects at actors, I read Judith W. Fisher’s essay “Audience Participation in the Eighteenth-Century London Theatre” in the collection. Her essay details the ways in which audiences contributed to the theatrical experience by shouting, hissing, and generally making their presence and desires known. She includes a short section on “pelting,” or throwing items at actors as a marker of discontent. In this section she references the play *The Author on the Wheel* and includes a short piece of dialogue from the play. This sparked my interest considerably, as it featured actors talking about audience members throwing things at them and provided performers’ perspectives on pelting. I then followed Judith Fisher’s bibliographic trail to the microfiche copy of the play in The Catalogue of Larpent Plays. From there, I photocopied the play from the microfiche copy of the handwritten manuscript.

Secondary sources regarding *The Author on the Wheel* are rare. However, several do exist. I begin with my findings in chronological order, starting with *Plays about the Theatre in England, 1737-1800* by Dane Farnsworth Smith and M.L. Lawhon. This book contains a thorough list of the plays about plays during this time period and functions as a sequel to its predecessor *Plays about the Theatre in England, 1671-1737*. Two pages in the 1737-1800 volume concern *The Author on the Wheel*. Smith and Lawhon place the play in the chapter “The Author as Character” and discuss the phenomenon of the wealthy playwright who does not want his play changed for any reason.

The authors of *Plays about the Theatre in England* are quick to point out that they do not consider the play within a play to be a genre but instead consider it to be a group of plays with similar topics. Stating several reasons for the proliferation of this topic, Smith and Lawhon cite two major factors. First, the audience of the eighteenth century firmly felt as well as possessed the right to judge a play as worthy or unworthy. These judgments caused the performance to
leak from the stage and invade the auditorium because the spectators acted as performers and vice versa. The authors posit that because of this center-stage placement of the audience in the theatre world, the audience in turn enjoyed seeing themselves on the stage proper as well. Therefore, plays that included the audience as a character were popular.

Secondly, the Licensing Act of 1737 caused plays involving political satire to become scarce due to the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. Playwrights, wanting to avoid censorship, turned to examine the theatre itself instead of satirizing the current political figures. Satire directed at the theatre (according to the Licensing Act) was an acceptable form of entertainment. Whether or not these two occurrences lead to the popularity of the subject, the sheer number of plays revolving around show business testifies to the well-liked theme. *The Author on the Wheel* takes a place in a long history of plays about the theatre and provides my work with a look at Theatre Royal Drury Lane from the inside out.

Tiffany Stern’s 2000 *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* is the third resource which contains a reference to *The Author on the Wheel*. This work traces not just the rehearsal processes as the title indicates, but also examines the first night of performances, private study by the actors, different acting styles, and how scripts were altered and edited based on both actor ability and audience reaction. A self-proclaimed “reference work,” this book is an “unashamedly historical account of rehearsal and its ramifications, not a work of editorial or performance theory” (Stern 19). Stern’s detailed account provides scholars with a one-stop experience for theatre practitioner history and for theatre history as well. *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* has filled a void in theatre scholarship and has created an organized space for archival material relating to two centuries of theatre practice.
Delving into Stern’s work, I found two references to *The Author on the Wheel*. Both reside in the last chapter “Garrick’s Theatre and Later” and under the subheading “Authors and Rehearsal.” Stern mentions *The Author on the Wheel* in this section to illustrate her point regarding the hands-off role of the playwright in late-eighteenth century London. By the 1750’s, authors generally did not attend rehearsals and instead relied on the star-power of the major actors to carry the show. The author usually returned the first night of performances to make needed revisions (270). Stern argues that this “lack of authorial control” (270) impacted the productions in positive and negative ways; *The Author on the Wheel* functions as evidence to this claim (mostly to the claim of negative impact). In the play, one actor never even bothered to memorize the final act of the play because he had convinced himself that the audience would not sit and listen that long. The play was so bad (in this actor’s opinion) that he refused to rehearse the ending scene because it was a waste of time. Though not particularly relevant for my study, this short reference to the play provides a look into the spatial placement of playwrights and actors during the rehearsal process. The playwrights usually remained out of the production process entirely.

*The Author on the Wheel* complicates the assertion that authors gave the cast ample space in which to work, for the playwright in this play secretly sneaks into the backstage spaces in order to find out the actors’ reactions to his work. From that point, the space negotiated in the green room shifts and crosses a factual/fictional threshold. In the space of the fictional playhouse, the playwright puts on yet another fictional cloak in order to disguise himself. No longer is he now not merely “Joe the Actor,” but he is an actor pretending to be a playwright pretending to be a spectator. Now twice-removed from the factual space, the playwright in *The
*Author on the Wheel* moves further into the recesses of the theatre and dances precariously on the line between inside and outside and between fact and fiction.

The second reference to the play in *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* occurs later in the Garrick chapter under the subheading “First Performance.” According to Stern, “the time between the first and second night was spent in frantic revisions, mostly made by the author” (284). The fictional audience in *The Author on the Wheel* hated the first performance; therefore, the company sat down to make the needed revisions. Actors, playwrights, and managers all had stakes in the success of the show. Those in show business took financial, artistic, and even physical risks. The meeting in the green room that occurred between the first performance and the second performance proved a crucial element to the coming success or the continuing failure of the play. It is this tension-filled space, the space between the stage and the house, between success and failure, and between process and product that *The Author on the Wheel* so nimbly negotiates. Stern’s work affords me with a look at the play in the context of actual rehearsal practices. This enables me to study the practices of late-eighteenth century London theatre while engaging with *The Author on the Wheel*.

Moving on to another eighteenth-century specific theatre text, I find Leo Hughes taking up the idea of the spectator as performer in his 1971 work *The Drama’s Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience*. Seeking to show the “complex interrelationship between playgoer and performer and, somewhat incidentally, playwright” (vii) Hughes gathers archival evidence in order to flesh out this triangle. *The Author on the Wheel* is not mentioned in this work. However, Hughes’ text contains the most extensive body of scholarship regarding pelting that I have found in my research. Many books contain references to the throwing habits of audiences, but seldom do the authors of these books devote more than a paragraph to the
occurrences. Therefore, this book is rare in that it allots an entire section of a chapter to pelting. Throwing acts as the main object of focus in my chapter Flying Space. The work provides, in one place, multiple examples of pelting in eighteenth-century London. However, the author takes a pointed stance on the actual act of pelting and spins the act into an issue of morality:

Another item in Palmer’s account [in addition to his account of catcalling] discourages any hope that there was appreciable improvement in the conduct of the noisy and irrepressible segment of playgoers… In some ways even more distressing, the incidence of orange-throwing seems to rise as catcalling declines, suggesting a mere change in fashions of disapprobation. Moreover, pelting continues on a fairly high level throughout the century, dispelling any facile assurance of markedly increasing civility. (43)

Hughes most likely has a low opinion of the orange-throwers and that low opinion influences his interpretation of the events. Viewing the act of throwing as decidedly sinful, Hughes goes on to chronicle several instances of this “hoodlumism” (43). I understand Hughes’ temptation to look down on the throwers. The pelting intruded upon the stage, the actors, and even other audience members. Using his research, I consider the act of pelting as a fascinating spatial case study, but Hughes reminds me to remember that the thrown object could not only hurt a career but could hurt a person.

The many sources containing information on Theatre Royal Drury Lane and eighteenth-century theatre augment my study of The Author on the Wheel and its performance in 1785. However, spatial theory primarily informs my research and analysis of the The Author on the Wheel. Therefore, a review of the literature concerning spatial theory, specifically spatial theory applied to the theatre, follows.
In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard’s text first published in 1958, Bachelard inquires into the values of various spaces and attempts to trace the image of each space to its poetic origin (xxxv). He contends that home is the ultimate center and intimate space, and that all other spaces attempt to get at this dynamic center. Bachelard looks primarily to the poets who have been able to connect with images of nature. His study highlights the imaginative exploration of images, and does not utilize metaphoric meanings. Instead, he centers his own experience of the poetry and allows himself to go where his dreams lead him (6).

While Bachelard approaches space in imaginative centered in the literary image, I feel his work is appropriate for my study in that I consider *The Author on the Wheel* partly from a textual analysis perspective. The fictional spaces that I examine and imagine are firmly grounded in the text of the play. Therefore, Bachelard’s ruminations on the imaginative nature of space are helpful and even inspiring. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard examines the “Dialectics of Outside and Inside” (211). As stated earlier, the theatre is an experience that may be considered in terms of an outside/inside binary, with many shifting and mutable spaces in between. Understanding his poetic impulse to view images with the qualities of inside and outside aids me in my quest to observe and explore the theatre’s changing spaces.

Regarding theatre spaces specifically, several sources provide a look at the material conditions of production and reception in the theatre. In the 1997 text *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, Susan Bennett explores the theatre audience as a cultural phenomenon using reader-response theory as well as performance theory. She examines the experience of theatre audiences from the trip to the theatre all the way until the ride home and beyond. Her study examines the encounter between audience and performer, but she clarifies
that this encounter does not exist solely in the theatre. It is being cultivated and refined before, during, and after the theatrical experience:

Above all, the role of the theatre audience involves the spectator’s interaction with the performance in both social (audience member) and private (individual) capacities. But these roles do not begin as the curtain rises… In the circumstance of the theatre visit, the spectator takes on his/her role(s) before the performance *per se* begins. (125)

Likewise, the experience of the audience member travelling to Theatre Royal Drury Lane in April of 1785 impacted the resulting theatrical experience. Bennett’s inclusive view of the theatrical experience informs my examination of the spectator experience in late eighteenth-century London; I explore the spaces inhabited by the spectator not only in the theatre, but outside the theatre as well.

Gay McAuley’s *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, Andrew Sofer’s *The Stage Life of Props*, and Ric Knowles’ *Reading the Material Theatre* serve as the main theoretical frameworks from which I draw. Therefore, I outline these three texts in detail in the following section.

Theoretical Frameworks Informing my Study

My dissertation primarily employs spatial theory, specifically spatial theory as applied to the theatre, in order to enter into the discussion of the spaces in *The Author on the Wheel*. I have chosen to use the work of Gay McAuley, theatre scholar, as a framework for my study. McAuley writes about theatre spaces and the variety of ways in which space is configured and performed. Her 1999 book *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* provides an
extremely useful theoretical framework for my study of the space between performer and spectator. In her text, McAuley examines the myriad of spaces in the theatre (physical, fictional, and several in between). She describes her book as “an attempt to explore the multiple functions of this spatial reality [the requirement of live bodies present in a space] in the construction and communication of theatrical meaning” (4). She goes on to state that “[t]he title indicates that my focus is the lived space of performance, space as it is occupied and experienced by performers and spectators” (4).

McAuley includes an initial outline of what she covers in the book that introduces the reader to the spatial terminology and definitions which she employs. Her study focuses on the physical and fictional spaces in the theatre, while leaving out semiotics, reader-response theory, and such considerations as the location of the theatre in the city. These topics have been covered by other scholars, most notably Anne Ubersfeld and Patrice Pavis (McAuley 7-8). This concentration on the physical and fictional space hones her argument and creates an excellent study that deals with performance space as it is activated through live bodies.

The emphasis on the live quality of theatre brings attention to the bodies of the performers as well as the bodies of the spectators. This “lived space” emerges as indispensable in my argument regarding the thrown object. According to McAuley:

The specificity of theatre is not to be found in its relationship to the dramatic, as film and television have shown through their appropriation and exploitation of the latter, but in that it consists essentially of the interaction between performers and spectators in a given space. Theatre is a social event, occurring in the auditorium as well as on the stage, and the primary signifiers are physical and even spatial in nature. (5)
This “interaction between performers and spectators in a given space” and focus on the space of the audience as well as the space of the stage provides me a solid basis on which to examine the thrown object and how that object shifts both the boundaries between the lived spaces in the theatre and the boundaries between identities of performers and spectators.

Applying spatial theory to the material and fictional theatre, McAuley lays out her taxonomy of spatial function as follows:

I. The Social Reality
   Theatre Space
   Audience Space
   Practitioner Space
   Rehearsal Space
   Performance Space

II. The Physical/Fictional Relationship
   Stage Space
   Presentational Space
   Fictional Place

III. Location and Fiction
   Onstage Fictional Place
   Offstage Fictional Place
   Unlocalized in relation to Performance Space
   Localized in relation to Performance Space
   Contiguous/Remote Spectrum
   Audience Off

IV. Textual Space

V. Thematic Space

Though the terms give an initial impression of segregation, McAuley encourages the reader to consider the divisions as overlapping and contiguous. Just as a spectator does not experience space in the theatre in a linear manner, so the analysis of space should not assume a linear progression (33-35). However, clearly defining and demarcating the spaces of theatre space provides a jumping-off point from which to begin an investigation.

I employ the terms as defined by McAuley in her taxonomy of spatial function in my study. These terms supply me with a vocabulary with which to discuss the multiple arrangements of space throughout the dissertation. For example, in the The Author on the Wheel,
the third category “Physical/Fictional Relationship” plays a very important role. McAuley divides theatre’s “Physical/Fictional Relationship” into three areas (stage space, presentational space, and fictional place); these three areas of interest offer me a framework for the analysis of the thrown object. How does the thrown object (the object thrown from the audience space into the performance space) invade the performance on all three of these levels?

*The Author on the Wheel* takes place in the green room of a theatre and this places the green room into the Onstage Fictional Place category according to the taxonomy. The green room of a theatre in the Social Reality of the taxonomy falls into the category of Practitioner Space. Already there exists a delightful intertwining of theatre spaces as the play slides amongst the social realm, the fictional location, and the architectural structures of the eighteenth-century theatre world.

The play also includes dialogue that refers to the “stage” on which the actors have been pelted; the stage in this instance falls into the category of Offstage Fictional Place according to the taxonomy. In the fictional world of the play, however, the stage is the performance space, stage space, and presentational space for the characters in the play. The reality of the Offstage Fictional Place comes alive because of the textual space which includes the dialogue and stage directions of *The Author on the Wheel*. Throwing objects at performers causes the boundaries between spaces (fictional, physical, and more) to temporarily fall away and leaves the people in the space to renegotiate spaces and recalibrate roles. After the throw, how do these already-amoebic spaces shift, change, and create new performers, new spectators, and new meanings?

In addition to the taxonomy created by McAuley, Andrew Sofer’s definition of a prop theoretically informs my study in relation to the actual thrown object. Also considering space in the theatre, but more specifically material and textual spaces, Sofer seeks to create a space for
stage properties in theatre history in his book *The Stage Life of Props* (2003). Sofer attempts to rescue the prop from a static place of rest in playscript analysis and focuses on the prop’s life in performance. With this in mind, he states what he claims is the prop’s vital characteristic: motion (14). Movement from one place to another, whether physically, rhetorically, or textually, allows a hunk of matter to move from a mere object to a stage property. Sofer contends that many scholars do not allow the prop this transitory quality and instead concentrate on the material nature or the symbolic value of the prop. This happens oftentimes because the prop lives uneasily in a liminal space between text and performance, in a state Sofer deems “suspended animation” (vi); this state requires activation physically by the actor or imaginatively by the reader.

As stated above, Sofer describes a prop in several ways but always starts with the requirement of movement. He clarifies: “By definition, a prop is an object that goes on a journey; hence props trace spatial trajectories and create temporal narratives as they track through a given performance” (2). Through performance analysis, he hopes to recapture these journeys and give the prop the freedom to move as it so desperately needs to do in order to survive. But not just any moving thing onstage is a prop: “A prop can be more rigorously defined as a discrete, material, inanimate object that is visibly manipulated by an actor in the course of performance” (11). This takes humans out of the running as props and also axes those material things onstage that never move. Thus, a stage object “must be ‘triggered’ by an actor in order to become a prop… The prop must physically move or alter in some way as a result of the actor’s physical intervention” so fundamentally a “prop is something an object becomes, rather than something an object is” (12). McAuley echoes Sofer’s sentiments on the prop (choosing to use the noun
“stage object” instead of “prop”) stating “The crucial factor in defining the stage object is thus human intervention” (176).

This necessity of human intervention strikes a chord in my consideration of the thrown object. Granted, the object thrown at the actor does not start out onstage physically or textually. But might I extend the use of prop to include objects “triggered” into being by spectators? The audience member that tosses an object onstage effectively “moves or alters” the object in some way. The spatial trajectories and temporal narratives achieved in this fashion become a part of the performance and create performers out of spectators while creating spectators out of performers. The traditional prop journeys down a path that travels spatially and textually across the playing space and moves parallel to the stage. The thrown object enters the stage perpendicularly and breaks through the planes of action to broaden the grid of experience for the audience as well as the actors. Therefore, the section involving flying space considers objects that are animated by people in the audience spaces, and I use both Sofer and McAuley’s definition of “prop” to analyze these objects’ movements in The Author on the Wheel.

A third theoretical framework informing my study appears in Ric Knowles’ book, Reading the Material Theatre. In an attempt theorize the theatre using a materialist framework, Knowles built on the work of cultural theorists, and specifically on the work of Stuart Hall, to form his own model for performance analysis. As Knowles posits the question of “precisely how audiences produce meaning” (17) in a given theatrical event, he cites the work of these theorists and summarizes with “[t]he shared assumption underlying all of this work [the cited cultural theorists] is that cultural productions neither contain meaning nor uni-dimensionally shape behavior and belief; rather they produce meaning through the discursive work of an interpretive community and through the lived, everyday relationships of people with texts and performances”
(17). What he investigates, then, is how meaning is both produced and received in the theatre. Through a three-part model, Knowles allows for the performance text, the conditions of production, and the conditions of reception to all factor into the overall theatrical experience.

Using this model, I argue that *The Author on the Wheel* produces meaning through the production and reception of the thrown object. The object transforms in identity several times as it moves from a food for consumption into a weapon for destruction. The object, then, passes through the spaces of the theatre (from the audience space to the performance space) and effectively transforms the spectator into a performer and the performer into a spectator. In addition to this shift of performer/spectator, the fruit itself helps transfer the consuming spectator into a producing participant. Far from passively consuming the performance text, the spectator reacts by inserting her or his agency physically into the stage space. In doing this, the spectator demonstrates Stuart Hall’s theory of the encoding and decoding process of images in culture. I use Knowles and Stuart in an effort to investigate the thrown object and the throwing spectator, and to show how the spaces involved both receive and produce meaning.

Methodology

This dissertation primarily employs the methodology of textual analysis. Based on a close reading of the play *The Author on the Wheel*, I analyze the uses and manipulations of space presented in the play. For all three chapters (fictional space, factual space, and flying space) I use Gay McAuley’s taxonomy of spatial function as a means to articulate the different manifestations of space. In each chapter, I point to specific references in the play regarding space and explore their applications, borders, and mutations.
In chapter one, fictional space, I examine each reference in the play as it concerns the world of the play. The fictional green room and stage mentioned in the play live at the center of this investigation. Conversely, in the second chapter, factual space, I explore the spaces that the play *The Author on the Wheel* actually inhabited. Since my research demonstrates the fact that the play was performed in 1785 at Theatre Royal Drury Lane, I examine the spaces of the theatre in that year and provide an educated conjecture about how the cast and crew of this play occupied the theatre spaces. Based on the documents described in my literature review, I provide a look at how the audience entered, filled out, and exited the theatre. In addition, I have documents that describe and picture the backstage areas of Theatre Royal Drury Lane, and with those I describe how the cast and crew would have inhabited and animated the performing space and the practioner space. In doing this, I analyze how the occupation of space creates meaning both in the world of the play and in the reality of the actors and spectators.

Finally, in chapter three I examine the specific act of the thrown object; this object lives in the world of the play as well as the reality of the spectators and the actors. Placing this chapter last, I use the evaluations of space posited in the previous two chapters as a reference for the intersection of the fictional and factual. I contend that the thrown object connects both worlds, and I show this through a description of the phenomenon of the thrown object as well as close textual analysis of the object in the play and in Theatre Royal Drury Lane history.

Conclusions

In this dissertation, I attempt to uncover and play with the shifting spaces created and recreated in the play *The Author on the Wheel*. The dialectical relationships existing in theatre provide ample opportunity for reflection and investigation regarding outside/inside,
performer/spectator, and reality/fiction. With this study I open up these binaries that frame the theatrical experience and delve into the constantly-shifting spaces that make theatre so engaging and oftentimes dangerous. The spaces in theatre range from comforting and safe to exposed and perilous. Actors and spectators in the eighteenth century placed their physical safety on the line in order to inhabit the fictional world of the play. How do these spaces shape meaning for all those involved? And what might we learn from an exploration into the dynamic areas of the theatre? Throughout my dissertation, I walk headlong into these spaces and demonstrate not only what the spaces mean, but how the spaces mean. These are the spaces in the theatre that we still embrace with joy (and sometimes trepidation) today.
THE AUTHOR ON THE WHEEL, OR A PIECE CUT IN THE GREEN ROOM

Dramatis Personae
DRAMA- Manager
PROMPTER [Harwood]
VAINWIT, The Author
THESPIS
SOCK
BUSKIN
PERIOD (Performers)
[Not included in this list: MASK]¹

Scene

a Room in the Theatre

DRAMA meeting, the PROMPTER

DRAMA. Pray Harwood has a gentleman been here to inquire for me this morning?
PROMPTER. No sir.

DRAMA. Are the performers come to the alteration of the piece? It wants but a few minutes of time.
PROMPTER. Most of the gentlemen are here, sir, but one of the principal ladies has sent word she has a violent cold and cannot attend the rehearsal this morning.

DRAMA. Ah! The old excuse. She has sent her part I hope.
PROMPTER. Yes sir, and she desires if you intend cutting or adding anything to it you’ll let her have it as soon as possible that she may have time to be perfect at night.

¹ Brackets indicate my own notes to this manuscript. I have typed the names of the characters in all caps, though they are not that way in the original. Entrances, exits, and asides are occasionally marked by the author in parentheses, but not always. The intent of the author is usually apparent, so parentheses and all punctuation remain faithful to the manuscript.
DRAMA. I shant trouble her with any great addition—give me the manuscript and call the performers. (Exit PROMPTER) We shall never get thru to night—we must inevitably be damned—of all tasks I know none so displeasing as cutting down an author’s piece in the green-room: I wonder he can be so obstinate in persisting to have it played again—Now shall I appear to him void of all human feeling—every dash of my pen will be felt like the amputation of a limb; and probably for my good intention shall be censored and execrated thro [sic] the season under the signatures of anti-Theatricus and Philo-Dramaticus while squibs and paragraphical crackers will be fired at me from all the combustible papers in town. But here comes the Author—Enter VAINWIT—

VAINWIT. Mr. Drama your servant—Well sir I’ve experienced pretty treatment from a set of hirelings. Parties sir formed and placed in all parts of the house to oppose my play—great encouragement now bestowed on the pen of genius! Indeed I am so incensed that I’m more than inclined never to write another piece.

DRAMA. That certainly would be an effectually way to avoid opposition; but don’t be so violent, Mr. Vainwit. To be sure you have experienced rather a harsh treatment but—

VAINWIT. Rather harsh treatment! Upon my word sir you’ve a mighty placid manner of expressing yourself. Harsh treatment! Sir ‘twas the most inhuman, execrable, malignant damnable attack ever made on dramatic writing—but that does not signify—my reputation can never be injured by the pitiful maneuvers of party.

DRAMA. Party! Dy’e think there were parties formed against the play?

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2 “Cabals” or groups often went to the theatre for the intent of damning or supporting a play. These groups would hiss, yell, and throw fruit at the actors or cheer and clap loudly, depending on their intent. See Chapter One for more information on cabals.
VAINWIT. Think so! Why my dear sir I know it—I can prove that dozens of Irish-chairmen and bricklayers, laborers with concealed bludgeons went in bodies to the one and two shilling galleries; deputy editors and puny paragraph writers were placed in the pit: and Fish-women dressed in silk gowns and balloon hats were hired to hiss and cry “off” during the performance.

DRAMA. Indeed! And pray sir how did you discover this?

VAINWIT. Why sir the Ladies who had places taken for them in the boxes were injudiciously entrusted with five shillings to pay for their admittance, but previous to their going to the Theatre adjourned to a house in Vinegar Yard\(^3\) where they spent two and six pence each in liquor, got thoroughly intoxicated, and went and bred a disturbance at half price.

DRAMA. Ha! Ha! Ha! I beg pardon for laughing sir- but still you’ve not answered my question; how do you know these ladies went to oppose the piece?

VAINWIT. Why sir they were discovered by a devil who accidentally popped in at their house of rendezvous and overheard their whole conspiratory conversation while he was taking a pint of purl and bitters at the bar.

DRAMA. Why this does appear like premeditated malice, but sir can you rely on the veracity of this gentleman?

VAINWIT. Rely on the veracity of the devil! Damned if the devil is capable of a lie- sir you may rely on its being a fact, for he’s ready to take his oath to it; and I’ve the utmost confidence in the devil as a man of honor.

DRAMA. Well sir as you informed me last night by your note that you are not inclined to withdraw the piece but determined to hazard another trial, I took the liberty of sending to you

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\(^3\) A area of London directly adjacent to Theatre Royal Drury Lane.
this morning, that we may mutually consult what’s best to be done for the good of the play on its next representation—are you prepared to suggest any alterations?

VAINWIT. Sir I have with the utmost attention considered the play, examined minutely its characters, incidents, dialogue and plot; and after the nicest investigation of these essentially dramatic parts, I cannot absolutely (without vanity! For that’s not one of my failings) find room for amendment in any one particular. But perhaps I am partial, or may want discernment. Let me hear your opinion and give it me candidly!

DRAMA. Why then candidly sir I am of opinion that on its next representation /if they’ll suffer us to perform it again/

VAINWIT. Sir!

DRAMA. Pray sir if they suffer us to act it again that such parts appeared as exceptionable to the audience should be expunged. I have some alterations to propose, such as I flatter myself will not totally displease you and every exertion on my part shall be strained to serve you.

VAINWIT. Sir you are very kind—I feel myself greatly indebted. /aside/ A damned hypocritical rascal I believe!

DRAMA. However sir as the piece has met with disapprobation ‘tis lucky that you have not publicly avowed yourself the Author, because if ill natured pinions are rumored abroad, you will at least have the satisfaction of lying concealed.

VAINWIT. Sir, I thank you for your friendly consolation.

DRAMA. Let me see: (takes out his watch) ‘tis past eleven. The actors are waiting for me in the green-room—suppose therefore I introduce you to them, not as the Author, but a friend of mine who was present at the play last night, and you will then hear ingenuously their sentiments on its merits, or demerits.
VAINWIT. Demerits! /aside/ Well sir I agree to this proposal. The actors are men whose profession should make them judicious and discerning, and I have not the least doubt of their seeing through the little arts, and malicious attempts to prevent the success of my play; and provided I am not known to them as the Author, will accompany you—not that I feel ashamed to own it! But rather imagine that by adopting your idea they will not be withheld from motives of delicacy in their sincere opinions.

DRAMA. Sir I am the only person in the Theatre acquainted with the circumstance, and be assured you may repose in me the strictest confidence.

VAINWIT. Sir I’ll follow you discreetly.

(Exit DRAMA)

VAINWIT. An oily tongued hypocrite! An arrogant pragmatical puppy! Suggest alterations for the good of the play indeed! Damn his conceit—there’s no answering for the vanity of some people! This is the consequence of bringing anything dramatic to fellows who dabble among the muses! Who dip their goose quills into Parnassian ink and by their barreness of thought they contrive to get everything damned but their own nonsense, and then they pay people to go into the house with orders—I’ll not consent to a line being cut! Shakespeare never wrote anything more to the heart than the pathetic scenes; and yet those very scenes were more laughed at than any in the play, which evidently proves the malevolence of party—or the ignorance of the age—for fools always laugh at what they can’t comprehend. I don’t know! I think vanity is not a failing of mine! But the piece is certainly the best modern one on the stage! Now to hear the actors’ opinions! They cannot be so ignorant, such dolts to make objections! If they do I’ll give critiques on their acting in all the newspapers in the style of Aesop and the Trunk-makers, sign myself an impartial critic and poison ‘em in the opinion of all the public. (Exit VAINWIT.)
Scene—Green-room

Table, chairs

*THESPIS, SOCK, BUSKIN and others discovered.*

THESPIS. Is Mr. Drama come Harwood?

PROMPTER. Yes sir, he’s in Fosbrook’s room with a gentleman; I expect him any minute.

THESPIS. Upon my honor I think it quite unnecessary to call us to any alteration of the play, for it was as factly damn’d last night as any piece I ever remember.

SOCK. Why I’ve been at the delivery of many an Author’s Muse but never witnessed so terrible a groaning.

BUSKIN. I think the play may be properly styled a dramatic abortion.

SOCK. Abortion! I can’t allow that for it certainly went its full time—‘tis very singular Drama suffers it to be played again.

THESPIS. Indeed I began to think it a service of danger and am rather alarmed at the consequences—for in the 3rd act last night where the chambermaid was to give me a slap on the face, a large apple came whizzing from the gods⁴, and probably on putting the back of my hand on my cheek to prevent her blow, I saved my eye being knocked out, for it came full in my palm.

SOCK. ‘Tis devilish wicked to laugh but faith I can’t help it.

BUSKIN. Pray what tickles your fancy?

SOCK. Why the ridiculous situation poor old Mrs. Rant was in last night.

THESPIS. I went away after I’d done in the 4th act. What was it?

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⁴ A common nickname for those audience members sitting in the galleries.
SOCK. Why sir some pleasant gentleman upstairs, not satisfied with what she was saying, threw a Windsor pear with such vehemence against her headdress that it unfortunately gave way and exposed her bald pate and a few hairs of a side. Ha! Ha! (all laugh)

THESPIS. The Gods saluted me with a few apples and oranges, but having a large wig on they did me no other damage than making the powder fly about. There were certainly apples and oranges enough to have set up a fruit shop.

SOCK. If the Author’s Muse had borne any comparison with the floor last night ‘twould have been the most fruit-full one that ever appeared on the stage.

BUSKIN. Aye, we all said how ‘twould be but the actors you know are not judges. Indeed I was so well assured of its fate that I did not study my part in the last act, for I was convinced the audience would never hear it out—here comes the Manager.

(Enter DRAMA and VAINWIT)

DRAMA. Gentlemen give me leave to introduce a friend of mine who was present last night at the representation of the play, and has kindly offered his advice of assistance; as I’ve the utmost reliance on his judgment I don’t doubt your paying attention to his remarks—pray sir be seated—Now gentlemen the first cut that appears necessary to me is in the first act—where Betty Daffadowndilly, the country girl, accompanied by the Beedle of the parish, goes to the house of Sir Thomas Overgrown to swear a child to Tom Touchet the Valet de Chambre.

VAINWIT. Why sure he’s jesting! /Aside/ He can’t mean to omit that scene- Mr. Drama I beg pardon for interrupting you so soon and at the same time for totally differing in opinion for I must confess the situation struck me exceedingly.

THESPIS. Then sir you are rather singular—for I believe you are the only person that was struck with it.
VAINWIT. Sir I pique myself on my singularity and shall never be ambitious of thinking like the mob. But Mr. Drama with submission to you the circumstance appeared to me a perfectly natural one.

DRAMA. I don’t deny its being a natural circumstance sir, surely not a delicate one for the stage.\footnote{After this sentence there is a carrot. I believe the carrot refers to the line “Besides it has not the least reference to the piece.” This line is written in the middle of an otherwise blank page; this page is located in between the page ending with the line “the situation struck me exceedingly” and the page beginning with the line “Then sir you are rather singular.” I have numbered the page 16b in the numbered manuscript pages. The manuscript does not clearly indicate that the line is to be inserted where the carrot is, but this seems to be the most reasonable conjecture.}

Besides it has not the least reference to the piece.

VAINWIT. To be sure sir it may be thought rather disgressive, but these liberties have been frequently taken by our first dramatic writer and by such brilliant exuberances have proved the force of a pregnant imagination.

SOCK. In poor Betty’s case sir I think the Author’s imagination was rather too pregnant.

VAINWIT. ‘Tis possible I may be wrong but I can’t help observing as Tom Touchet is taken into custody by a Tip staff and forced from his master’s house subsequent to Betty’s accusation that the scene conveyed an admirable moral and what appeared evident to me one of the Author’s great objects seemed fully answered.

DRAMA. What was that pray sir?

VAINWIT. Why sir creating pity in the audience for the poor girl’s misfortune.

THESPIS. O sir if that was his intention it was evidently answered for they not only pitied the pool girl (that is, the person who performed the character) but the author into the bargain.

DRAMA. Sir I am sorry we differ on this point. Harwood see if Mrs. Exit is come—I should be glad to hear her sentiments.

PROMPTER. Sit I beg pardon—I forgot to give you a note she sent this morning. Here it is sir.
DRAMA. Let’s see /opens the note and reads/ Mrs. Exit presents her regrets to Mr. Drama. The character she endeavored to sustain last night being it so gross and indecent a nature and thinking it may be very well spared, hopes he will not be offended at her declining to perform it a second time. There sir, you hear the Lady’s opinion.

VAINWIT. I beg her pardon. I did not know the Lady had been so nice on these occasions.

/Aside/ Gross and indecent! Damn her modesty.

DRAMA. Well as it seems the general opinion that scene should be omitted—give me the pen Harwood that I may cut it.

VAINWIT. /Aside/ Aye do, and I’ll cut you with my pen—but if I don’t conceal my passion I shall discover myself.

DRAMA. Before sir I proceed any farther is there any thing you wish to suggest /to VAINWIT/

VAINWIT. Why sir notwithstanding the cruel treatment the play has met with I cannot say that any part of it appeared to me defective—I should be sorry to throw out any ill natured insinuation against the gentlemen of the stage but am rather inclined to think that several of them were totally indifferent about the piece and did not play with their accustomed excellence. Now it struck me that Mr. Buskin in the 2nd act had misconceived the Author’s meaning—for he addressed himself frequently to Lady Harriot when I think it must have been his intention for these speeches to have been spoken aside—and I’m convinced if they were given aside the audience would be highly pleased.

BUSKIN. I believe they’d be much better pleased if the whole play was aside.
VAINWIT. Upon my word gentlemen your repartees are so truly pleasant, so seasoned with attic salt,\(^6\) that I think it would be worth an author’s while to minute your conversation and introduce it in a play—the neatness of the dialogue could not fail having a pleasing effect.

SOCK. I don’t know what effect it might have on the stage, but I’m certain it could not have a worse than that produced last night.

VAINWIT. What an ignorant dog to be a principal actor /aside/ Gentlemen pray don’t let me interrupt you. Proceed if you please.

THESPIS. This strange fellow seems so interested about the play that I think he must be the author.

BUSKIN. From the justness of his remarks I should suppose he was /aside/ DRAMA. Mr. Period we must leave out your character entirely in the second act; it appears to have very little connection with the plot.

VAINWIT. Why what the devil will he cut out next! /aside/

PERIOD. Upon my word Sir I can see no reason why the part should be left out; the audience laughed very much while I was on and especially at the description of Doctor Mundungul’s flight in an air balloon\(^7\)—but I appeal to thy gentlemen—do you think sir the part should be omitted?

VAINWIT. Upon my soul sir I do not. The audience highly relished the satire and it should certainly be retained. /aside/ this is the only sensible fellow among ‘em.

PERIOD. Indeed sir I think it is one of the best parts in the piece.

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\(^6\) Attic salt: “Writing distinguished by its classic refinement, its intellectual sharpness, and its elegant but stinging wit” (Harmon and Holman 44).

\(^7\) “Balloonomania” was a huge fad in Europe at this time, and women often wore clothing and accessories shaped like hot-air balloons (Keen).
VAINWIT. Why as to that sir, I can’t immediately say, but it should not be left out.

THESPIS. ‘Twas certainly the most desirable part for it was the shortest.

DRAMA. I’m sorry gentlemen you object to this alteration, but the character cannot be retained.

PERIOD. Well sir here’s the part then, /partly aside/ it’s damned hard tho [sic], that I never got a good part yet, but it was cut out of the piece.

SOCK. I wish you had mine with all my heart.

PERIOD. If I had I should play it a good deal better; but I believe the manager will never see my merit. /Exit/

DRAMA. Several of Sir Politic Party’s speeches must be expunged.

VAINWIT. Oh curse it I can’t hear this. Sir I beg pardon Mr. Drama but if you continue dissecting in this manner you’ll not leave the skeleton of a play—why Sir Politic’s speeches were the most pointed of any.

DRAMA. Sir they must not be spoken again. If they were I should not be surprised at their pulling the house down.

VAINWIT. /aside/ I wish they would and bury you in the ruins.

BUSKIN. Surely sir the speeches Mr. Drama alludes to were very improper to come from the mouth of a performer.

VAINWIT. Why so sir?

BUSKIN. Because sir as actors are candidates for the favour of the Public and supported by their liberality they should never utter a sentiment which may give offence to a party or an individual.

DRAMA. We must likewise leave out that pathetic scene in the 4th act between Lady Harriot and Lord Loveless—
VAINWIT. Leave out that pathetic scene! I’ll be damned if that scene shall be forgetting and [unreadable] himself! I beg pardon gentlemen but my particular regard for the author as I’ve the honor of being known to him makes me rather too zealous in his cause.

BUSKIN. Then sir as you are known to the author the greatest proof you can possibly give him of your regard will be to prevail on him immediately to withdraw his piece for be assured his forte is not dramatic writing. The incidents in his play are vague and uninteresting and totally destitute of comic humor—Sir I take the liberty to speak rather freely of your friend but my motive being a good one and as you profess a regard for him I hope you’ll forgive me.

VAINWIT. /aside/ I’ll be damned if I do—Sir the author I’m convinced must [unreadable] if much obliged to you for your candour, and I dare say won’t die in your debt—but sir you surprise me when you say the piece is destitute of humour. Why it surely abounds as much in true humour as true sentiment.

SOCK. Aye there abouts /aside/

VAINWIT. But gentlemen you are certainly variable in your opinions if you now think the play wants comic humour—for the other morning when Mr. Drama brought me to see a rehearsal of it every person seemed perfectly pleased and laughed incessantly; the gentlemen of the orchestra in particular.

SOCK. Why yes Sir we did laugh but then it was at the author’s absurdities and not at his wit.

VAINWIT. This is vastly pleasant! Surely Drama must have told these fellows that I am the author and they are instructed to torture me /aside/

BUSKIN. I beg pardon sir for interrupting you but unless you can substitute something very material indeed the omitting particular scenes or passages will be of little consequence; and
therefore I must beg leave to decline playing my character again for positively I would as soon stand in the pillory as hazard a second attempt.

SOCK. Mr. Buskin speaks my sentiments so I must /with submission/ follow his example by giving up my part, for tho I am not very nice about damnation, yet I’m not proof against pelting.

THESPIS. Nor I! /here all the actors throw down their part/

VAINWIT. Ah! Now ‘tis obvious—this is a scheme of that double faced manager’s—but gentlemen I’ll save you the trouble of cutting any more—here I seize upon this manuscript as my property—I am the author, notwithstanding your ignorant remarks, glory in the declaration. As for you, sir manager upon your tragedy Chair—these who sit like Bashaw among his servile train—I now see through your shallow premeditated maneuver but sir don’t flatter yourself because like the master of a Puppet-show you have pulled the wires by which your actors have been set in motion, that you or they can boast of having wounded the refined feelings of a man of letters. I had tragedies and comedies enough to have furnished your house with novelty for these ten years—but I’d sooner give ‘em to a Cheese monger or sell ‘em to line trunks with than you should benefit by the effusions of my genius—I’ll exercise the power of pen against this theatre puff the other into fashion. I’ll prejudice the public to consider this a mere bore, and make the other as popular and attractive as the Learned Pig.⁸ Exit.

THESPIS. Ha! Ha! The author.

SOCK. Exit Prince Pretty Man⁹ in a rage.

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⁸ “Learned Pigs” were in fashion around the late 18th century. Pigs would be on display for the public to enjoy, and they reportedly could count, play cards, and tell fortunes. See Ricky Jay’s *Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women*, pages 9-23.

⁹ Prince Pretty is a character from George, Duke of Buckingham’s play *The Rehearsal*. The play was written in 1663 and first performed at Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1671 (Gale 10).
DRAMA. Ah I thought he’d never keep his own secret, however I’m glad we are rid of him at any rate.

BUSKIN. Thank heaven we are rid of two theatrical plagues- a mad Author and a bad piece.\textsuperscript{10}

PROMPTER. But sir as the author has taken away his play what must we perform instead of it this evening?

DRAMA. Let me consider—put up The Tempest and The Devil to Pay. And bid prepare for an apology. So good morning gentlemen. Exit.

SOCK. The Tempest! The Devil to Pay\textsuperscript{11}! I think it would be more germain [sic] to the matter to perform what we have been rehearsing.

THESPIS. What’s that?

SOCK. Much ado about Nothing. Exuent.

Scene Changes

Enter VAINWIT with his manuscript in his hand

Blockheads! Coxcombs! Butchers! /Surveying his manuscript wishfully and in great agitation/

Here’s a cut! One of the finest passages in the whole piece. How spitefully it’s crossed out—this is that damned fellow Drama’s own doing; I know the stroke of his own pen from a million

\textsuperscript{10} This line is on a single page between manuscript pages 29 and 30- there is no carrot to indicate placement, so I inserted the line where I believe it most likely belonged.

\textsuperscript{11} The Devil to Pay is a ballad opera written by Charles Coffey and first produced at Drury Lane in 1731. However, after its first performance in 1731, the piece was shortened to just the most well-received parts. According to James Ayres, “[the manager] was of Opinion, that if it was judiciously cut, or shorten’d, it would make an excellent Entertainment, but thought it would not furnish a whole Night” (Stern 238). That Drama in The Author on the Wheel suggested that they put on the entertainment The Devil to Pay brings a self-referential quality to The Author on the Wheel, in the sense that it is about cutting a piece down. But also the play itself falls under the heading of “Entertainment” as categorized by Allardyce Nicoll in A History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama, 1750-1800.
{still turning over the leaves of the manuscript eagerly} Crossed! Dash! Cut! Whole pages black! Black! Nothing but black! These cuts could never have been made with common pen and ink—some of the strokes are as broad as my thumb and have that dingy, sooty appearance as if they had been made with lamb-black and a painter’s brush. But here, here’s the worst cut of all. Mrs. Exit’s part given up, she who I have been puffing so long. This cuts as home as Brutus in the heart of Caesar. What’s to be done… I’ll not rest quiet under so much indignity and injustice. A thought strikes me at the thought of Mask yonder; it will do—it will do… I’ll put it in execution and be revenged of them all completely.

Enter MASK

VAINWIT. My dear Mask how shall I thank you for your exertions last night? But all wouldn’t do. They came determined to be out of humour and yet it is not surprising to think what a number of foolish things keep floating successfully a whole season, when mine went to the bottom the first night?

MASK. Perhaps sir some things are too light ever to sink, and others again too heavy even to swim.

VAINWIT. Oh! Mask! Mask! That I had but cast you the principal character in my piece—you’d have saved it to a certainty.

MASK. Upon my soul sir had I the merit of a dozen actors centered in myself, I could not have the vanity to believe you.

VAINWIT. And you have the merit of a dozen actors centered in yourself—is there one of them whose manner you cannot mistake? But much as I have heard of your talents in that line I have never yet seen an exertion of them; will you therefore be so good as to favour me with specimen, and afterwards I’ll impart a plan, for our mutual advantage will charm you—
MASK. Upon my word, sir I would rather be excused.

VAINWIT. What, I suppose you are apprehensive of offending your brethren of the Sock and Buskin; do you think they’d be so nice with you? I wish you had been in the green-room when they were breaking me upon the wheel; you would then have had an opportunity of judging of their humanity. Damn! If an old actor has any more feeling than a trap door—

MASK. Sir as I never mean my brethren of the stage any offense, when I give my imitations I hardly think they ever take any; every man has something peculiar in his manner which distinguishes him from another. And the actor who professes powers of mimicry may be considered as a kind of vocal painter who takes off in speaking colors the portraits of all those he hears and sees without any intention of making them ridiculous—but what is the plan you have to propose?

VAINWIT. Is it sufficient when I tell you ‘tis for the good of the stage?

MASK. Nay, sir, if it be for the good of the stage, as a warm well-wisher to it, I cannot deny your request. {Here MASK performs several theatrical imitations}

VAINWIT. Why sir, you’re a prodigy of universal powers! You’re a Dramatic Atlas—and can sustain a whole theatre on your own shoulders.¹² /aside/ A little flattery some times does well. But to my plan; do you see these coat pockets? They are crammed with comedies; my waistcoat are [sic] filled with farces.

MASK. And I hope sir your breeches pockets are not empty.

¹² After this line there is a symbol that resembles a circle. The next page of the manuscript is one sentence on an otherwise blank page. The line reads: “/aside/ A little flattery some times does well.” This line is marked with the same symbol, so I have inserted it into the text and marked it with italics.
VAINWIT. No faith! They’re well lined; I’m not one of your poor authors who write for fame, when they should be working for bread. If critics call me a dull poet, they must call me a dull gentleman too.

MASK. I assure you sir, I never considered you in any other light.

VAINWIT. Why sir my last piece paid me very handsomely, though it was damned.

MASK. That was damned good luck indeed, sir.

VAINWIT. Yes sir, it went off on the third night but it was a spanker, and one good night let me tell you, is better than three bad ones. But to business; now sir I’ll immediately hire a large room for you and yourself singly shall entertain the town with my pieces in the style of the man who gives readings in Leicester-fields; nay more in every piece you read I shall set down the names of the performers to the several characters exactly as I should cast it if represented regularly at the theatre. And you shall take them off in caricature and they highly delight the town with a novel species of entertainment and gratify my resentment into the bargain.

MASK. Sir, your plan may be calculated to answer every end you could wish, but I must beg leave to decline having anything to do with it.

VAINWIT. Oh death, man can you be so blind to your own interest?

MASK. There is no advantage which interest holds out, can induce me to act so ungenerous a part.

VAINWIT. It’s mighty well sir—it’s mighty well—I Shan’t solicit you to make your own fortune. But let me secure my manuscript. I shall have that purloined from me /putting up his manuscript/ if I don’t look sharp. Once more the last time of asking… will you—Aye, or no?

MASK. No.
VAINWIT. Then there’s an end of the business. A better thought has come into my head. I’ll go to the fellow who has made the speaking figures, and if he can but make me a good company of wooden actors, I’ll set up an opposition to both theatre—damn if I don’t and so your servant. /Exit/

MASK. Now I suppose will he go publish his piece, abuse without any mercy actors and managers, appealing to posterity to determine a cause which will never be tried before them to the audience.

But real worth will never appeal from you
Who give to genius every meed\textsuperscript{13} that’s due;
If combs\textsuperscript{14} and fools advance their empty claim
Even rise to Laurel Crowning Fame,
But you best judges the fine touchstone hold
Which tells the counterfeit from real gold.
Oh! May true genius your guardian aid
And dullness still be sentenced to the blade
Your voice decides—it’s power supreme we feel
To fix—or take an author from the wheel.

Finish

\textsuperscript{13} Reward or wage

\textsuperscript{14} Short for “coxcomb.” A conceited dandy, a fop.
CHAPTER ONE

FICTIONAL SPACE

“a Room in the Theatre” (Author 32)

_The Author on the Wheel_ opens in a simply-enough titled space: a room in the theatre. The manager and the prompter hurriedly go over the last-minute details involved in the day’s work. Where are the actors? Is the playwright here yet? Did the principal lady send in her part? (She has trotted out that old excuse—a cold—yet again, and needs to study her revised part at home.) Their conversation possesses a frantic quality with which a theatre practitioner today can commiserate. Theatre must place the correct people (both the performers and the spectators) in the correct place at the correct time. It is no wonder, then, that people who are located _between_ places in the theatre cause anxiety to those responsible for the seamless execution of the show. In this particular instance, the actors are in the green room, the leading lady is at home, and the playwright is on his way. Knowing where each person is in relation to the stage might assuage the tension that the manager feels. But actually getting each person to his or her place is the penultimate step in the process of making theatre happen. Before “Places!” is called, actors occupy spaces throughout the theatre and maybe even outside of the building. After this call to action, the final step onto the stage from backstage/offstage must be completed in order to start the show. Therefore, “a room in the theatre,” though seemingly neutral and innocuous, already situates _The Author on the Wheel_ in an unsettled area, causing the manager to ask (in so many words) “Where IS everybody?” Location in the space proves critical to the success of the show.

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1 Throughout the dissertation, I refer to the page numbers of _The Author on the Wheel_ as they fall in my annotated version so the reader might easily refer back to the script. Therefore, the play spans pages 32-49.
For the moment, let us take a step back from this tremulous space of tension and start at a place of more solid grounding. In order to analyze the spaces of The Author on the Wheel, I utilize the taxonomy of spatial function as described by Gay McAuley. In her book Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre, McAuley provides a five-part outline in which she breaks down and categorizes the various spaces of the theatre. McAuley admits to the inherent problems lurking around the researcher when s/he attempts to delimit terms and spaces that seem to resist any sort of minute separation. As she explains:

The extent to which the set of terms that follows [the taxonomy] is useful or usable for others depends in part upon the degree of consensus about the theory of performance and communication that emerges from it and also upon the accessibility of the terminology. … Accessibility has been chosen here, with all its attendant risks of confusion, but the familiar terms like stage space, theatre space, and performance space have been defined in ways that take into account their traditional use and specify its boundaries here. (24)

In short, a key to any taxonomy is its ability to help researchers explicate theories and figuratively “get on the same page.” I find McAuley’s terms ideal for my study, as she brings in both the social as well as occupational aspects of theatre spaces. The Author on the Wheel inhabits both of these social and occupational spaces as well as many corners and hallways in between.

McAuley divides her taxonomy of spatial function into five major categories. The social reality, the physical/fictional relationship, location and fiction, textual space, and thematic space
constitute the key components of the classification. These components further break down as follows:

I. The Social Reality
   - Theatre Space
   - Audience Space
   - Performance Space
   - Practitioner Space
   - Rehearsal Space

II. The Physical/Fictional Relationship
   - Stage Space
   - Presentational Space
   - Fictional Place

III. Location and Fiction
   - Onstage Fictional Place
   - Offstage Fictional Place
     - Unlocalized in relation to Performance Space
     - Localized in relation to Performance Space
       - Contiguous/Remote Spectrum
         - Audience Off

IV. Textual Space
V. Thematic Space

These categories guide my examination of *The Author on the Wheel* throughout the dissertation. Though the taxonomy presents a linear path down through the spaces, I attempt to consider the spaces of the play with a more rounded, three-dimensional approach. This approach will necessarily be a more meandering, inquisitive path throughout the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*. However, I feel strongly that the reader will benefit from a more nuanced and fluid study than from a rigid, linear route through the space. As much as possible, I would like to take you, the reader, on a journey that gives the experience of walking; we shall visit spaces and try to see paths that connect ideas and ways of thinking about this play and about Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1785. As I survey the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*
fictionally, textually, and historically, I demonstrate how this short play can so quickly expand to magnificent proportions.

In chapter one, I utilize the “Location and Fiction” section of McAuley’s taxonomy. This section splits into two major subcategories and then further divides within those categories. To begin, I analyze the spaces that fall under the heading of “onstage fictional places.” These include the places that *The Author on the Wheel* represents onstage in view of the audience. *The Author on the Wheel* includes three definitively “onstage fictional places”: a room in the theatre, the green room, and another room in the theatre. The play configures a more slippery space in which to present the epilogue of the play; this space slightly bends the categories, and I investigate the implication of this space thoroughly in this chapter.

The second major section in this chapter deals with the category of “offstage fictional space.” These spaces include places that are not represented onstage, but that the characters reference throughout the play. These are further divided into localized and unlocalized in relation to the performance space. “Localized offstage fictional place” is a location immediately adjacent to the onstage place, say, a bedroom or hallway, while an “unlocalized offstage fictional place” is a location not connected to the onstage place, say, a nearby town. Places in *The Author on the Wheel* fall mostly into these two categories. I conclude the chapter, however, with a discussion of the most potent spaces in the play: the spaces in the fictional theatre. Since the play-within-a-play has already been performed in the theatre, the cast and crew experienced the play in front of an actual (though fictional) audience. The characters refer to this performance and describe their reactions to it, but the performance is not represented onstage. The fictional play takes place within the walls of a theatre building.
therefore layering the space with multiple meanings. I believe these spaces help nuance understanding of eighteenth-century theatre in London as well increase appreciation of the spatial-temporal relationships created by an evening’s performance.

Plot Summary

An anonymously-written play, The Author on the Wheel premiered at Theatre Royal Drury Lane on April 18, 1785. The play follows a theatre manager with an awful, yet necessary task on his hands: substantially revise and cut down a play in between the play’s first and second performances. The cast of the fictional theatre had performed the play the night before. The performance was such a failure however that no one will perform again unless the script is substantially changed. Vainwit, the author of the terrible play, arrives at the theatre hopping mad. He believes “parties” were formed to ruin the play, and that audience members intentionally made it a flop. Since only Drama, the manager, knows the identity of the author, he suggests that Vainwit attend the revising session in disguise. Under cover, Vainwit might learn the cast’s true feelings about his play and may finally be convinced if its shortcomings. In the green room, Vainwit, posing as a friend of Drama’s who attended the first performance of the play, cannot help himself from opposing every cut suggested by the manager and cast. Of course, the cast mocks both the play and the author profusely, unaware that the author is in their presence. At last, Vainwit reveals his identity as the author and storms off with his manuscript. Quickly contriving a possible solution, Vainwit offers another actor who was not present at the cutting session a private performance of his work. This actor is known for his talent at imitations, and Vainwit tries to convince him to perform a one-man-show of sorts.
But Mask the actor declines, leaving Vainwit to wonder if he can somehow acquire a cast of wooden speaking figures, bypassing the need for actors altogether. Mask recites the epilogue and pointedly reminds the audience of their supreme agency in the success or failure of a play. If the audience approves, an author may be spared. If not, he must be willing to affix himself to the wheel, and endure the torture of seeing his beloved piece marked and shredded to oblivion.

Onstage Fictional Place

Beginning with the simple description “a room in the Theatre,” The Author on the Wheel places the action directly into a contained, yet undefined location. Drama and the Prompter converse in this unidentified room in the practitioner space of the theatre and start out the play with a shaky feeling of unbalance. Drama’s immediate order of business is obviously to assemble the company in the green room:

   DRAMA. Are the performers come to the alteration of the piece? It wants but a few minutes of time.
   PROMPTER. Most of the gentlemen are here, sir, but one of the principal ladies has sent word she has a violent cold and cannot attend the rehearsal this morning.
   DRAMA. Ah! The old excuse again. (32)

It seems all were invited to the session held for the purpose of altering the play. The play flopped so badly the night before that revisions to the script were absolutely necessary in order for the show to go on again. The subtitle of this play “A Piece Cut in the Green-Room” refers
directly to an onstage fictional place according to Gay McAuley’s taxonomy. The actual business of revising the play will transpire in the green room, which is set up with a table and chairs (37). The set pieces required give a nod to the arc of the play; the play begins in a room not set specifically set with stage furniture and then moves to the green room in which the bulk of the play (and the actual piece-cutting) occurs. The play ends in another room in the theatre, a room which may be the room the play opened in, or may not be. As the play moves from an amorphous space to a solidly defined space (however transitory and liminal a green room might be) then back to a non-specified space, the play’s settings mirror the play’s plot trajectory. The manager hovers in a shaky place, eager to revise the script because of the horrible performance the night before. Time is of the essence; another show is scheduled for that very night. The cast sits down to make the show playable, but the author ultimately runs off with his script. Left with nothing to perform, the manager hastily decides on *The Tempest* and *The Devil Will Pay*, as Sock wryly suggests that they should perform what they have been rehearsing: “Much ado about Nothing” (45). Another unpredictable night is sure to follow.

Upon entering the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*, the first space encountered is the fictional space created and inhabited by the characters. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the play begins with the simple description “a room in the Theatre” (32). Drama (the manger) and Harwood (the prompter) occupy this room. The text does not specify whether the play opens with both men onstage or if they enter and then begin their conversation. What is certain about this room is that it is inside the theatre and it is not the green room. This first space fictionally inhabits the first category of the taxonomy: the social reality. The social
reality of the theatre space further divides into three parts. Each of these parts obtain identity through access: who has access to a given space? McAuley explains:

The theatre space is divided; it is a place of employment for some, a place of entertainment and cultural enrichment for others. The two groups have their designated areas within the space that is, in traditional theatres, quite rigidly demarcated and conceptualized in terms of front and back (‘front of house’ and ‘backstage’). (25)

Drama and the Prompter both possess, and make use of, access to this room. Both characters in this case have access because the theatre, for them, functions as a place of employment. Because of this, the room falls into the category deemed “practitioner space.” McAuley states that “[p]ractitioner space includes the stage door access, the whole backstage area with its dressing rooms, its hierarchy of comfort and discomfort, green room, corridor and stairways, and the stage itself” (26). Since the two characters are involved in the production of the show, and no audience is present, the room sits securely in this category reserved for theatre practitioners.

“Practitioner space” holds complexities unique to the art of theatre. When practitioners enter the backstage area, transitions from outside in and from fact to fiction occur. Both spaces and identities can transform because of interaction with a practitioner space. Actors provide an example of an identity transformation based on a specific journey through a space. Those performing in a show take one step closer to the world of the play, and one step further from the world of life outside the theatre. Dressing rooms, without a doubt, provide a space in which actors may cauterize this shift in identity. Changing into a character in a dressing room
takes an actor toward the stage, but leaves the practitioner in another in-between space. Waiting in costume, the actor must negotiate the spaces that will bring yet another transformation, a transformation that will fully congeal on the stage.

In general, spectators rarely see this in-between identity of actor / character. Indeed, the image of a character in costume and makeup yet not onstage would be quite jarring, if not simply amusing for the audience and fellow practitioners. The complex practitioner space of this unidentified room falls further into the fictional abyss when the actual space of Theatre Royal Drury Lane enters the picture. In April of 1785, performers created the allusion of a practitioner space on the stage of the Drury Lane theatre, while using the actual backstage areas of the theatre to transform into the characters of The Author on the Wheel. Spaces, like the characters that inhabit them, swiftly shift in identity throughout the play and its performance.

As the main scenic location in the play, the green room of the fictional theatre acts as a centering space in The Author on the Wheel. The second (and central) scene includes a short description of the set pieces needed: a table and chairs. All the characters meet here in the green room to discuss and revise the play performed the previous night. “Thespis, Sock, Buskin, and others discovered” (37) indicates that a group of the actors are already in the green room. “Others” seems ambiguous, though it is clear that one of the “others” is Harwood the Prompter. Later in the scene, Period the actor also contributes to the discussion. After the actors engage in a discussion of the last night’s failed performance, the Manager (Drama) and

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2 As a Cast Member at Disneyland in Anaheim, California, I observed many instances of this jarring/amusing transitional moment. Characters in full costume walked the backstage area to and from performances, and my most vivid memory is of Princess Jasmine using the payphone.
the playwright (Vainwit) enter. Drama introduces Vainwit not as the author of the play, but as a friend who had attended the performance. The two men begin their performance for the audience of the cast; set in the green room, this performance (the performance Vainwit enacts as he pretends to be merely a spectator of the show and not the author) highlights the centrifugal force pulling the audience’s and practitioners’ focus toward the “stage.” The stage in this instance happens to be in the fictional practitioner space of the theatre. Characters already prove their ability to morph and move throughout the spaces while changing spaces, identities, and action.

Space (and movement in that space) helps move the action forward: Drama introduces his “friend” to the cast, and then declares:

DRAMA. [A]s I’ve the utmost reliance on his judgment I don’t doubt your paying attention to his remarks—pray sir [Vainwit] be seated. Now gentlemen the first cut that appears necessary to me is in the first act—where Betty Daffadowndilly, the country girl, accompanied by the Beedle of the parish, goes to the house of Sir Thomas Overgrown to swear a child to Tom Touchet the Valet de Chambre. (38)

After the introduction of the newcomer (Vainwit in disguise), Drama asks him to be seated. The physical movement from a standing position to a sitting position officially signals the start of the cutting process; the company proverbially “gets down to business,” in this case physically sitting themselves down in the green room. Moving the characters to new positions as well as signifying the start of the cutting process, Drama’s direction to Vainwit to “pray sir be seated” at once asserts Drama’s role as leader of the meeting while simultaneously
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disguising Vainwit as one of the company. Because Drama gives the author a seat in the green
room amongst the actors, he grants Vainwit a place that allows the author access to the play’s
revisions; this is definitely not a position that is granted to just anyone, and Vainwit has just
acquired entrance to a space of secrecy and power. However, posing as a civilian and not as
author of the play, he in actuality surrenders agency in order to retain some amount of creative
control over his product. The green room acts as a social leveler that provides (at least the
appearance of) equality. Centering the action physically and creatively, the green room in The
Author on the Wheel portrays a space of solid grounding on which the swirl of disguise, vanity,
and conflict may move about.

Note the shifting designations of spectator and performance within The Author on the
Wheel, designations that the cast assign in the space of the green room. On the surface, the
play operates as a play (or activities revolving around a play) within a play. Plays with this
subject matter found their way into much of the theatres’ repertoire during this time period.
The book Plays about the Theatre in England, 1737-1800 by Dane Farnsworth Smith and M.L.
Lawhon attests to the mass of plays that turned inwardly to consider the theatre itself as worthy
of attention. The authors of this text posit one possible reason for the proliferation of such plays,
stating:

The principal key to explaining the popularity of such plays lies in the attitude of
the eighteenth-century spectators toward themselves and toward their relationship
with the play. Convinced of their right to judge a play simultaneously with its
performance, they participated in production, thus enlarging the idea of
performance to include the auditorium as well as the stage. (16)
Audiences at this time played a huge role in the success or failure of a play, as evinced by the plot of *The Author on the Wheel*. The audience members very much acted as critics and even performers. The disapproving audience clearly identified its objectives and obstacles through its vocal and physical actions. Not only did the performers risk the disapproval of the audience, they also risked bodily injury. Many plays and newspapers of the eighteenth century document the practice of pelting: the practice of audience members hurling objects such as fruit and vegetables toward the actors onstage. When Smith and Lawhon discuss the audience’s perceived “right to judge,” much more is at stake than bad press or a cancelled show. This right exercised by the spectators could permanently damage an actor’s public face, or possibly just his face.

By acknowledging the spectators’ willingness to take part in the production by pelting, the cast of Vainwit’s play also acknowledges the theatricality that exists throughout the different theatre spaces. The moment a spectator pelts a performer with an object, the spectator steps into a role as performer. Though the audience certainly played a part in the overall show even without throwing things, the object that connects the spectator to the performer introduces an element of corporeality that begins to melt the divide between spectator and performer and between fact and fiction. Chapter three focuses on the thrown object and the performances that resulted throughout the eighteenth-century playhouse.

Plays about the theatre abounded in the eighteenth century, therefore it is unsurprising that *The Author on the Wheel* takes place not on the stage, but in the adjacent practitioner space of the green room. However, *The Author on the Wheel* travels even farther into the fictional matrix than a play-about-a-play, and this is why I believe *The Author on the Wheel* warrants a very close analysis. The play layers its dialogue with theatrical language and descriptions, and
further lubricates the already-slippery spaces amongst which the play effortlessly slides. For example, in the green room scene, the actors mercilessly insult the play they have just performed, despite the author’s many attempts to justify his work. Throughout most of the scene, the actors do not know that this “friend of Drama’s” is actually the author. But because of the “friend’s” many suggestions to keep the horrid play untouched, the cast figures out his identity with ease. Vainwit ceremoniously unveils his already-unveiled identity and leaves with a dramatic threat to decry the theatre in all the papers. Immediately after his exit, the actors quip about what has just happened:

THESPIS. Ha! Ha! The author.

SOCK. Exit Prince Pretty Man in a rage.

DRAMA. Ah I thought he’d never keep his own secret, however I’m glad we are rid of him at any rate. (44)

Sock, an actor in Vainwit’s play, describes the movements of Vainwit, an actor playing an author playing a theatre-goer, in stage directions. He insults Vainwit by sarcastically puffing him up (calling him “Prince Pretty Man”\(^3\)), and simultaneously slides into the role of author by articulating Vainwit’s movement on the “stage” (which is, in the instance of this “scene,” the green room). Sock describes Vainwit’s tantrum as an “exit” while bestowing on him a character and even a description of his motivation. Sock turns the fictional situation of Vainwit storming out of the green room with his manuscript in hand into a performance that he (Sock) is now watching/prompting. Sock’s usage of the language of theatre movement helps move the story’s

\(^3\) Prince Pretty is a character from George, Duke of Buckingham’s play *The Rehearsal*. The play was written in 1663 and first performed at Drury Lane in 1671 (Gale 10).
plot, as well as the characters, fluidly about the stage and coats *The Author on the Wheel* thickly with theatricality.

In addition to highlighting the theatricality of *The Author on the Wheel*, the use of stage directions, specifically stage directions indicating an exit, points the spectator’s attention to the fictional world extending beyond the stage space visually accessible to the audience. McAuley argues for the importance of entrances and exits in her chapter “Energized Space.” After examining the spatial importance of entrances, she moves onto exits, stating:

> Exits, too, are important moments in the performance for, apart from their role in structuring the performance continuum, they function very powerfully to activate the offstage as fictional place. The fictional world onstage exists in relationship to further fictional domains and, as has been argued in chapter 2 [“The Physical Space”], it is the physical interface between onstage and off that actualizes the relationship. The actor is the active agent whose physical comings and goings make manifest the interface and the exit is a particularly potent moment in raising the spectators’ consciousness of the “there” beyond the “here.” (98)

Vainwit’s exit and Sock’s subsequent description of Vainwit’s exit both contribute to this activation of the offstage as fictional space. Vainwit exits from the green room to somewhere else in the practitioner space of the theatre. Vainwit appears next in an unspecified place, where he is discovered ranting to himself about the fools who have rejected his play. The space previously designated as the offstage fictional space in the second scene (the space to which Vainwit exited directly from the green room) is now the onstage fictional space of the third scene; in turn, the green room now shifts suddenly into the role of offstage fictional space.
As McAuley explains, the shifts between the onstage and offstage fictional spaces can raise the spectator’s awareness of the “here” and the “there.” In *The Author on the Wheel*, the “here” and the “there” exchange several times. The “here” and “there” space-swap as the characters move throughout the backstage area of the theatre. These spaces, though shifting fluidly throughout the fictional places, remain firmly planted in the area designated in the social reality of the theatre as “practitioner space.” As noted earlier, the practitioner space is an extremely complex site. This site allows for transformation of identity, whether it is from actor to character or from civilian to employee. Though usually providing a space for transformation, the practitioner space presented onstage as a fictional place in this case creates a dynamic interface of the “here” and “there,” found not only in the fictional onstage and offstage, but in the social reality of the theatre. The spectator of *The Author on the Wheel* has already experienced the tri-partied arrangement of the theatre’s social reality just by entering the building: viewing from the *audience space* (1), the spectator looks upon the *performance space* (2) while shielded/separated from the *practitioner space* (3). Since the practitioner space in this instance is represented on/by the performance space, it is the audience space that remains fictionally and socially unchanged. The spectator’s awareness of the “here” and “there” becomes more of a “there” and “there,” as practitioner and performer collide imaginatively on the stage. The interface most critical in this relationship is no longer the exit on stage left or stage right, but the downstage edge of the stage connecting spectator to performer and fact to fiction through site/sight.

This interface joining spectator and performer so closely in *The Author on the Wheel* emerges not only from the spatial-temporal relationship created at the moment of performance,
but also becomes evident in the fictional relationship between Vainwit’s play and its first-night audience. First night performances in eighteenth-century London theatre often met spectators who aggressively demanded cuts or revisions to the play. In order for the play to go on again, it would have to meet the demands made by the audience members. The manager and cast would change and cut the play accordingly, and it is in this meeting that the conflict of *The Author on the Wheel* becomes clear. Placed in this unsteady time and space, clashes of will and desire take on additional weight; the piece cut in the green room signifies creative and financial life or death for all involved.

The manager and cast hold this alteration session the morning after the first performance, but before the second performance that night. Since the play was a disaster, no one wants to go on again without significantly altering the script. The actors, manager, and prompter are all present for the meeting. Vainwit, summoned by Drama, shows up at the theatre to talk to Drama about the performance, but he is definitely not there to suggest any alterations or cuts. It is because of Drama’s proposal that Vainwit attends the cutting session at all. Vainwit attends as a friend of the manager who saw the show the previous night. Of course, Vainwit blows his own cover defending the worthless material. Though Sock and the others do not seem particularly surprised that Vainwit is actually the author of the play, Vainwit at least attempted to mask his identity so he could “hear ingenuously their [the actors’] sentiments on its merits, or demerits” (35). To get a more accurate picture of what this meeting entailed, it is beneficial to investigate further into the revision process between the first and second night performances.
Tiffany Stern sheds light on this revision process in her book *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (2000). In a section entitled “Authors and Rehearsal” in the chapter “Garrick’s Theatre and Later” Stern details the various ways in which authors might interact with their creative works:

By the middle of the eighteenth century, it was, anyway, unusual for playwrights to attend rehearsals, for they followed the system of priorities that existed at the time, wanting, primarily, good privately rehearsed major actors, without worrying unduly about minor actors or harmonious ensembles… Occasionally authors were specifically asked to attend for revision purposes, but even then they might prove inadequate and have to be replaced. (270-271)

As Stern states, authors may or may not have attended rehearsals. In *The Author on the Wheel*, Vainwit attended one rehearsal, but seems to have been watching from afar, as the cast still does not recognize him during their green room encounter. His covert attendance of a rehearsal sets up an opportunity for Vainwit to defend his play. After Buskin declares that the play is “destitute of comic humor,” Vainwit interrupts with proof of the contrary:

VAINWIT. But gentlemen you are certainly variable in your opinions if you now think the play wants comic humour—for the other morning when Mr. Drama brought me to see a rehearsal of it every person seemed perfectly pleased and laughed incessantly; the gentlemen of the orchestra in particular.

SOCK. Why yes Sir we did laugh but then it was at the author’s absurdities and not at his wit. (43)
This reveals that Vainwit, in addition to being completely blind to his own inadequacies, tried to keep a close reign on his work. Unlike the other authors of the time period content to hand control over to the manager, Vainwit consistently insists upon keeping his thumb on the play and never admitting to its faults. This obstinate behavior makes all involved, especially the actors, feel uneasy; after all, it is the actor who must face the audience (and the flying pears) head on.

Stern also explains how the first performance of a show was still very much a work in progress. In her chapter “Cibber’s Theatre,” she comments on the unsettled quality of a first performance:

As before [in the 17th century], the first performance was the test of a text, and was therefore part of the revision stage: the text on its opening night had not yet been ‘fixed’… Play prefaces are full of references to authorial changes made after first performance, as a direct response to audience criticism: ‘The Second Night the particular Things objected to, being taken out, the play was acted from Beginning to End, without one single Mark of Displeasure in the Audience’ writes William Popple of The Lady’s Revenge. (235)

Though this description applies to the theatre of the early eighteenth century, the practice held fast through the end of the century as Stern points out later in her book; however, the latter part of the century saw play revisions based more on the opinions of the manager, and less on the opinions of the author. The Author on the Wheel upholds this assessment and dramatizes a play that is going through cuts and revisions mostly based on the thoughts of the manager. It seems likely the manager would be appealing to the audience in order to correct the play to their liking; after all, the manager strives to make a profit through the successful run of a show. Vainwit’s
stubborn attitude toward keeping his play intact reveals his true vanity. Rather than please the public, he refuses to budge and takes his play elsewhere. As demonstrated, Vainwit feels that all are conspiring around him: the spectators were hired to oppose his piece and the manager convinced the actors to refuse to perform again. Never does Vainwit question the strength of his writing. He truly believes that it is the configuration and conspiracies of people that ruin the play, and that the material reality of his play bears no blame.

Rejecting suggestions to alter the play, Vainwit most likely does not understand (or refuses to adhere to) the theatre conventions of his day. As noted above, managers, actors, and authors routinely revised plays after the first performance. What is important to note is that in addition to revisions, the audience usually demanded cuts as well. So the revising session almost always included cutting down the script (hence the subtitle: *A Piece Cut in the Green Room*). Drama’s (the manager’s) chief concern in *The Author on the Wheel* is to cut down the piece, but Vainwit steadfastly opposes this decision to strip his play. After he hastily exits the green room into the unidentified room backstage, the whining begins:

VAINWIT. Here’s a cut! One of the finest passages in the whole piece. How spitefully it’s crossed out—this is that damned fellow Drama’s own doing; I know the stroke of his own pen from a million {still turning over the leaves of the manuscript eagerly} Crossed! Dash! Cut! Whole pages black! Black! Nothing but black! (45)

Drama offends the author not only by executing cuts (though these cuts would have been regularly practiced in the eighteenth century), but also by executing the cuts so maliciously. Vainwit believes he can actually feel the spite deep in Drama’s heart flowing out through the
black marks upon his page. Spatially, *The Author on the Wheel* moves throughout the backstage of a theatre as its onstage fictional place; the play in Vainwit’s hand moves swiftly throughout the theatre as well as it travels from the rehearsal space to the stage then back to the green room for cuts. Moving from an onstage performance to a well-attended torture session, the manuscript does not negotiate the fictional spaces of the play with success, but instead falls victim to the whims of the fictional audience. Only heavily scarred and beat-down will the manuscript ever see the audience again: but such is the nature of the eighteenth-century theatre audience, the audience that shifts seamlessly and effortlessly into the role of critic.

Though alteration sessions occurred frequently, evidence in *The Author on the Wheel* hints that managers might have realized the powerful impact of cutting a piece and understood how traumatic this act could be to the playwright. Drama anticipates Vainwit’s hurt feelings, and (wisely) expresses an acute fear of retaliation:

DRAMA. Now I shall appear to him void of all human feeling—every dash of my pen will be felt like the amputation of a limb; and probably for my good intention shall be censored and execrated though the season under the signatures of anti-Theatricus and Philo-Dramaticus while squibs and paragraphical crackers will be fired at me from all the combustible papers in town. (32)

Drama dreads the task of cutting down the piece, but also realizes that it cannot go onstage again as is. He allows Vainwit to attend the alteration session and suggests Vainwit keep his identity concealed. Vainwit takes offence, of course, but Drama really does want to help save Vainwit’s career; since Vainwit is not yet known to the public as the author of this horrible play, he can still keep this unfortunate event secret and retain some sort of decent reputation. Drama in this case
emerges as the most compassionate and useful person in the group. But even his reasonable suggestions and useful ideas cannot penetrate the vanity of the aptly-named Vainwit. In this case, it seems as if the author has placed himself on the wheel.

The spaces of *The Author on the Wheel* flow into and around one another not only physically and fictionally, but historically as well. Evident in this discussion of the onstage fictional places in *The Author on the Wheel* is the extent to which actual theatrical conventions of the day play a role. The play demonstrates the unsettled nature of the time between first and second performances. The manager, cast, and (sometimes) author worked under strict time constraints in order to produce a newly-revised script that would be acceptable to the second night audience. Spectators of this time not only felt the right to judge a play, but possessed the right to demand cuts and revisions where deemed necessary. The cutting session illustrated in *The Author on the Wheel* may have been typical of late eighteenth-century London theatre practices. The conflict however arises due to the personality of the stubborn author. As a playwright, Vainwit moved throughout the space of the theatre surreptitiously with intent on keeping his work pure. The work itself moved through the spaces as well and eventually landed back in the author’s untalented hands. The cast of the failed play remained stationed in the green room while travelling imaginatively through the spaces of the theatre by reliving memories from the night before. The manager Drama attempted to prune away at the awful play; the less space that play took up in the theatre, the better. All involved in performing negotiated the spaces of the theatre fruitfully, while the audience enjoyed the spectacle of the onstage fictional places combining with real and imagined practitioner spaces. What resulted in the presentational space of the Drury Lane theatre on April 18, 1785 was a space all its own.
The play ends with an epilogue granting the audience a position of judgment. Still in prose form, Mask speculates that Vainwit will take his play and continue to make a nuisance of himself to theatregoers and theatre-makers. Mask then speaks directly to the audience in heroic couplets, changing the onstage fictional place one last time:

- But real worth will never appeal from you
- Who give to genius every meed that’s due;
- If combs and fools advance their empty claim
- Even rise to Laurel Crowning Fame,
- But you best judges the fine touchstone hold
- Which tells the counterfeit from real gold.
- Oh! May true genius your guardian aid
- And dullness still be sentenced to the blade
- Your voice decides—it’s power supreme we feel
- To fix—or take an author from the wheel. (49)

Prologues and epilogues customarily framed plays in the eighteenth-century theatre. As part of the revision process, playwrights sometimes added play prefaces or epilogues based on the reactions of the first-night audience. Since *The Author on the Wheel* was performed only once, this epilogue was most likely written for the first performance. It seems clear that the author knows the audience’s powerful presence and addresses them directly at the end of *The Author on the Wheel*. When Mask moves to give this address to the spectators, he occupies not only a corporeal place onstage, but also occupies a role as liaison as well, and physically divides the
spectators from performers while acting as a conduit from the audience to the cast, crew, and author.

It is fitting that this fourth and final onstage fictional place represented in *The Author on the Wheel* is not really a defined place at all. It is in this moment of Mask’s epilogue spoken directly to the audience that the onstage fictional space meets the performance space. The audience now shifts simultaneously into the roles of both performer and critic. The character Mask addresses the audience as another character and relinquishes all agency to the public, with “Your voice decides—it’s power supreme we feel / To fix—or take an author from the wheel” (49). Mask turns the gaze of the audience back on itself, as the fate of the author, actors, and manager lies squarely in the house.

Though “audience space” never functions as an onstage fictional place as defined by McAuley, its presence is inescapable. At one point during the cutting session in the green room, Drama suggests that they cut the speeches given by the character of Sir Politic Party. Those speeches being “very improper,” the only option Drama sees is to cut them out entirely. Vainwit stridently objects, but Drama insists with:

**Drama.** Sir they must not be spoken again. If they were I should not be surprised at their [the audience] pulling the house down.

**Vainwit.** /aside/ I wish they would and bury you in the ruins. (42)

Drama remains steadfast in his opinion and cuts the speeches out. Tellingly, he uses a vivid metaphor to create the image of the audience physically damaging the theatre building itself by “pulling the house down.” The theatre of the play swells with kinetic potential and seems almost ready to burst from the inside out. In *The Author on the Wheel*, fictional spaces fluidly shift and
change hands, but it is the audience, I argue, that retains ultimate power over all spaces: theatrical, textual, and material. All the fictional onstage places remain backstage, but the house cannot help but to repeatedly stand center stage.

Offstage Fictional Place

Turning now to the second category in Gay McAuley’s taxonomy of spatial function, we meet the array of fictional places that exists offstage in the world of the play. As detailed above, *The Author on the Wheel* kept the onstage fictional world securely enclosed within the backstage of a theatre. The offstage fictional places in the play range from other rooms and spaces in the theatre to the whole city of London. McAuley refers to the work of Tim Fitzpatrick, author of “The Dialectics of Space-Time: Dramaturgical and Directorial Strategies for Performance and Fictional World” in the volume *Performance from Product to Process*, while describing the need for the multiples categories within offstage fictional place:

> [H]ere it does seem that we need a number of subcategories, for the function of the fictional place does change, depending on its location in relation to presentational space, stage space, and even audience space. Tim Fitzpatrick uses the terms *localized* and *unlocalized* to refer to the parts of the fictional world not shown onstage and suggests that there is a spectrum of possibilities concerning the extent to which this localization is specified. (McAuley 31)

The “spectrum of possibilities” in *The Author on the Wheel* encompasses both localized and unlocalized offstage fictional places, but the most meaningful places, I believe, lie in the intersection between these two categories. In this section, I travel through several potent offstage
fictional places. First, I visit the offstage fictional localized places of the play. These places include the space directly connected to the locations on the stage (for example, when the green room is the onstage fictional place, the adjacent backstage room functions as the localized offstage fictional place). Secondly, I consider the areas that fill out the category of offstage fictional unlocalized places. These places exist offstage in the fictional world of the play, but do not directly connect to the onstage fictional space (for example, since the theatre is the onstage fictional place, a pub down the road might be an unlocalized offstage fictional place). The third collection of places spirals further down the fictional matrix, because this group of places exists in the fictional world created by Vainwit’s play (for example, the house of Betty Daffadowndilly). Finally, and I believe most meaningfully, there exists a space that functions as an interstice between the localized and unlocalized offstage places: this is the place in which Vainwit’s play was performed and received, that is, the fictional theatre in *The Author on the Wheel*. The spaces of this fictional theatre transcend the categories of the taxonomy and provide compelling settings for spectator / performer interaction. Examining the spaces of the theatre imaginatively manifested offstage in *The Author on the Wheel* illuminates the rapidly shifting roles of all involved in the eighteenth-century London theatre world.

**Offstage Fictional Place: Localized Off**

The onstage fictional world of *The Author on the Wheel* exists solely in the backstage areas (or practitioner spaces) of a theatre. As demonstrated in the first section, the areas represented onstage include “a Room in the theatre,” the green room, and another unspecified backstage area which may or may not be the first “Room in the theatre.” The practitioner spaces
in this play are especially important because they show the business of theatre from the manager’s, prompter’s, author’s, and actors’ perspectives. Each character comes to Vainwit’s play with slightly (or greatly) different goals. Drama the manager wants to put on a successful play in order to make money. Harwood the prompter desires the same outcome for similar reasons. The actors want to put on a good play to make money but also to further their careers with a good performance. All the practitioners depend on successful productions for their livelihoods. This imbues the practitioner spaces with an additional weight not necessarily found in the spectator areas of the theatre. Patrons of the theatre were very involved in the productions to be sure, but it is the practitioners who depended on the theatre to provide money for food and shelter. In this sense, the practitioner spaces of the theatre provide areas for opportunity as well as for failure. Much is on the line at this theatre, and the ramifications of a bad show hit each practitioner close to home.

As both performers and spectators make their respective ways to the theatre in The Author on the Wheel, it is helpful to remember one of Gay McAuley’s descriptions of these journeys: “the theatre building is one that emphasizes this sense of inward progression” (51). Both parties move closer and closer towards the stage seeking enjoyment, employment, or a combination of the two. The audience navigates spaces separate from those inhabited by the practitioners. But both follow a path of inward progression. What makes The Author on the Wheel unique, however, is that the fictional characters in the play congregate, interact, and disperse in/from the green room, not the stage. The stage in the case of The Author on the Wheel is the imminent matter at hand (no one wants to repeat the last night’s awful performance) but that stage is only realized in the memory of each person present in the green room. The physical
space occupied by the characters lies beside the stage; the inward progression in this case landed slightly off-target. But in fact the play does take place in the actual, physical space of the Drury Lane theatre and stacks the fictional and physical worlds of the theatre one on top of the other. The draw towards the stage in this case is so strong that even harbored in the green room, *The Author on the Wheel* cannot help but be pulled back onto the stage.

**Offstage Fictional Place: Unlocalized Off**

We now turn to the spaces unlocalized in relation to (or not directly connected to) the onstage fictional place. Since the theatre for all of the characters in *The Author on the Wheel* functions as a place for work, offstage therefore should function as a place of rest. It is fitting, then, that several of the offstage fictional places in *The Author on the Wheel* are the homes of the theatre practitioners. Since the theatre to these people is a place of employment, they must have a house to which to retire at the end of the day. Though setting the play in a workplace does not necessarily preclude any domestic issues from occurring in the story, this play confines its subjects to the production of theatre. No families are mentioned, nor are any real day-to-day issues outside of work. However, the homes of several characters make it into the script, as I demonstrate in this section. The inclusion of references to homes reveals much about the practices of theatre practitioners in this time period and contributes to the overall fictional world of the play.

*The Author on the Wheel* reveals an eighteenth-century theatre practice through the very first offstage fictional place mentioned. The play refers to the home of one of the principal ladies (which character this lady plays is not indicated). After the manager Drama asks the prompter
Harwood if the performers are assembled and ready to alter Vainwit’s script, Harwood answers with:

PROMPTER. Most of the gentlemen are here, sir, but one of the principal ladies has sent word she has a violent cold and cannot attend the rehearsal this morning.

DRAMA. Ah! The old excuse. She has sent her part I hope.

PROMPTER. Yes sir, and she desires if you intend cutting or adding anything to it you’ll let her have it as soon as possible that she may have time to be perfect at night.

DRAMA. I shant trouble her with any great addition—give me the manuscript and call the performers. (32)

Since the actress has a cold, she stays at home instead of coming in to attend the revision session. She performed in the show the night before, as evinced by the need to study her part again if it was going to be changed. This brief conversation touches upon a practice of actors at theatre such as Theatre Royal Drury Lane in the eighteenth century. Plays produced during this time tended to be part-based instead of whole-based. Tiffany Stern writes at length about the ways in which part-based rehearsing and revising was part of a broader part-based appreciation of theatre from both the performers’ perspectives and the audiences’ perspectives. In her conclusion of the chapter on Garrick, Stern writes:

As actors rather than plays were the focus of late eighteenth-century theatre… many alterations were actor- and part-related, rather than play-related… Group rehearsals failed to make the actors aware of the play as a whole or of their common goal in performing it together, because that was not the emphasis of
acting. The possession of parts, the stress on private instruction, even the benefit
system itself, which made certain nights more financially lucrative for one actor
than for another, promoted the idea of the individual against the group; this was
reflected in the ways that plays were written and revised. (287, 289)

The Author on the Wheel demonstrates this characteristic of eighteenth-century theatre in the
previous dramatic exchange between Drama and Harwood. The principal lady, though at least
providing the reason of a bad cold, did not come in to help revise the play. She felt content to
rest at home, to study a revised copy of her part, and then to perform it that night. The manager
did not seem particularly concerned with this situation, and even casually suspected her of
fabricating the story. This supports Stern’s argument of the part-based system. The show could
easily be revised then put up that same night even without all the actors present for the entire
process.

For my study, I find it intriguing to consider the offstage fictional location of the actress’s
home. Spatially, it figures into the world of the play, but the actual distance between this
offstage place and the onstage place of the theatre is unknown. It is clear that it is a distance
travelable in a short period of time, for she has “sent word” of her illness and also “sent her
part.” She expects to have her revised part back to her at home in order to study for the
performance that evening. The actress’s home cannot be a great distance from the theatre. A
messenger will carry her part to and from the theatre; this supports the argument for part-based
theatre in the eighteenth-century. The actress will perform with the rest of the cast that evening,
but she will rehearse and prepare in isolation. Because Vainwit ultimately takes his manuscript
and leaves, he forces the cast to put on a production that is already in their repertoire. Hopefully
the actress is familiar with her parts in *The Tempest* and *The Devil to Pay*. The play-within-a-play’s onstage fictional place will change, but the offstage fictional places remain the same. The theatre practitioners’ homes remain stationed in relation to the theatre and create a solid foundation on which the fictional places may morph and slide.

The spatial relation of a person’s home (whether a practitioner or a spectator) to the theatre proves an important factor in the overall production and reception of a show. Scholars have theorized about the impact of the journey to the theatre before a show even begins. Susan Bennett, author of *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, emphasizes the journey to the theatre in the spectator’s overall reception of the performance. Bennett asks several questions which influence the spectator’s experience: How did he or she get to the theatre? How much did the tickets cost? Is the entertainment part of a larger vacation? (125). She references Richard Schechner’s take on the journey to the theatre, and states: “All such elements of the gathering process are bound to the influence the spectator’s preparation for the theatrical event, and Schechner suggests that the process undertaken by the audience resembles the actors’ preparation [from *Essays on Performance Theory 1970-1976*, pg. 122]. Both, he argues, set in place the theatrical frame” (Bennett 125).

Schechner’s suggestion regarding both the actor’s and spectator’s journey into the theatre is especially apt for my investigation. The spectator’s physical journey to the theatre plays a large role in his/her transformation into an “audience member” from a “civilian.” The performer’s physical journey to the theatre plays a large role in his/her transformation into “character” from “civilian.” Both groups, in *The Author on the Wheel*, navigate the city of London in order to meet in the performance space; without either, the show will not exist. This
is another example of the constantly-changing roles of those involved in the theatre: civilians transform into performers and spectators, and then all transform theoretically into practitioners. Every person in the theatre building contributes to the life of the show, and therefore practices the art of theatre; it’s just a matter of entering through the front door or the back.

Returning to the geographical places of the characters, the principal lady is at home with a cold while “most of the gentlemen are here [in the green room]” (32). After introducing Vainwit as a friend and not the author in the green room during the second scene, Drama suggests cutting the scene with Betty and Tom Touchet. Though Vainwit objects persistently, Drama nevertheless insists that the scene should be cut. Drama decides he wants to hear the actress’s thoughts on whether the scene should be cut. Mrs. Exit (the actress playing Betty) has not yet arrived to the green room, so Drama inquires to the prompter:

DRAMA. Harwood see if Mrs. Exit is come—I should be glad to hear her sentiments.

PROMPTER. Sir I beg pardon—I forgot to give you a note she sent this morning. Here it is sir.

DRAMA. Let’s see (opens the note and reads) Mrs. Exit presents her regrets to Mr. Drama. The character she endeavored to sustain last night being it so gross and indecent a nature and thinking it may be very well spared, hopes he will not be offended at her declining to perform it a second time. There sir, you hear the Lady’s opinion. (39-40)
Mrs. Exit, just like the principal lady in scene one, has sent in a note to the theatre announcing her absence. Though in Mrs. Exit’s case, she announces that she will be absent from the performance that night. Harwood, acting as liaison between the actors at home and the manager at work, receives and delivers the notes to Drama. This message system is integral to the inner workings of the theatre, both in the fictional theatre presented in *The Author on the Wheel* and in the factual theatre of the eighteenth century. Through the work of messengers and the prompter, the actresses call in sick and even refuse to perform. How did the spatial configuration of the city play out practically in the communication between theatre practitioners?

The book *Restoration and Georgian England, 1660-1788* edited by David Thomas provides an invaluable source of documentary evidence on theatre in Europe throughout the time period mentioned in the title. In a particularly revealing entry entitled “The trials of a prompter,” Mr. Hopkins, prompter at Drury Lane for over twenty years, records his experience with the message system between actors and the manager:

Thursday 21st [September 1769]. Wrote to Mr. Barry to know when they could play. Received a letter from him on Monday, desiring they might be excused playing till Saturday sennight [week] as they were both ill [Mr. Barry and Mrs. Barry]; and write to him the same day desiring they would send me word what play they would choose to appear in and when they would rehearse. Received a letter on Thursday 28th that the soonest they could appear would be the latter end

4 With both Mrs. Exit and Mrs. Rant now secured away at home, there is now no need for actresses to perform in *The Author on the Wheel*. The extent to which this was a conscious choice on the part of the author, I do not know. But the play does not require any female actresses.
of the next week. May play King Lear on Sat 7th of October. (as quoted in Thomas 392)

The letters back and forth from the prompter to Mr. and Mrs. Barry continue: the husband and wife providing more and more excuses, and Hopkins trying harder and harder to demonstrate patience. The letters end with a letter to Mrs. Barry from Garrick who wrote that “he would never ask her to play in anything in which he was particularly interested” (as quoted in Thomas 393).

*The Author on the Wheel* dramatized the message system in the eighteenth century that provided communication as well as frustration for theatre prompters and managers. Mrs. Rant used the message system to call in sick, but Mrs. Exit used the message system to relay her unwillingness to perform such a role again. Though at home and removed from the meeting, the actresses share a place in the green room vicariously through their letters. The opinion of Mrs. Exit solidifies Drama’s decision; after hearing that she refuses to play that part again, he feels certain that the part of “Betty” must be cut. Mrs. Exit’s absence in this situation demonstrates more than her presence. She stays geographically apart from the theatre, and then becomes separated permanently from the play by the stroke of a pen. The power of the pen (whether composing a note to the manager or striking a line from the play) is mighty indeed.

The unlocalized offstage fictional places such as the homes of the actors call attention to the wider space of the city. As I imagine the prompter or a messenger journeying across the city to Mrs. Exit’s home, waiting for a response, and then traveling back, the paths around the theatre factor into the production of the show just as much as the paths traveled in the theatre building itself. The interplay between the represented places on the stage and the actual places of the city
might have been amusing for the audience to imagine, as they could picture the different ways which one might walk to, enter, and leave the theatre space.

In *City / Stage / Globe: Performance and Space in Shakespeare’s London*, D. J. Hopkins considers the interchange between the city of London and the performances in the London theatres and the London city streets in the early modern period. Though Hopkins deals with the city of London in the time of Shakespeare, his argument in some instances can also be applied to my research. He states:

That the city and its history had an influence on Shakespeare is hardly in question, but the critical corollary of this influence is more challenging, and, for this inquiry, more important: the representation of city space in Shakespeare’s plays influenced the physical space of the city. At a time of particularly acute social dynamism in London, the public theatre played a part in deciding what the city was, and what it could become. (155-156)

Though *The Author on the Wheel*, a very tiny play in the history of London theatre, may not have influenced the city of London in any great way, it just may have influenced the space of the theatre. As the characters in the play negotiated the performance space, practitioner space, and audience space of the fictional theatre, they also negotiated the spaces of London in the fictional drama surrounding Vainwit’s (fictional) play. *The Author on the Wheel*, through its offstage fictional places, inscribed in the minds of the audience a particular picture of the city of London that may have influenced their own paths and trajectories through the city. In doing so, the spaces of the fictional play and the factual city collide while continually vying for center stage.
Places and Spaces in Vainwit’s Play

The next group of offstage fictional places in *The Author on the Wheel* also reveals an inward progression, but in this instance the places progress further towards the realm of the fictional, and not towards the stage. The fictional places in this group constitute both the onstage fictional places and the offstage fictional places (both localized and unlocalized) in Vainwit’s play. Vainwit’s play takes place somewhere, and though the whole plot is not explicitly stated, the characters do name some of the places represented on the fictional stage. These places include, for example, the house of Sir Thomas Overgrown and Tom Touchet’s master’s house. Drama suggests a cut in the first act:

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DRAMA. … here Betty Daffadowndilly, the country girl, accompanied by the Beadle of the parish, goes to the house of Sir Thomas Overgrown to swear a child to Tom Touchet the Valet de Chambre. (38)
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Vainwit, of course, protests, but Drama persists and suggests yet another scene to be cut: when Tom Touchet is forced from his master’s house. In an instant two onstage fictional locations in Vainwit’s play become offstage fictional locations in *The Author on the Wheel*. The audience of *The Author on the Wheel* would be expected to keep locations such as Thomas Overgrown’s house in the realm of the imaginary, a world separate from the fictional world of the performers. These locations become doubly fictional (fictional characters discussing fictional places they have represented onstage) while sliding from the offstage fictional category to the onstage fictional category in their world. Vainwit fights to keep the locations in, while the others battle to cut them out. Either way, these offstage fictional places will enjoy a space in the imagination of the audience, as well as in the (fictional) memories of the actors.
One final note regarding the offstage fictional places in *The Author on the Wheel* is necessary before moving to the more substantial collection of areas in the fictional theatre. Several times in the play, characters reference the larger (newspaper-reading) public. As Drama and Vainwit hatch their plan to sneak him into the cutting session, Drama notes the good fortune Vainwit has run into:

DRAMA. However sir as the piece has met with disapprobation ‘tis lucky that you have not publicly avowed yourself the Author, because if ill natured pinions are rumored abroad, you will at least have the satisfaction of lying concealed. (35)

And later, after Vainwit storms out with his manuscript, he threatens:

VAINWIT. I’ll exercise the power of the pen against this theatre, and puff the other into fashion. I’ll prejudice the public to consider this a mere bore, and make the other as popular and attractive as the Learned Pig.5 (44)

Drama desires to help keep Vainwit’s reputation intact “abroad,” while Vainwit later threatens to attack Drama’s theatre in the “public.” Both references alert the audiences’ attention to the world outside of the theatre. Vainwit’s career may be ruined if the public thinks he writes terrible plays, while Drama’s theatre may be ruined if Vainwit can persuade the public that it is a “mere bore.” The outside world manifests itself as vitally important to those in the theatre business. Since theatre is based partially (sometimes majorly) on the preferences of the audiences, spectators influenced by rumors or preconceptions about a specific theatre or playwright may cause damage, both financial and egotistical, to the practitioners. The theatre in

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5 “Learned Pigs” were in fashion around the late 18th century. Pigs would be on display for the public to enjoy, and they reportedly could count, play cards, and tell fortunes. See Ricky Jay’s *Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women*, pages 9-23.
this situation is not an insular location separated from reality. It is, in fact, reliant on the outside places to succeed.

Because the theatre interacts so closely with the public, an interesting interplay exists between the two sides. Since, as McAuley states, “[t]heatre is an art form that plays extensively with the notions of inside and outside, particularly in relation to the onstage/offstage relationship and its use in presenting fictional world(s)” (51), The Author on the Wheel confirms this statement in its highly flexible areas of inside and outside. The inside of the fictional theatre (the theatre in which Vainwit’s play was performed) pushes its way to the forefront of the stage, and consequently to the open space of the performance area. However, the play remains stationed in the practitioner space of that theatre, so the performers perform, in a sense, behind the scenes. As the backstage areas have been described by McAuley and others as mysterious and closed, the play once again flips sides and brings these areas to the public. The public must decide, based on their own opinions as well as those of critics and friends, if the play performed meets the standards of excellence required. The public here exists in two forms (the fictional audience of Vainwit’s play and the actual audience of The Author on the Wheel), and the power of both forms is quite clear. Because Vainwit’s play hovers so precariously in the balance between the first and second night (or, more accurately, between its first and maybe last performance), the space between inside and out, between fictional and factual, and between success and failure proves most dynamic, engaging, and unpredictable.
Spaces in the (Fictional) Theatre

The most dynamic space of *The Author on the Wheel* exists amidst the multitude of spaces of in the play. *The Author on the Wheel* is set in the backstage area of a theatre, and the characters rehash the production of Vainwit’s play performed the night before in that same theatre. Therefore, the space of the theatre of performance in the fictional world of the play (not the theatre of the actual performance at Drury Lane in 1785) allows for an extremely layered and nuanced investigation using McAuley’s taxonomy of spatial function. The actors give descriptions of their negotiations of space to and from the stage, as well as descriptions of their spatial relationships with the audience. The playwright describes not only the spaces occupied by different classes of spectators, but also speculates on the spaces through which they traveled on the way to the theatre (through places that, he believes, highly influenced their reception of the play). Finally, the manager and author respectively evaluate the performance of the play in terms of the practitioner space, audience space, and performance space of the theatre; these three categories guide us through the theatrical configurations in the play and shed light on the rich, yet ever-morphing spaces of the eighteenth-century theatre. *The Author on the Wheel* thoroughly exploits the fictional and factual spaces of theatre and performance while revealing the power of the cracks and fissures that lie in between.

The theatre in question in *The Author on the Wheel* provides ample opportunity to examine the spaces of the theatres in London in 1785. It is important, however, to not accept the descriptions and situations of *The Author on the Wheel* as fact. The play appears to be an example of a play that would be produced at Drury Lane or Covent Garden around this time period. Specifically, the extant list of plays performed during this year categorizes *The Author
on the Wheel as an “entertainment” which is a shorter play performed before or after the main production (Nicoll, *History* 319). But a look into the history of the Drury Lane theatre will create a more solid basis on which to ground an investigation of the spaces of an eighteenth-century London theatre. Since the physical structure of the Drury Lane theatre in 1785 is the subject of Chapter two, in this final section on the fictional spaces of *The Author on the Wheel* I use the play text as the foundation for analysis. Information regarding audience and performer behavior during the eighteenth century factor into the study, but I focus on the spaces contained within the play. Of course, as demonstrated previously, the spaces of theatres (both real and imagined) have a hard time staying neatly contained in any one category. This always-shifting characteristic emerges as one of the theatre’s most constant qualities.

Vainwit’s spatial relationship with the audience of his play proves a fertile soil in which to dig for meaning. To review, Vainwit attended the production of his play the previous evening. The play bombed while he looked on helplessly. Of course, Vainwit blamed the audience, the performers, and the manager for the failure of the piece. According to him, his manuscript was perfect, and it would have succeeded had the players and spectators involved fulfilled their roles. As author, Vainwit’s perspective of the play was not analogous to either the actors’ or the manager’s perspectives. He sees the play from a different angle, both figuratively and literally. I believe this is why he stringently opposes any suggestion of his play’s faults. As I show, he uses his place in the theatre (both in the house and backstage) as a defense of the play.

As *The Author on the Wheel* opens, Harwood the Prompter and Drama the Manager discuss the revision and cutting session that is about to take place. After Drama mulls over the dreaded task of cutting down an author’s piece in the green room, Vainwit enters the backstage
area in a huff. His very first complaint alludes to the layout of the theatre in which his play was just performed:

VAINWIT. Mr. Drama your servant—Well sir I’ve experienced a pretty treatment from a set of hirelings. Parties sir formed and placed in all parts of the house to oppose my play—great encouragement now bestowed on the pen of genius!

Indeed I am so incensed that I’m more than inclined never to write another piece.

(33)

Vainwit’s sweeping grievance includes a whole range of areas in the “house,” though it does not acknowledge the practitioner space nor the performance space. The parties in question, according to Vainwit, were “formed and placed in all parts of the house.” The phrasing of his statement references both the intent of those opposing the piece as well as the execution of their plan. To ruin Vainwit’s play, these parties allegedly peppered the audience space with their combative presence. Vainwit’s seat in the house is not specified, but he seems to have had visual access to all these parts of the house, and he most definitely believes a conspiracy took place.

The hirelings Vainwit describes allow the reader to imagine the layout of the theatre from the perspective of several different angles.6 The first point of view Vainwit would be concerned with is the performance space, since it is his piece that is on display for the approval or disapproval from the audience. Vainwit does not see any fault whatsoever in his play and

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6 In chapter two I discuss, in great detail, the spatial arrangement of the Drury Lane theatre in 1785. Since the current chapter is concerned with the fictional spaces of The Author on the Wheel, I evaluate the spaces in the play using historical records and accounts of actual audience spaces from this time, but the main focus remains stationed in the world of the play. It is tempting to meld the two together (the fictional space of the theatre in The Author on the Wheel and the factually-documented space of Drury Lane that held the performance of The Author on the Wheel), but keeping the two worlds somewhat separate allows for greater theoretical nuance and investigation into the dynamic spaces in between and the myriad of interesting points of contact that pop up between the two.
therefore blames the audience and the performers for the disaster the night before. Claiming that
the parties formed to oppose his play were placed in all parts of the house, he describes the
striated seating arrangement of the playhouse. After Drama asks Vainwit if he believes parties
were formed against the play, Vainwit responds:

VAINWIT. Think so! Why my dear sir I know it—I can prove that dozens of
Irish-chairmen and bricklayers, laborers with concealed bludgeons went in bodies
to the one and two shilling galleries; deputy editors and puny paragraph writers
were placed in the pit: and Fish-women dressed in silk gowns and balloon hats
were hired to hiss and cry “off” during the performance. (34)

In one long sentence, Vainwit accuses audience members throughout the house while calling to
attention issues of class, gender, and social decorum. In this section I consider these remarks as
they reveal the playwright’s own prejudices as well as take a satirical stab at eighteenth-century
London audiences.

In his tirade, Vainwit first mentions the one and two shilling galleries. Ample theatre
scholarship has documented and traced the changing shape of playhouses throughout the
centuries, and the gallery proves a long-lasting staple of British houses. In his book Box, Pit,
and Gallery: Stage and Society in Johnson’s London, James J. Lynch notes both the physical
arrangement and class makeup of these spaces, stating “[a]bove the boxes and occupying most of
the rear of the theaters ranged the two galleries, to which admission could be had for as little as
one and two shillings. Here sat those at the other end of the social scale [opposite on the scale
from the patrons of the more expensive box seats]” (203). The galleries provided a view of the
performance for an affordable price; Lynch’s statement corroborates Vainwit’s description of the
galleries he is referring to as the “one and two shilling galleries” (34). The galleries occupied the back wall of the theatre, though, and sat up above the stage and the other spectators. Depending on the size of the theatre, the gallery could be as close as thirty-six feet; throughout the eighteenth century, however, theatre size increased dramatically, both in the house and on the stage (Brockett 249-250). Thus, the gallery space in the bigger theatres was pushed farther back and farther up as the space lengthened and rose.

Vainwit describes the damning spectators in the galleries as Irish-chairmen and bricklayers; since the ticket prices to these areas were the lowest of all the spaces in the theatre, it stands to reason that these “laborers” as he calls them watched the play from the galleries. The cheap seats may have attracted a more rambunctious group (spectators in the galleries often showered peas or fruit down on the performers when not particularly impressed). But far from ignoring the spectators watching from above, Lynch offers the speculation that the theatres played to the galleries for approval, even though the patrons may not have been the most socially or culturally powerful:

> It should not be thought, however, that those in the galleries were merely noisy and riotous. They must have included a large number of habitués whose approval managers and actors alike sought to gain… Garrick, for example, often found it expedient to address them directly, as in the prologues to *Desert Island* and *Florizel and Perdita*; in the latter he calls them “my hearts of oak.” And in the “Occasional Prologue,” spoken when he retired from the stage, he says: To you, ye Gods! I make my last appeal / You have a right to judge, as well as feel. (203-204)
Though the gallery spectators remained physically separate from the performers and the other audience members, theatre practitioners nevertheless courted their approval. A party, then, placed in the gallery as Vainwit alleges, would not be ignored, but would be attentively noted and even feared. Though it is not clear that the play performed was the victim of parties specifically attending to damn the play, it is clear that the gallery patrons did not approve of the performance. Whether the laborers arrived at the theatre already prejudiced against Vainwit’s play or came with an open mind, the result was the same: the play was uniformly rejected throughout the house.

The next group of theatre-goers Vainwit indicts enjoyed the performance the night before from the pit. The pit is the audience seating area directly in front of the stage on the ground floor. The pit in eighteenth-century London theatres, according to Oscar Brockett in *History of the Theatre*, was an area “raked to improve sightlines and equipped with backless benches for all spectators” (249). The price of admittance to the pit was less than the price of a box, but more than the price to the gallery. After describing the box seats and the gallery seats, Lynch states, “[b]etween these two extremes of the social order were the merchants, clerks, and professional men who made up most of the pit audience” (204). Lynch’s statement concurs with Vainwit’s description of the parties in the pit: “deputy editors and puny paragraph writers” (34). The idea of the “spectator as critic”\(^7\) recurs throughout much of the body of eighteenth-century London theatre scholarship. A newspaper writer or editor would most likely experience the performance from the pit. From there, he could see and hear the action better than from the galleries, or, in

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\(^7\) I return to the idea of the spectator as critic in the conclusion of this dissertation.
some cases, better than from the boxes. This class of patrons could more easily afford the higher
ticket prices of the pit. Vainwit simultaneously accuses this group of deliberately damming his
play while slighting their professions with his accusation and denunciation of the “puny
paragraph writers” (34). Though Vainwit looks down on these spectators, the theatre of the
eighteenth century highly valued the approval of the pit as well as the galleries. After noting
several passages from eighteenth-century plays that specifically asked for the approval of the pit,
Lynch adds the socially-minded declaration:

[I]mportant evidence of the pit’s merits is the fact that numerous prologues and
epilogues were specifically directed at the critical audience that sat there… That
such special attention was given the pit from the stage attests also the recognition
by the managers and their acting companies of the growing influence and position
of the middle class, since it was largely members of that social rank who sat there.

(205)

*The Author on the Wheel* supports this claim and places editors and writers in the pit, most likely
alongside the merchants and professional men. Vainwit does not report how specifically the pit
patrons opposed his piece, but most likely the writer and editors yelled and hissed at the actors to
show their distaste.

In his initial description of the spectators who attended the theatre solely to damn his
play, Vainwit thirdly points to the ladies occupying the boxes and accuses an unknown party of
hiring them to hiss and cry “off!” These box seats were the most expensive in the theatre. As
Lynch describes, “persons of the higher ranks of society regularly occupied the boxes, which
lined both the sides of the eighteenth-century theater and extended beyond the proscenium on
and above the stage itself” (201). Boxes gave audience members who could afford the prices a way not only to see the show, but to be seen as well. Scholars have documented the behavior of those in the boxes during this time period and pointed to the performative nature of their spectatorship. Lynch gives several examples of this practice, including in his chapter “The Audience” this piece of evidence quoted from Bluestocking Letters, New York 1826:

> The part of the audience that sat in the boxes did not always attend primarily to see the play, however, as is more than once noted by contemporaries. Mrs. Boscawen wrote to Mrs. Delany in 1770: “on Thursday, when Garrick acted, [Mrs. Montague] had Lord Chatham’s children at dinner, and carried them to the play. His lordship himself was to have been of her party (Miss Mary Pitt told me), had not the gout intervened; but for this contretemps I think my friend’s box would have been honoured with the acclamations of the upper gallery.” (Lynch 202)

As evinced by this short anecdote, the boxes functioned as a mini-stage on which the patrons could perform for the other audience members. Those in the pit could look up and see the boxes, and those in the galleries could look down into the boxes. This highlights the interconnected nature of the spectators in eighteenth-century audiences. The spectators looked at each other as well as at the stage. Since the boxes regularly held members of the higher classes, they became a showcase for fashion, wealth, and forming / dissolving relationships. This makes the case of the Fish-women even more interesting. The Fish-women Vainwit described dressed in fancy clothes and came to performance late. They “bred a disturbance” from the boxes and because of the physical structure and arrangement of the eighteenth-century theatre, the box patrons could be
seen and heard especially well. It might be easier to tune out the cries from the gallery at the back of the theatre, but the hisses and yells from the boxes must have garnered the attention of the entire crowd. Thus the audience of Vainwit’s play may have fed off the cries of the women in the boxes more than the men in the galleries or the pit. What is certain in the world of this play is that the varied spaces of the house all contributed to the spectacular failure of the author’s masterpiece. “Placed,” as Vainwit describes, these parties used their specific locations in the theatre to ruin the performance. Whether they were sent to damn the play or came without any prior conceptions, the spectators took hold of the power of the live moment and directed all awareness inward towards the house.

The audience space in The Author on the Wheel defies categorization according to Gay McAuley’s spatial taxonomy. The spaces of the audience (the pit, the boxes, and the galleries) fall into the category of “Offstage Fictional Place.” Because the characters reference the audience space of the theatre (as Vainwit does above), the places seem to fall into the subcategory “Unlocalized Offstage Space.” The unlocalized spaces do not have a physical connection to the space on the stage. A localized space, on the other hand, has a direct connection to the place represented on the stage: “Within the category of the localized off there are those places that are contiguous with those onstage, immediately accessed through a door or stairway or partially glimpsed through a window” (31). Referring to other places that may not actually be seen by the audience she continues: “There are others [spaces] more or less distant from the onstage fictional place or places, which can be brought into them or clearly associated with them via a particular entrance, an object, a gesture, or even simply a look” (31). The practitioner space of the theatre may fall in this category, as it is clear that Drama and Vainwit
walked from one room backstage to another. However, the house of the theatre is not configured textually, visually, or gesturally, and therefore it cannot be categorized as “Localized Off.” But to place the house in the category “Unlocalized Off” removes much of the dramatic tension built up in the play: the failure of the performance means more because it is only steps away from the green room in which the cast relives the awful experience. Because of the proximity of the house to the onstage fictional places, the ominous, powerful will of the audience looms over the backstage areas. Viewing the house in *The Author on the Wheel* as in-between a localized and unlocalized offstage fictional place allows the space to fluidly morph from one space into another, and preserves the ever-changing nature of this play.

The house, represented in this play by the boxes, the galleries, and the pit, makes up a portion of the theatre. The other spaces (practitioner spaces) fill out the building. So where exactly, in the fictional world of *The Author on the Wheel*, do the onstage fictional place (mainly the green room) and the offstage fictional space (the house) meet? The script does not allude spatially to the house by means of a word or gesture, as McAuley suggests. The actors describe what happened to them the night before at the horrible performance. The actors recall these events as they experienced the show from their positions upon the stage. Though the actors tell the tales to one another in the green room, they reconstitute the stage and the house imaginatively through description. The locations of the seats in the house are not characterized by their relation to the green room (the room presently filled in the actor’s fictional world), but instead characterized by their relation to the (fictional) stage. For example, as the actors trade war stories from the performance, Sock (one of the actors) positions himself on the stage in relation to the gallery:
SOCK. Why sir some pleasant gentleman upstairs, not satisfied with what she [Mrs. Rant] was saying, threw a Windsor pear with such vehemence against her headdress that it unfortunately gave way and exposed her bald pate and a few hairs of a side. Ha! Ha! (38)

Sock mentions the “gentleman upstairs” who threw a pear at Mrs. Rant. This theatre patron sat in the gallery above the pit, hence the reference to upstairs. Another actor, Thespis, tells of the apple that “came whizzing from the gods” and then remembers optimistically:

THESPIS. The Gods saluted me with a few apples and oranges, but having a large wig on they did me no other damage than making the powder fly about. (38)

All three of these examples include the gallery of the theatre. The apples, oranges, and pear came from the “gods” (a nickname for those viewing the performance from the galleries). No direct physical contact between spectator and performer occurred, nor were there any accusations of yells or hisses from the galleries. It seems the main method of communication between the galleries and the stage was the missile. This is corroborated by Vainwit’s prior description of the damning parties in the galleries:

VAINWIT. I can prove that dozens of Irish-chairmen and bricklayers, laborers with concealed bludgeons went in bodies to the one and two shilling galleries.

(34)

The gallery constitutes an unlocalized offstage location, but emerges threateningly as a location rife with intimidation to the performers and the author. Though not represented onstage or in direct connection with the stage, the gallery of the house maintains a solid, even menacing presence in *The Author on the Wheel*. It may be the stage that usually draws all the focus in the
theatre\textsuperscript{8} but in this situation it is the house that continually vies for and captures the attention of all present.

The magnetic nature of the house in \textit{The Author on the Wheel} allows the readers and spectators to visualize the real drama; that is, the performance given by the \textit{audience members} of Vainwit’s play. The main conflict of \textit{The Author on the Wheel} revolves around the performance that failed the night before. All the arguments and suggestions pertain to changing the play or keeping it the same, depending on who is voicing his opinion. Therefore, the situation of the play’s dismal failure comes into focus right from the start. Vainwit believes that groups of people came to the performance specifically hired to ruin the show in various ways. Of the “cast” in the house mentioned earlier, the Fish-women who “bred a disturbance” give the most dramatic performance both before and during the show. Their journeys to the theatre and their positions in the theatre rise to great importance when examining the fictional spaces of \textit{The Author on the Wheel}. I dive further into the movements of the accused Fish-women below to round out this investigation into the fictional spaces of this play.

It is wise at this juncture to take a step back and explore the phenomenon of the person or party who attended the theatre in order to ruin or bolster a play. Vainwit blames these parties for the failure of his play. Leo Hughes in \textit{The Drama’s Patrons} devotes a majority of his book to theatre audience behavior in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, stating: “An even more troubling problem [than pelting] occurs with what the language of the day called a cabal, a group

\textsuperscript{8} McAuley states, “A theatre building, as has often been remarked, is centripetal, and it is the stage that is at the center, seeming to exert a magnetic force on everyone entering the building, whether it is approached from the auditorium or from the practitioners’ domain” (74). Technically, I still believe this is true, but to grant that magnetic quality to the house instead of the stage opens up avenues for exploration in this work that go beyond the traditionally-centered stage.
pre-organized to cry up or down a play or player or author, often quite without regard to merit” (52-53). These groups would either yell “off,” hiss, and pelt or would clap and shout “Bravo!” Only a few years before the performance of *The Author on the Wheel*, a cabal was recorded in the diary of Sylas Neville, as described by Hughes:

> On 8 March 1781 a sharply divided audience gathered at Covent Garden to see the first performance of Frederick Pilon’s afterpiece, *Thelyphthora: or, More Wives than One*. The author had prudently raised a band of noisy supporters but found himself overwhelmed by an even larger and noisier band of opponents who had come prepared—aroused perhaps by the subtitle—to be offended. And offended they were, “even before any part of the dialogue was spoken.” (131)

Spectators so frequently formed cabals that the practice made its way into the texts of the plays. Of course, *The Author on the Wheel* incorporates cabals into its storyline. But other plays (plays even from a century earlier) include the power of the audience with a reaction to the play already formed. For example, Hughes includes a prologue from John Dryden’s *The Wild Gallant*:

> It is not strange, to hear a poet say,
> He comes to ask how you like the play?
> You have not seen it yet! Alas ‘tis true
> But now your love and hatred judge, not you.
> And cruel factions (brib’d by interest) come,
> Not to weigh merit, but to give their doome. (as quoted in Hughes 54)

With this and the many other documented reports of these parties, the impact of the cabal on theatre practice cannot be denied. A bad play might succeed and a good play might fail due to
groups intent on making their presence known. It is no wonder, then, that Vainwit immediately blames the hired parties for his dismal performance. For, according to him, Drama and the others in the company want only their own material performed at the theatre, so they decided to sabotage his play by hiring laborers, writers, and Fish-women to play the roles of the offended spectator. And it is these very Fish-women who became the evening’s stars.

Vainwit’s story of the Fish-women who were hired to oppose his play unleashes a myriad of spatial negotiations in the fictional world of *The Author on the Wheel*. The performance they put on in the house of the theatre (for Vainwit believes that they were hired to play a part) began even before they reached their seats. The Fish-women began by dressing in costume. They donned “silk gowns and balloon hats”\(^9\) (34). Fish-women made a living by selling their wares to those in the city and rested solidly in the working class of society. Dressing up in fancy clothes, it seems they attempted to conceal their identities as laborers. These women watched the show from the boxes, though. If the boxes were the most expensive seats at the theatre, how could these women afford them? Vainwit feels sure he has the answer.

Though Vainwit never names a mastermind behind the cabal, he certainly believes someone concocted and helped execute the entire scheme; this scheme morphs into a performance of grand proportion and places the women center-stage. *The Author on the Wheel* first introduces the women through Vainwit’s description. He accuses them of hissing at the performance from the boxes. But in the fictional world of the play, the women are first discovered at a pub in Vinegar Yard:

\(^9\) “Balloonomania” was a huge fad in Europe at this time, and women often wore clothing and accessories shaped like hot-air balloons (Keen).
VAINWIT. Why sir the Ladies who had places taken for them in the boxes were injudiciously entrusted with five shillings to pay for their admittance, but previous to their going to the Theatre adjourned to a house in Vinegar Yard where they spent two and six pence each in liquor, got thoroughly intoxicated, and went and bred a disturbance at half price. (34)

The ladies had places reserved for them, but spent the first half of the show at a bar. Someone gave them five shillings each and they chose to go and drink up at a local watering hole, then travel to the theatre. Since they came to see only the latter half of the show, they only paid half price for admission. The women moved through the spaces of the London streets from the pub to the theatre. Since they were hired to perform their parts as offended spectators inside the house, we might consider the pub and the streets of London the practitioner space of their little show. They dressed up at home, prepared for their roles by imbibing at the pub, and then moved toward the stage (which for them was the house). The pub and streets become once more removed from the “stage” and can be categorized as “unlocalized offstage fictional places” according to McAuley’s taxonomy (25). The women put on a very memorable performance from the boxes, even though it remains tucked away in the memories of the fictional characters of _The Author on the Wheel_.

Vainwit claims that he has proof that the ladies went to damn the play purposefully. Of course, if the actors’ and manager’s experiences give any indication it is that the whole audience hated the play for the sheer fact that it was a bad play. But Vainwit gives evidence of the ladies’ schemes. When Drama asked Vainwit how he knew the women came to oppose the piece, he replied:
VAINWIT. Why sir they were discovered by a devil who accidentally popped in at their house of rendezvous and overheard their whole conspiratory conversation while he was taking a pint of purl and bitters at the bar. (34)

If this is true (and Vainwit could very well be making this up to convince Drama that it was the audience and not the play that was faulty), then it is most likely that the area between the theatre and the bar is not a large one. The man at the bar overheard the ladies unveil the plan and then relayed that information to Vainwit sometime between the last night’s performance and the morning of the green room cutting. It may have been a local pub close to the theatre that patrons frequent before or after attending a performance. If indeed the man saw and heard the women at the pub, the performance space of the fictional world has moved once again to the area formerly known as the practitioner space. A drama is now unfolding within a drama: as the women get ready for their performance, they are actually performing (though unbeknownst to them) in front of the man at the pub. Their actions and dialogue make the pub the onstage fictional space in this instance. The spatial layout of the city then turns into a giant theatre. The performance space continually changes and the drama climaxes in the practitioner space of the green room. As The Author on the Wheel unfolds, the play’s fictional perimeters expand, contract, and reform in new areas.

Conclusions

In the fictional world of The Author on the Wheel, roles reverse, characters transform, and power flies about. This play, though tiny in the grand scheme of theatre history, enlarges in size as I continue to inspect it. As he considers the apple, Gaston Bachelard suggests that “[t]he
apple itself, the fruit, is no longer the principal thing, but the seed, which becomes the real
dynamic value” (150). Likewise, the spaces of this play grow to magnificent proportions the
more I mull them over in my mind. The forty pages of hand-written dialogue transcribed from
microfiche take up only a small section of space on my desk. But the twisting, meandering
hallways and alleys through which *The Author on the Wheel* travels go on without end. As the
characters negotiate the tension-filled spaces of the theatre, I now leave them and move to a
more factual consideration of the theatre, but one that is dynamic just the same.
CHAPTER TWO

FACTUAL SPACE

On April 18, 1785 *The Daily Universal Register* (now known as *The Times*) included a short description of the fare to be performed at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane that evening. A musical prelude entitled *Sons of Anacreon* opened the evening’s entertainment. Mr. Bannister was to sing the “celebrated Anacreontic Song” as well as perform (for that night only) two imitative songs. Next up, the theatre scheduled the three-act Shakespeare play *The Winter’s Tale*. Mr. Bannister played the part of Florizel. At the end of the night’s entertainment, for the first time, the company would put on a one-act comic sketch entitled *The Author on the Wheel; Or, a Piece Cut in the Green Room*. In this one-act entertainment Mr. Bannister would be performing several imitations to the delight of the crowd. The April 15, 1785 issue of *The Daily Universal Register* gives the reader a hint at why the April 18 performances at Drury Lane revolve around one man. April 18 was set aside as a benefit for Mr. John Bannister. Since this actor demonstrated talent in the area of imitations, *The Author on the Wheel* proved a suitable choice to show off John’s best work. When an actor gave a benefit performance, all revenue from ticket sales went directly to him or her. The actors most likely desired to put on a great, well-attended show. *Sons of Anacreon, The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Author on the Wheel* became the ingredients for Mr. Bannister’s benefit performance. It is from this archival piece of newspaper over two hundred years old that we now resume our journey of the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*.

As I explore the wandering and sometimes intersecting paths of the fictional spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*, I cannot help but let my mind wander into the actual and factual
performance of this one-act play. Describing and investigating the spaces this work inhabits in the fictional world brings a wealth of theoretical ruminations and interesting conclusions. But *The Author on the Wheel* is not a short story and it was not created to remain contained on the page. The author of the play created the fictional world of Vainwit and Drama to fill out a three-dimensional physical space. The play requires real people in a real place for activation. Imaginatively, of course, one may enter the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel* and browse through the hallways and corners as I have done. But attempting to revisit the history of that moment on the evening of April 18, 1785 may prove fruitful in a different way. For those desiring a more concrete and historical look at *The Author on the Wheel*, I dedicate this chapter to you. From the newspaper clippings documenting the performance, to the hand-written manuscript with lines crossed out and added, to the biography of John Bannister, to the dimensions of the stage and backstage of Drury Lane, the evidence in this chapter will slowly solidify around the fictional areas of *The Author on the Wheel* and create an historically-sound archive of this play and its performance.

In order to do this, I break this chapter down into two major sections. First, I inspect the architectural spaces of Drury Lane in 1785. I survey the changing shape and space of the building in an attempt to describe the stage and backstage areas. Secondly, I examine the extant documents that record the performance of *The Author on the Wheel* on April 18, 1785. This section includes what little information survives concerning on the performance of the play. I uncover the actors, managers, and even audience members involved in the production. I investigate the archival evidence from newspapers, contemporary biographies, and the manuscript itself. As the first section assembles the physical space of *The Author on the Wheel*,
the second section amasses the more fleeting, but still traceable qualities of the performance (the bodies congregated in the space for that moment). Moving from the hard, static walls of the theatre building to the moving, interacting bodies in the performance, I argue that *The Author on the Wheel* continually negotiates space while shifting from fictional to factual place. Though it may be argued that all plays accomplish this feat to some degree, *The Author on the Wheel* thrives in the slippage between and amongst the performance space, practitioner space, and the audience space both in the fiction of the story and the factual dimensions of the theatre.

*The Author on the Wheel*, in both story and performance, provides a time and place for both people and places to try out new roles. For example, the performance space of Theatre Royal Drury Lane gets to play the part of practitioner space. Mr. Bannister gets to play the character of Mask who consequently performs imitations of other actors. The audience space of the theatre becomes a temporary performance space when the fish-women use the boxes as a stage for their theatrical debut. And the actors in Vainwit’s play quickly become spectators in a dangerous drama when apples and oranges come flying toward their heads. What becomes apparent in this list of changes and shifting roles is that the role depends on the perspective. Each individual comes to the theatre (and, as I will demonstrate later on, leaves the theatre) with a specific and distinctive viewpoint and identity. Who performs depends on who watches, and who watches depends on the time and place. Factual space does exist, but it is accessible through a viewpoint.

The way that I approach this chapter, then, is that I illuminate specific perspectives and see what can be seen through each set of eyes. History comes to my hands through the eyewitness accounts of performers and spectators sifted through the scholarship of researchers
and the challenges of time. Like the insect (or periwinkle) in the magnifying glass, when one looks closely through a specific lens, the small grows to magnificent proportions. Observing the space from a few singular viewpoints I hope will show the grandeur of Theatre Royal Drury Lane, if not in total, then in a “best of” highlighted tour.

“Pepys Behind the Curtain”

Traveling back through time past The Author on the Wheel and past Mr. Bannister’s benefit performance, we visit Theatre Royal Drury Lane at its infancy. Even before Charles II bestowed upon the theatre its official birth certificate in the form of a legal charter, London felt the kicks of Drury Lane. From 1649-1660 the Puritanical regime under Oliver Cromwell attempted to erase the performative leanings of the English public, but of course the desire and will for theatre could never totally be squelched:

Appetites for plays had been sharpened by the eighteen-year fast since 1642 when Crowell’s Puritans closed down every playhouse and imposed legal penalties, even imprisonments, upon those rash enough to bring a little histrionic colour into a grey Puritan world… theatre became something of an underground activity. Like Chicago speak-easies, Commonwealth theatres were prone to raids. Evidence exists to show that audiences were seized by troops and fined on the spot or imprisoned. Actors naturally suffered the same fate if their illegal activities were known. (Dobbs 4)

This theatrical bubbling erupted in full fashion with the downfall of the Commonwealth of England. In 1639 Charles II, newly restored to the throne of England, issued a charter to
William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew that granted exclusive theatre rights to the two men. Davenant headed the Duke’s Company while Killigrew took charge of the King’s Company (Brockett 236). Killigrew and the King’s Company built a new theatre in London to capitalize on the city’s newfound theatrical freedom. W. J. MacQueen-Pope, author of Theatre Royal Drury Lane defends the theatre from those who might equate a name with an identity. Not initially named Drury Lane, “[t]he playhouse became known as Theatre Royal, Bridges Street. It actually stood in a field approached by a pathway from Drury Lane to Bridges Street, which is now Catherine Street. It faced Bridges Street and was therefore called. But it was Drury Lane. It was Theatre Royal. The charter which made it so important is still in existence” (MacQueen-Pope 24). As the theatre transformed in both age and size, the name “Drury Lane” congealed in the history of London and the history of theatre.

The Humorous Lieutenant filled the Drury Lane stage with actors and the Drury Lane house with spectators for the first time on May 7, 1663. Samuel Pepys, ardent theatergoer of the seventeenth century, supplied a description in his diary of his experience of this play the second night (May 8) of the run. Pepys, his wife, and his brother journeyed:

to the Theatre Royall, being the second day of its being opened. The house is made with extraordinary good contrivance, and yet hath some faults, as the narrowness of the passages in and out of the Pitt, and the distance from the stage to the boxes, which I am confident cannot hear; but for all other things it is well, only, above all, the musique being below, and most of it sounding under the very stage, there is no hearing of the bases at all, nor very well of the trebles, which sure must be mended. The play was "The Humerous Lieutenant," a play that hath
little good in it, nor much in the very part which, by the King's command, Lacy now acts instead of Clun. In the dance, the tall devil's actions was very pretty.

(“Friday 8 May 1663”)

Pepys praises as well as criticizes the theatre space in this diary entry. First he calls our attention to the narrow passages leading to and from the pit, and then remarks on the distance from the stage to the boxes. Narrow passages would make the journey to the pit slower and more crowded, and the distance from the boxes to the stage would hamper volume. I will visit the Drury Lane structure(s) in more detail throughout this chapter, but for the moment I would like to meditate on Pepys’ comments in relation to Gay McAuley’s taxonomy as an introduction to the physical structure of the theatre space.

To review, McAuley’s taxonomy of spatial function first lays out the social reality of the theatre. The social reality breaks up into two main categories: the theatre space and the rehearsal space. The theatre space further divides into the audience space, practitioner space, and performance space (with the performance space bridging the audience space and practitioner spaces). Pepys understandably enters the taxonomy from the audience space; he plays the role of a spectator and not a practitioner. Note that he immediately mentions the space and not the dramatic piece. The Drury Lane theatre had just opened and the building itself served as a performance to be appreciated and critiqued just as much as the fictional performance on the stage. Pepys comments first on the architecture and secondly on the performance on the stage.

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1 Since I consider the theatre building in this instance as a performance, it is interesting to imagine that Pepys actually got to see a few rehearsals of the “show.” On February 6 of 1663, he writes that after doing business in his office he traveled “Thence to Lincoln’s Inn Fields; and it being too soon to go to dinner, I walked up and down, and looked upon the outside of the new theatre, now a-building in Covent Garden, which will be very fine” (“Diary of Samuel Pepys”). He witnessed the erection of the building and gave his opinion on the still-forming structure from
Similar to the value hierarchy I have argued for in *The Author on the Wheel*, the house holds the magnetic pull normally attributed to the stage. The fictional space occupied by the players in *The Humorous Lieutenant* could not overpower the factual space occupied by the audience.

Though Pepys’ place officially remained in the house, he could not help but wonder about the behind-the-scenes world that a practitioner would inhabit. In chapter one, I included McAuley’s interpretation of the divide between the front of house and the backstage: “it is a place of employment for some, a place of entertainment and cultural enrichment for others. The two groups have their designated areas within the space that is, in traditional theatre, quite rigidly demarcated and conceptualized in terms of front and back” (McAuley 25). The spectator accesses the space through the designated doors and hallways, while the practitioner accesses the space by means of the stage door and backstage areas. A highly palpable (though in some cases invisible) wall exists between the two areas, and the performance space connects the two at the moment of the show. The example from my experience backstage at Disneyland (page 58, footnote) demonstrates the bizarre images that can result when front meets back. As we shall see, Pepys oddly enough experienced similarly jarring images when he visited the backstage area of Theatre Royal Drury Lane. During his visit to the practitioner space of the theatre, Pepys proved that though the house in Restoration and eighteenth-century London played a key role in the factual spaces of Drury Lane, it is the *performance space* that activates the fictional space in the theatre and effectively bridges the gap between front and back. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, I argue throughout this section that the audience space does indeed the outside. His word choice that the theatre *will* be very fine indicates his understanding of the building as in process and preparing for its starring role in the city.
play a large part in the drama of the theatre, but the specific time and place transform the
audience space into a temporary performance space. Bridging the gap between the front and the
back, then, creates a unique space for a moment in time in which performers, practitioners, and
spectators can all try out new roles.

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through a specific lens, the small grows to magnificent proportions. Observing the space from a
few singular viewpoints I hope will show the grandeur of Theatre Royal Drury Lane, if not in
total, then in a “best of” highlighted tour.
Pepys’ self-guided backstage tour of Drury Lane occurred on the 19 of March in 1666. The Great Plague of London forced the closing of Drury Lane and Lincoln’s Inn Theatre on June 5 of 1665; the theatres did not open again until November 29, 1666 (MacQueen-Pope 47). Thomas Killigrew used the down time for some interior renovations that included the widening of the stage (47). On the evening of March 19, Pepys crossed over from front to back and saw the inner-workings or Drury Lane:

… my business here was to see the inside of the stage and all the tiring-rooms and machines; and, indeed, it was a sight worthy seeing. But to see their clothes, and the various sorts, and what a mixture of things there was; here a wooden-leg, there a ruff, here a hobbyhorse, there a crown, would make a man split himself to see with laughing; and particularly Lacy’s wardrobe, and Shotrell’s. But then again, to think how fine they show on the stage by candle-light, and how poor things they are to look now too near hand, is not pleasant at all. (as quoted in Latham and Matthews 76-77).

For Pepys, the performance space effectively transforms the costumes and props into something “fine” from something “poor.” As he admits, the clothes are the same both on the stage and backstage, but the location of these clothes infuses them with a life beyond their materiality. Nothing has really changed of Lacy’s wardrobe, but the moment the costume enters the physical area of the performance space, the clothing hovers magnificently in the gaps between fact and fiction and between performer and spectator. Space in this instance makes all the difference in the (factual and fictional) world.
Pertinent to this discussion of Pepys’ disillusionment, McAuley contends that “[t]he experience of the theatergoer is one of penetration further and further into the building until one reaches the point beyond which one cannot go, the point that Iain Mackintosh does not hesitate to designate a ‘magical area,’ the place where ‘the worlds of audience and actor interconnect’” (McAuley 50). Though his curiosity compelled him, Pepys may have regretted his choice to cross the divide between the front and back. The “magical area” Mackintosh describes does not happen by chance. Keeping the world of the performer and the world of the spectator separate fortifies the performance space with this magic and further inscribes the stage with a value not present in either the front of house or backstage. Pepys visited the backstage without the activating agent of the performance space; without that, the backstage loses the potency it holds because of its proximity to the stage.

Pepys’ peep behind the curtain, I feel, serves as an apt introduction to my chapter on the factual spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane. He illuminates the marked difference between front and back while arguing for the performance space’s magical, transforming power. Connecting these ideas back to *The Author on the Wheel*, I still argue for the captivating draw of the house as opposed to the captivating draw of the stage. As the actors playing Vainwit and Drama performed in the performance space of Drury Lane, a connection sparked between the performers and the spectators present on April 18, 1785. But fictionally, all dialogue focused on the audience of Vainwit’s play. Because *The Author on the Wheel* already plays with the idea of the “magical area” by propelling the backstage of a theatre out into the open, the areas once so meticulously separate now seem to materialize in new locations. The green room is onstage and the house is offstage. Like pulses of light, the spaces of the theatre flare up with meaning only to
be snuffed out again and reignited with new identity. *The Author on the Wheel* manipulates the experience of the theatergoer through the exploitation of these highly-charged spaces: the audience space, the practitioner space, and the performance space. As we probe the morphing spaces as well as the overlaps and fissures in between, the theatre remains, as Pepys describes, “a sight worthy seeing.”

As Pepys experienced first-hand, the different areas of the theatre matter both spatially and temporally. Spatially, the places in the theatre differ in potency based on who possesses visual access to the space. For example, the stage holds great power (as well as danger) because of its relation to the audience: two hundred pairs of eyes directed toward the stage raise the stakes associated with the stage space as opposed to the stakes associated with those of a non-watched area. The “non-watched” spaces of the theatre include the backstage areas such as the green room and dressing rooms as well as the wings and unused portions of the stage. In addition, the boxes in the house held great power because of their relation to both the stage and the rest of the house. The spectators of the box, pit, and galleries could gaze upon those occupying the boxes and critique what they saw. But these spaces matter temporally as well because of this very performer / spectator binary. The stage does not hold the power it does all the time; only when the gaze of the audience is on the stage does it become the “magical area.” Rehearsals do not have the same kinetic potential that performances hold. *Who* is watching *what* and *when* all must come together in a single moment to produce meaning: and *where* this moment takes place allows it to happen at all.

As we consider *The Author on the Wheel* existing in its own spatio-temporal moment, the space of *where* requires close scrutiny. As noted above, Theatre Royal Drury Lane opened its
doors on Bridges Street to audiences on April 8, 1663 (Koenig 16). The theatre remained open until the Great Plague of London forced its closure from June 5, 1665 to November 29, 1666 (Koenig 19). During this closure, Killigrew utilized the time to alter the interior of the theatre and widen the stage (MacQueen-Pope 48). From the time of the renovations, the theatre’s physical exterior and interior remained frozen, even through the devastating Great Fire of London in September of 1666 (Thomson 3). Unfortunately the theatre ran out of luck and succumbed to fire in 1672; the theatre and surrounding buildings burned to the ground. Dobbs includes a letter found by scholar Hazleton Spencer which reads:

A fire at the King’s playhouse between 7 and 8 pm on Thursday evening last [25 Jan 1672] which half burned down the house and all their scenes and wardrobe; and all the houses from the Rose Tavern in Russell Street on that side of the way to Drury Lane are burned and blown up, with many in Vinegar Yard²; 20,000 l. in damage. The fire began under the stairs where Orange Moll keeps her fruit. Bell the player was blown up. (as quoted in Dobbs 51)

This fire marks the first large-scale structural change made to Theatre Royal Drury Lane (a change admittedly neither anticipated nor appreciated). The next structure built to accommodate the drama of Drury Lane would include the walls that would surround Drama, Vainwit, and the rest of the players in 1785. It is to these walls that we now turn for an investigation of the factual spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*.

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² Vainwit accused the ladies in the boxes at the performance of his play of imbibing heavily before the show at a pub in Vinegar Yard (32). Here it is clear that Vinegar Yard inhabited an area very close to the theatre, and this makes it possible for the ladies to drink at the pub then walk over to the theatre. When Killigrew rebuilt the theatre, he built a scene house in Vinegar Yard (MacQueen-Pope 58); this evidence also attests to the close proximity of Drury Lane and Vinegar Yard.
The Theatre Royal “Wren-ovated”

After the devastation of the fire in 1672, Killigrew immediately started to raise money to rebuild (MacQueen-Pope 57). He recruited architect Christopher Wren to design the new theatre. Wren had designed the theatre for Dorset Gardens as well as redesigned many buildings for the city after the Great Fire of London in 1666 (Koenig 65). MacQueen-Pope writes, “All was ready on 26th March, 1674, and Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, reopened its doors for the second time” (59). Wren’s design would last 117 years, and more importantly to my study, would stand during the 1785 performance of The Author on the Wheel.

Scholars delving into the historical architecture of Theatre Royal Drury Lane turn repeatedly to a specific extant drawing (Figure 1). In his dissertation Theatre Royal Drury Lane: An Architectural Study, Bruce Koenig describes this drawing as one “found among some of Wren’s papers in the library of All Souls College, Oxford, [and] assumed by theatre historians to be the design for the Theatre Royal of 1674” (Koenig 73). Scholars differ on their own individual interpretations of the drawing’s validity. Koenig allows for some measure of error by using the term “assumed.” Richard Leacroft, author of The Development of the English Playhouse, also equivocates by stating that the drawing is “generally accepted” as a drawing of the new Drury Lane (89). The actual measurements of the theatre did not vary much from the design, and so it is, as noted, generally accepted as Wren’s design.
Koenig describes the content of the drawing as follows:

From this sectional view it is evident that the theatre had three galleries, each containing four rows of backless benches. The two lower galleries circled around the sides of the house, while the third gallery did not. Access to the upper galleries was gained by a flight of stairs located at either end of a narrow foyer. ... Ten backless benches were fixed in the sloping pit and were reached through passages located along either side of the house, under the first gallery and side boxes. ... The stage was raked, and an apron jutted out into the pit. (Koenig 73-74)

Think back to The Author on the Wheel. Vainwit described the ladies in the boxes, the writers in the pit, and the laborers in the galleries. From this drawing, the spatial layout of the fictional arrangement of space comes to life. The audience sits below, above, and around the performers
on the stage; considering this spatial layout, the imminent danger and vulnerability of those who brave to go out onstage is clear.

Wren’s drawing provides detailed evidence of Theatre Royal Drury Lane’s design. Scholar Edward A. Langhans used the design as a basis for a model of the theatre of 1674 so as to further journey into the historical spaces of Drury Lane. A photo of his three-dimensional model is below (Figure 2). The dimensions remain true to the dimensions of the drawings, and the model provides for a more imaginative experience (though a small one) of being on the stage or in the house in the late seventeenth century. The pit slopes downward to the stage and the galleries rise toward the back wall. “Corinthian pilasters” lined the side of the house (Koenig 73). These pillars may have “appeared to continue the scenic vista” (74) for the patrons in the King’s box (the box located in the first gallery, center) but for some spectators in the galleries the pillars broke up the visual access to the stage and to the rest of the house.
As noted above, the Wren-designed playhouse stood for 117 years; however, throughout those years the building saw several alterations. The most large-scale renovation took place in 1775 under the architectural guidance of Robert Adam (Leacroft 92). Before we explore Adam’s transformation of the space, I include an interesting though smaller, less-documented renovation which took place sometime between the opening of the theatre in 1674 and the year 1696. Colley Cibber, actor, manager, and playwright for Theatre Royal Drury Lane in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, included a description of the altered stage and house of Drury Lane in his autobiography *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, first published in 1740. After stating that the stage had been extended about four feet forward into the pit, Cibber also notes the addition of boxes on each side of the stage; these boxes took the place of the side door entrances. Though this change may on the surface seem to bring the actors closer to the audience and allow for greater and more intimate interaction, Cibber remarks on how the alteration technically pushed actors away from the audience:

By this Original Form, the usual Station of the Actors, in almost every Scene, was advance’d by at least ten Foot nearer to the Audience, than they now can be; because, not only from the Stage’s being shorten’d, in front, but likewise to the additional Interposition of those Stage-Boxes, the Actors (in respect to the Spectators, that fill them) are kept so much more backward from the main Audience, than they us’d to be. (225)

Immediately I am drawn to the descriptive language that suggests the backwards and forwards positioning of the actor in relation to the audience. Though the new stage was stretched out toward the house, the location of the audience forced the actor back even farther than before. In
order to be seen by those spectators in the side boxes that now sit on the stage, the actors must hug the back wall of the stage to give them even a profile view of the show. The desire for exposure to the whole house caused the actors to retreat from the edge of the stage.

This pull on the actors toward the upstage portion of the stage, according to Cibber, did not enhance the spectator’s experience. He comments on the ways which the loss of the forward portion of the stage impacted the audience’s experience, and simultaneously remembers the past stage:

But when the Actors were in Possession of that forwarder Space, to advance upon, the Voice was then more in the Centre of the House, so that the most distant Ear had scarce the least Doubt, of Difficulty inhearing [sic] what fell from the weakest Utterance: All Objects were drawn nearer to the Sense: every painted Scene was stronger; every grand Scene and Dance more extended; every rich, or fine-coloured Habit had a more lively Lustre: Nor was the Minutest Motion of a Feature (properly changing with the Passion, or Humour it suited) ever lost, as they frequently must be in the Obscurity of too great a Distance; And how valuable an Advantage the Facility of hearing distinctly is to every well-acted Scene, every common Spectator is a Judge.\(^3\) (225)

Distance, for Cibber, is the enemy. The closer the actor is to the spectator the better. The dances and scenes played better and seemed more “extended” with the close proximity. The spectator could observe even the smallest movement of the actor. Cibber ends with a comment on the

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\(^3\) Italics my own.
hearing capabilities of the audience: “hearing distinctly” proves a valuable advantage. As the actor moves physically toward the house, the spectator’s experience improves in both sight and hearing. Physical space between the performer and spectator stands as an important factor in the overall theatrical experience.

Cibber concludes his analysis of the differences between the old stage and the new stage by casting the spectators in the role of judge. His definition of a judge centers on the audible and visual capabilities of the person. Though this may seem exceedingly obvious (for how can one judge a play without hearing or seeing it?) it does complicate the notion of the spectator as critic in the eighteenth century. As mentioned earlier in chapter one, groups of spectators often formed cabals or parties to oppose a play. Vainwit almost exclusively blames these parties for the failure of his play. How the spectator decides to play this role of judge or critic can determine the outcome of either wild success of miserable failure, or of anything in between. The role of judge, then, emerges as one of the most important in the performance of theatre. The spectator in the house holds a great amount of power over the actor, playwright, and theatre practitioner. The performance in (and by) the house shifts the focus of the theatre from the stage and into the galleries, boxes, and pit. The characters in the house, then, must decide whether to play their roles with a predetermined script or try their hand at improvisation.

Though I return to a discussion of the spectator as critic in the conclusion of this dissertation, I would like now to point out how the real-life experiences of both actors and audience members verify this idea within the factual space of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. Using Pepys and Cibber as examples, it is clear that the location of both things and people highly impact the dissemination and reception of the theatrical text. Space materializes as the key factor
of the theatrical experience. Pepys encountered props and costumes in the “wrong” space and felt somewhat disillusioned. Cibber played on stages both closer to and farther away from the house. In both cases, a shift in the space caused the shift in experience. As roles and stage move throughout the house, backstage, and performance space, the right (both perceived and sanctioned) to judge a performance travels about the theatre space but ultimately gravitates toward the house. The magical power of the stage, in this case, repeatedly relinquishes its enticing persuasiveness to the box, pit, and gallery.

Wren Remodeled: Adam Brothers, 1775

Continuing on in our journey to the 1785 theatre of The Author on the Wheel, we arrive at the only major renovation of Wren’s 1674 Theatre Royal Drury Lane. One hundred years after Wren designed the theatre, David Garrick (who became the sole manager of Theatre Royal in 1774) chose to execute a “complete remodelling [sic]” (Nicoll, Garrick 44). Allardyce Nicoll, in his 1980 The Garrick Stage: Theatre and Audience in the Eighteenth Century, attempts to account for Garrick’s decision by stating that “towards the end of Garrick’s active career, however, many changes in taste were becoming evident, and, in particular, the Wren style of architecture was beginning to seem somewhat old-fashioned and ponderous” (44). Garrick employed the architect Robert Adam to makeover the theatre.

Following Gay McAuley’s charge to acknowledge the sense of “inward progression” that the theatre building emphasizes (51), I now turn to the renovations made by Robert Adam in 1775 starting at the building’s point of contact between the inside and the outside. As McAuley argues:
The major function of any building, theatre, or simple dwelling place, is to mark the distinction between inside and outside… [Due in part to this distinction], the experience of the theatergoer is one of penetration further and further into the building until one reaches the point beyond which one cannot go, the point that Iain Mackintosh does not hesitate to designate a “magical area,” the place where “the worlds of audience and actor interconnect.” (49-50)

The outer façade of a theatre building sets the tone for what is to come. Since the theatre experience is largely centered on the aforementioned practice of moving in further and further, the initial threshold crossed marks a key moment in the overall transformation from regular person to audience member (and, in some cases, theatre critic). Adam’s renovation changed the initial encounter audience members experienced at Theatre Royal Drury Lane. Instead of negotiating the small alley-way outside the theatre leading to the pit and box doors, the spectators now saw the “imposing new entrance” on Bridges Street which “gave the public a foretaste of what they were to view inside” (Nicoll, Garrick 45-46). This would substantially impact the reception of the performance, even if only subconsciously. Though theatre buildings actuate the change from outside to inside in varying ways, “each provide a different experience of crossing the threshold for the theatergoer, [and] require a different kind of physical and mental effort” (McAuley 51).

This physical and mental effort required to enter into the theatre space most definitely impacted the experience of the spectator, but in what precise ways it is harder to tell. Richard Leacroft includes the reaction from an audience member who enjoyed the redesigned path from inside to outside: “The Stairs to the second and third tiers of Boxes I found were projected out of
the House beyond the Old Walls, which gives a space to make them much wider and more convenient” (as quoted in Leacroft 95). The stairs to the boxes and galleries required a physical effort as McAuley describes; climbing up to the third floor started out a theatergoer’s experience with a challenge for the body. This physical challenge did not exist as much for the spectator in the pit who stayed on the ground floor for the entirety of his or her evening. However, for the pit dweller, more of a mental effort may have been required. The pit often included a negotiation through the crowd in addition to an effort to avoid any projectiles hurled from the galleries. Each different experience of “crossing the threshold” would influence the individual spectator’s reception of the performance, and therefore alter (slightly or heavily) the spectator’s own performance in the house.

Leacroft includes a different reaction to the renovated staircase as experienced by Tate Wilkinson (English actor in the late eighteenth century) who alludes to the danger inherent in live performance, both for the actor and the spectator:

[a]t present the stair-case to the Upper boxes at Drury Lane is so narrow, that should an alarm of fire happen, the persons in the two upper tiers of boxes would be thrown into such confusion, should they open at the same time the different doors, the passage is so strait and they would so effectually block up each other, that not one single soul should escape (as quoted in Leacroft 96)

Up until this point, the examples I have included all assess the experience of the spectator in regards to the experience of entering the theatre space. McAuley’s description of the penetration into the space further and further concerns a person going into a space and effectively shifting from the role of average citizen to the role of audience member. In contrast, Wilkinson’s
assessment of the space focuses on the spectator’s (possible) experience of exiting the theatre. 
This description flips the idea of penetration to one of withdrawal. The experience of leaving the 
theatre may very well influence the spectator just as much as the experience of entering. As I 
will show, Wilkinson’s remarks on the space of Theatre Royal Drury Lane provocatively shed 
light on the spectator’s experience with inside and outside, as well as on the unwieldy, 
connecting paths in between.

As discussed earlier in chapter one, the entrances and exits of characters on the stage bear 
meaningful weight. According to Gay McAuley the exit (a character’s movement from onstage 
to offstage), “activate[s] the offstage as fictional place” (McAuley 98). The act of a spectator 
leaving the theatre does not exactly correlate to the act of a character leaving the stage. 
However, a similar transformation of identity does occur. The boundaries of the stage and the 
boundaries of the theatre building both function as the physical interface between the inside and 
the outside. As the eighteenth-century spectator often slipped effortlessly into the role of critic, 
so the actor slipped into the role of character. The thresholds between the fictional and 
nonfictional and between the inside and outside connect powerful spaces physically as well as 
imaginatively. *How* spectators and performers cross those thresholds, then, will greatly 
influence the experience. Both a leisurely stroll and a panic-stricken sprint will move a person 
from the inside to the outside, but each possesses qualities that leave unique impressions on the 
body and the mind.

The sprint would most likely come as a result of a fire, a common problem before the 
introduction of electric lights in the theatre. The threat of fire always loomed large at Theatre 
Royal Drury Lane; fire destroyed the first theatre, and would destroy the theatre in the future.
Wilkinson’s comments cut to the heart of the theatre experience: live people together in a shared space at a single moment in time. Actors giving a bad performance may have risked occupational ruin or even bodily injury from an edible projectile. Spectators risked bodily injury as well, and accounts from theatergoers reveal that audience members in the pit especially received the brunt of the flying missiles that fell short of the stage. But a fire creates a much more highly-charged problem. With lack of the glowing-red “exit” signs that theatres display today, Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1785 must have been a dangerous place. Tate Wilkinson imagines a scenario in which all the box doors open out to the narrow hallway at the same time. This would further reduce the width of the passageways as the spectators attempted to leave. The stage in this instance would not be a magnetic site of attraction; all those inside would desire the open air outside to escape injury and even death. Though the drama of the evening would still take place inside the theatre, the performance would most definitely be usurped by the undeniable presence of the flame.

In addition to the altering the building’s facade and passageways which changed the way spectators both entered and exited the theatre, Adam made changes to the interior of the theatre as well. Nicoll details the changes made to the inside of the building in *The Garrick Stage*, stating, “Gone were the old heavy pilasters, and in their stead were slender supporting posts, giving an impression of grace and delicacy” (46). The “Corinthian pilasters” I mentioned earlier in the chapter gave way to the more slender posts. This would increase the visual access of all the spectators sitting in the boxes and in the galleries. Nicoll believes this change resulted from Garrick’s desire to create the allusion of grandeur and vast space, as “[t]he ceiling had been raised by 12 feet… the fronts of the boxes had been re-designed and lined with ‘crimson spotted
paper’, their slender pillars, ‘inlaid with plate glass on a crimson and green ground’, creating an effect which was described as ‘lente and brilliant’” (46). The opinion that the renovation changed the auditorium for the better is corroborated by several sources. MacQueen-Pope records that in 1775 the theatre “received its front designed by the Brothers Adam” (177), and later in the chapter adds that “the theatre had been enlarged again, taking in the Rose Tavern, and a new entrance had been made in Bridges Street. The work was done by The Brothers Adam, and a lovely playhouse was the result” (187). But it is Donald Mullin in *The Development of the Playhouse* who gives the most complete description of the Adam’s new theatre:

> In the interior, the galleries were pushed back to the old exterior wall, a move which doubled the number of rows available. Wren’s great pilasters were replaced with narrow pillars, enabling patrons in the side boxes to see more of the stage, and making it possible to place more seats in those locations. The ceiling was raised and a third tier was added to the sides. (74)

Again the source notes the removal of the pilasters and also gives a sense of the expanded seating areas. The result was, according to my sources, a larger and more magnificent auditorium. This theatre allowed for more spectators and therefore more ticket sales. Below, I include a picture of the engraving made by the brothers in 1775.
Figure 3 Adam renovation engraving, 1775. (Nicoll, The Garrick Stage 46)

The above engraving shows the now-slim pillars, beautiful ceiling, and the decorated box fronts. The engraving gives the viewer a look at the house from the perspective of the stage. Three unidentified persons marvel at the new theatre with an empty house on an empty stage. This picture shows up often in theatre history textbooks and histories of theatre architecture. Mullin comments on what he believes is the reason for the picture’s pervasiveness, and also suggests what the picture may be trying to achieve:

It is the Adam version of Drury Lane which is so frequently reproduced, because the brothers were so pleased with the results of their work that they had an engraving made of it. Unfortunately, the scale of the engraving was changed in order to make the house seem monumental, a trick architects still use in order to give stature to their work. (74)

Why the brothers scaled the engraving to make the house “seem monumental” historians may never fully know, but Mullin’s suggestion of the architect’s trick may come into play. Richard Leacroft undertook an investigation to create a scale drawing of the interior of Drury Lane after
the Adam renovation, similar to Langhans’ recreation of the interior after the Wren renovation. Leacroft compared the Adam engraving (120) to a scale drawing by Adam for the theatre’s ceiling (92). He found that “the figures depicted in the view [of the Adam engraving, fig. 3] had all been drawn to approximately half their correct size, thereby creating an illusion of vastness quite out of character with the actual size of the building” (121). He includes in his book “the same view with the figures corrected for size [which] reduces the apparent proportion of the auditorium to a size more compatible with the descriptions of intimacy recorded for this building” (120). Both pictures appear below for your comparison:

The two pictures show the boxes, pit, and galleries of the Theatre Royal in 1775. The theatre dwarfs the observers in the first picture. The second picture gives, as Leacroft stated, a feeling of greater intimacy. For my discussion of the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel* I find it useful to imagine the performance in each of the theatres represented. In the theatre on the left, a flying apple would never reach the actor from the center galleries. Those yelling from the pit would require seats in the first few rows to be heard. And the ladies breeding a disturbance in the boxes would have to have been in a box near the stage in order to impact either the performers or the
rest of the house. The picture on the right allows for a closer relationship between the performers and spectators as well as amongst the audience members themselves. As the people on the stage grow in size, the theatre—though unchanged in measure—compresses in around them. The performers of both Vainwit’s play and *The Author on the Wheel* had opportunity to read the reactions of the crowd and adjust performances accordingly. As Cibber commented, if the actor plays closer to the spectator in word and action, every spectator gains the right to judge. Proximity in this case heightens the theatrical experience and brings the performance closer to the senses; though the Adam brothers obviously padded their engraving to appear more majestic and immense, they very well should have remembered that it is not the size that counts, but how you use it.

The Spaces of Drury Lane: April 18, 1785

We have arrived at the destination of this chapter. Journeying through the history of Theatre Royal Drury Lane provides a look at how the theatre’s spaces change in size and shape, both on the outside and the inside. From the theatre’s beginnings in 1663 to the fire in 1672, from the remodeling by Wren in 1674 to the renovation by the Adam brothers in 1775, Drury Lane continued to entertain audiences for over a century. On April 18, 1785 the theatre produced *The Author on the Wheel* for the benefit of Mr. Bannister. The physical manifestation of the theatre that provided the audience space, performance space, and practitioner space for this play concerns me greatly in my investigation of the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*. In this section I provide a detailed description of the theatre that existed in 1785 and attempt to situate the play into this theatre. Returning to Gay McAuley’s taxonomy of spatial function I ask: how
might *The Author on the Wheel* have inhabited the performance space of Drury Lane? What practitioner spaces would have been used by the performers and crew? How might the spectators have utilized the audience space of the house to interact with the performance? And how would the performance space, practitioner space, and audience space shift in role and identity to create a performance that occurs in the house as much as on the stage? The answers to these questions will lay the foundation for the final section of this chapter in which I present and examine the excavated evidence of the only known performance of *The Author on the Wheel* on April 18, 1785.

Performance Space, 1785

Mapping out the social reality of the theatre space, Gay McAuley first defines the audience space and the practitioner space (of the stage) and combines these two in order to define the performance space: “Overriding yet subsuming the division [between the audience space of the auditorium and the practitioner space of the stage], the divided yet nevertheless unitary space in which the two constitutive groups (performers and spectators) meet and work together to create the performance experience, is the privileged domain that I shall call the *performance space*” (27). The performance space for McAuley encompasses not merely the metric dimensions of the stage, but the whole three-dimensional area in which the performance takes place. This would include the area above the stage that performers may utilize, and any areas in the audience spaces that the performers may “invade” during the show. The nature of theatre at the time of *The Author on the Wheel* kept the actors mostly confined to the actual stage and did not often see any (sanctioned) crossing of the threshold between audience and
performer\(^4\) during a performance. Therefore, the stage of the theatre in 1785 is the focus of my research for this section.

The stage of the theatre acted as the performance space of Theatre Royal Drury Lane. To begin the investigation into the stage space, I trace Koenig’s documentation of the theatre starting with the dimensions of the stage. Koenig includes detailed descriptions of the theatre spaces, stating “In 1791 some dimensions of the theatre were taken before the theatre was razed [for the 1791 Henry Holland remodeling] and the opening [of the proscenium] then scaled 30’0 wide by 22’0 high, or approximately the same size as the Adam sketch indicates” (Koenig 110). The downstage edge of the apron measured 34’6”\(^5\) (111). The distance from the pit floor to the stage measured 4’6” at the downstage edge and 4’11” from the pit floor to the stage floor at the proscenium (111). The stage measured ten feet from the apron to the proscenium, which calculates the rake of the stage at 2.5 degrees (slightly less raked than Wren’s stage) (111). In short, the stage space measured 34.5 feet by 10 feet at the downstage boundary and decreased to 30 feet by 10 feet at the proscenium. Beyond the proscenium, the stage space continued for 130’ to the back wall of the theatre (118). Though this seems an illogical amount of space for the depth of a stage, Koenig points out that “less than half of the total depth of the stage, however, was normally used for scenic display, as 53’0” was the depth of the stage from the frontispiece [proscenium arch] to the back shutter” (118). The stage was 4’6” up off the pit floor, while the

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\(^{4}\) This is in physical terms only, of course. The house and stage interacted frequently, and objects sometimes passed through the invisible divide between spectator and performer. I investigate the act of throwing at the theatre in chapter three.

\(^{5}\) As I mentioned above, in 1791 dimensions were recorded for the theatre and the downstage edge of the apron was recorded as 32’6” rather than 34’6”. Koenig suggests that the two-foot difference is because bowed fronts were added to the boxes on the sides of the stage, effectively reducing the width of the stage by two feet (Koenig 111).
ceiling rose 29’7” from the floor: in other words, the downstage edge of the stage was 25’1” from the ceiling (111).

In addition to the technical dimensions of the performance space, Koenig includes an aesthetic description of the stage and proscenium. A drawing dated 1775 and signed by Adam shows:

[t]wo thin pilasters, probably inlaid with plate glass over a foil or varnish of crimson or green, supporting a thin cornice. A festooned drapery, fringed with gold, frames a large rectangular panel depicting “The Apotheosis of Shakespeare by the Tragic and Comic Muses.” The winged muses, painted on a pale blue ground, hold a profile portrait medallion of Shakespeare in gold and black.

(Koenig 110)

This is the picture that would have floated above the cast that performed on April 18, 1785. Evoking the already ever-present figure of Shakespeare, the painting would have looked down on the performance of *The Winter’s Tale* with loving fondness, and then chuckled at the reference to *Much Ado about Nothing* in *The Author on the Wheel*. The painting above the stage, along with the gold-fringed drapery, would have remained constant throughout the evening as well as the season. Koenig’s description reveals the color scheme (red and green) that Adam used in the pilasters and boxes fronts around the house as well.

From the house, the stage decoration made a good impression on many spectators, but some, of course, may have had reservations. An otherwise-pleased spectator reviewed the changes made to the Theatre Royal in the *Public Advertiser* on September 30, 1775, stating “Were I to hazard a Criticism, where almost everything is so much to my Satisfaction, it would
be, that the Crimson Drapery over the Stage is too dark for the Objects round it; and that the Gold Fringe has not the brilliant effect it ought to have in such a situation” (as quoted in Koenig 108). The drapery over the stage, for this spectator, competed for the audience’s attention with the characters on the stage. In a similar manner, other spectators found the whole of Adam’s interior decoration to be gaudy and distracting (Leacroft 127). Personal preferences will always differ; those made from the audience space, however, seem to have the most lasting impact.

Practitioner Space, 1785

As I have discussed extensively in chapter one, the practitioner space of *The Author on the Wheel* plays a huge role in the overall significance of the play. Set wholly in the practitioner areas of a theatre, the play moves from an unidentified room backstage to the greenroom and then back to another unidentified room backstage. To review, the practitioner space includes “the stage door access, the whole backstage areas with its dressing rooms, its hierarchy of comfort and discomfort, green room, corridors and stairways, and the stage itself” and Gay McAuley considers access a key factor in defining this space (26). Considering the practitioner spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane at the moment of *The Author on the Wheel* is therefore vital to my study.

The practitioner spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane make up about one third of the total space of the theatre building. The drawing rendered by Bruce Koenig shows a simple layout of the theatre; though not precisely to scale, the drawing helps give a sense of the overall areas of Drury Lane:
As the drawing shows, the performance space and the audience space combined make up the largest portion of the building (B). The spaces on the right half of the drawing constitute the practitioner spaces. In 1785, spaces D, T, and U all functioned as scene rooms, while Spaces E and J functioned as green rooms. The actors could access the green rooms directly from the stage by exiting stage left. Interestingly, the scene rooms and green rooms both experienced the shifts in role and identity that performers and spectators often underwent. In 1674, Wren designed a space for two scene rooms (the great scene room and the little scene room- D and E on the drawing, respectively) right next to the stage. Koenig records that “the ‘Little Scene Room’ was converted into a green room after 1714 and was used until about 1740 when the new green room (Greater Green Room) [J] was constructed” (Koenig 89). The names of the spaces changed, but the areas still remained firmly planted in the practitioner space of the theatre.
As I have theorized in chapter one, the green room of a theatre proves fraught with in-between-ness. In the green room, actors rest before, during, and after scenes. In the green room, mangers and playwrights cut and alter plays between performances. Though the space could be rather hectic, actor Thomas Davies muses on the atmosphere he experienced in the green room (also called the “settle”). In his memoir *Dramatic Micellanies* printed in 1784, Davies writes:

There is a little open room, in Drury-lane theatre, called the settle; it is separated from the stage and the scene-room by a wainscot inclosure [sic]. It was formerly, before the great green room was built, a place for many of the actors to retire to, between the acts, during the time of action and rehearsal. From time out of mind, till about the year 1740, to this place a pretty large number of the comedians used to resort constantly after dinner, which, at that time, was generally over at two o’clock... Kings, footmen, aldermen, cardinals, coblers [sic], princes, judges, link-boys, and fine gentlemen, in short all characters, were mingled together; and from this chaos of confusion, arose a harmony of mirth, which contributed not a little to reconcile them to their various situations in the theatre. (459-460)

In this passage, Davies refers to the new green room and the old green room. His recollection of the old green room is one of camaraderie and fellowship. The events in the green room occurred around the events outside: performing or rehearsing a show, or eating dinner. The green room provided a place for rest, discussion, and even reconciliation it seems. A space of shifting identity and role, the green room allows for interaction in a way not always condoned in the outside world.
The scenario Davies mentions regarding the interaction of all the different characters creates an image of a democratization of sorts. In chapter one, I demonstrated how the green room in *The Author on the Wheel* can act as a social leveler to some degree. Vainwit is allowed access not normally granted to outsiders, and all work together to execute the cuts necessary to make the play successful. In the above passage, Davies refers to the people in the green room by their *characters* and not their names or occupations. The image of kings, servants, and religious leaders interacting on even terms makes this passage meaningful. Though the people involved are not really kings or servants, in the green room actors occupy that constantly recalibrating space of identity between the stage and the street. Not quite a king, yet not anymore Joe six-pack, the character in the green room plays a role that falls somewhere in-between. The liminal nature of the green room allows for a morphing selfhood not normally granted in other spaces. The actors resolved real problems and disagreements through the “harmony of mirth” allowed in the sanctioned space of the green room. In Davies’ idealized recollection of the green room, rank and social standing seem to take a back seat to intimacy and understanding.

Other evidence of green room life suggests a less accepting atmosphere. In *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, Tiffany Stern asserts that rehearsal in the eighteenth century was partial and not focused on the entire script as a whole. Actors often rehearsed in isolation, and sometimes never even read through the whole play. The rank and social standing of the actors contributed to this operational method, and to refuse to acknowledge this fact “ignores the way major and insignificant actors were divided from each other during rehearsal and even performance, and the effect this had on the group presentation of a play. Players of small rank
and low salary could not, for instance, use the green room, but had a different room for themselves, necessarily leading to separate, partial rehearsals” (Stern 220).

English writer Henry Fielding (1707-1754) included dialogue in his play *Pasquin* (a 1736 play about the rehearsal and performance of a play) that demonstrates this striated environment of the green room during this time:

1st PLAYER. [To the authors Trapwit and Fustian] Sir, the Prompter, and most of the Players, are drinking Tea in the Green-Room.

TRAPWIT. Mr. Fustian, shall we go drink a Dish of Tea with them? Come, Sir, as you have a Part in my Play, you shall drink a Dish with us.

1st PLAYER. Sir, I dare not go into the Green-Room; my Salary is not high enough. (Fielding 11)

This short exchange acknowledges the fact that actors followed a certain decorum in the green room. MacQueen-Pope concurs with Stern and recognizes Fielding’s description, stating “There was a special etiquette about the Green Room, too. Players of low rank and small salary could not use it. So, often, there were two Green Rooms, one for the principals and one for the smaller part people” (MacQueen-Pope 36). This certainly matches up with the building layout including both a lesser green room and a great green room. Though Davies felt camaraderie with his fellow actors in the green room, those fellow actors most likely held a high social standing compared to the rest of the characters in the play. His idealized version of a space of agreement and togetherness blatantly refuses any real opportunity for equality.

To conclude my study of the space of the green room, I present an anecdote often cited in theatre history books. In the late eighteenth century, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, an Irishman,
moved to London in an attempt to make a living as a playwright. His first play *The Rivals* premiered in 1775 and (after a failed first performance and substantial revisions) the successful play placed him on the London theatrical map (Glasgow 113-114). His next play *The School for Scandal* was a smashing success as well. *The School for Scandal* opened on May 8, 1777 at Theatre Royal Drury Lane. Sheridan started writing his play *The Critic* (a satire inspired by Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal*), but found himself in the same predicament he found himself while writing most of his plays. A true procrastinator, Sheridan wrote his plays bit by bit, and could hardly force himself to complete a manuscript. The managers at Drury Lane never doubted his genius, however, and he was allowed to write in this halting manner for as long as possible. In 1779, during composition of *The Critic*, Thomas King (an actor who took over production duties after Garrick’s retirement) and Thomas Linley (then manager of Drury Lane) awaited the completed script anxiously; the date of the play’s opening neared. The two “lured the errant author down to the theatre (he was supposed to be writing at home), they got him in the Green Room, gave him pens, paper and ink and the prompter’s copy of the play as far as it went: and they left him with two bottles of claret and some anchovy sandwiches, and then locked him in” (MacQueen-Pope 200). Dobbs recounts the story with only a slight variation: “They [the cast and crew] got it finished by the adroit advice of luring Sheridan into the Green Room where pen and paper, two bottles of port and a plate of anchovy sandwiches awaited him, locking the door, and allowing him out only when it was finished” (Dobbs 111). And Stern includes one sentence about the incident, leaving out the human interest of the refreshments: “*The Critic* had not been fully written when it was put into rehearsal, and the actors had to lock its author Richard Sheridan into the green room to make him complete it” (Stern 241).
If I may look at this story literally, the green room space at Drury Lane shifts once again to reveal a breadth of identities. As I have demonstrated, the green room provides a place for rest, a place for communion, and a place for cutting and altering a play. The space heretofore acted as a sort of waiting area in which people and things can exist in between acts of rehearsing and performing. In Sheridan’s case, the green room functioned as a space in which to create a play. No longer simply a space of limbo between two other places, the green room here becomes a destination in and of itself. As Sheridan consumes the wine and food, he generates material in its stead. The creation of the work of fiction usually happens elsewhere, while the revision of the piece occurs in the green room. Here, the material begins life in the green room, maybe returning after a performance or two for modifications. The distinction, I feel, warrants close scrutiny. When the “in-between” quality of the green room leaves the space and the green room functions as a place for a complete cycle of conception, production, and distribution, it is possible to lose sight of the unstable, yet exciting energy that the space has always retained.

Of course, using the green room for reasons other than text-book green room activities would actually fall right in line with the qualities exhibited by the room. Starting out as a room for storing and constructing scenery and props, the old green room most likely contained traces of its past life. When the new green room was built, the cast moved into the bigger room right down the hall, but as we have seen all the practitioners most likely did not have access to the greater room. A green room allows for ambiguity, both in identity and in task. As the characters move in and out of role, so the space of the green room conforms to its function of the moment. *The Author on the Wheel* dramatizes the social, spatial, and fictional changes that can occur in the green room; the anonymous author of this work knew just where to set the play to inject the
drama with dynamic tension and palpable malleability. The green room of Theatre Royal Drury Lane featured both.

Audience Space, 1785

In defining the spaces of the theatre, Gay McAuley describes the audience space in the following way:

For the spectators theatre is a social event, their reception of the performance is part of a social experience, the areas within the theatre space to which they have access, which can be called audience space, facilitate (or discourage) types of social behavior and social interaction. The point of access to the building, the foyers, stairways, corridors, bars and restaurants, the box office, and of course the auditorium are all parts of this space, and the way we experience them has an unavoidable impact upon the meanings we take away with us. (25-26)

A spectator enjoying The Author on the Wheel in 1785 would negotiate and experience some of these spaces throughout the course of the evening. The social event of the theatre at Drury Lane breaks down even further as spectators have access to certain sections of the auditorium based on pricing. The way financial matters (and therefore this division of access) impacted the theatrical experience deserves a closer look.

In 1785, the theatre at Drury Lane had been through several alterations and redecorations as shareholders and mangers sought to keep Drury Lane competitive throughout the decades. Theatre practitioners at this time made a living by engaging in theatre, either on the stage or off of the stage. Artistic excellence and personal creativity aside, the practitioners of the theatre
desired to make money. Up to this point I have not focused on the financial aspects of the Drury Lane renovations, but it is clear that monetary gain was the impetus for many, if not all, of the theatre’s alterations. The managers made many of the changes to the theatre in order to either provide a better product for the customer or to increase the size of the auditorium to allow for more spectators at a time. Financial matters also came into play during the benefit performances, for these performances put money straight into one actor’s pockets. As the audience moves in and out of the spaces of the theatre, money circulates and changes hands just as quickly.

In *The Author on the Wheel*, the audience members watching Vainwit’s play take center stage in the drama, even though we never see any onstage. Vainwit condemns the ladies in the boxes, the gentlemen in the pit, and the laborers up in the galleries. All watched his show, and all (according to Vainwit) came predetermined to ruin the performance. The company at Theatre Royal Drury Lane performed this play on the stage, but the audience space of the theatre closely resembled the setting that Vainwit describes. The audience space changed with the building over the years as architects designed and redesigned the exterior and interior. In 1785, the audience space still inhabited the skeleton of the Wren structure of 1674. The renovations by the Adam brothers, however, made several changes to the space that I note in this section.

The audience space of Theatre Royal Drury Lane followed the tripartite seating plan of the day: boxes, galleries, and the pit. As Vainwit laments, all the spectators could interrupt and damn the play from their respective seating areas. These seating areas were altered during the 1775 renovations in several ways. Kalman A. Burnim in his work *David Garrick, Director* claims the work done to the house was in order to make “the house much more comfortable and admission to all locations more easily accessible” (64). Burnim states “The old side boxes were
replaced by larger ones, supported by light elegant pillars, the ceiling was raised twelve feet, new passages were installed to the upper and lower boxes, and a more spacious entrance was effected from the Bridges Street front” (64). Burnim also includes an excerpt from a 1775 *Town and Country Magazine* article that corroborates the story of the raised ceiling, noting “the ceiling is heightened twelve feet, whereby the voice of the performers is greatly improved” (as quoted in Burnim 65). The same article reports that because of the “additional height given to each Tier, which admits of the seats being raised considerably above each other, [this] consequently gives a much better View of the Stage” (as quoted in Koenig 105-106). In addition to describing the house as more “comfortable” and “accessible,” the article demonstrates how the alterations impacted the spectators’ experience of the performance. The new theatre provided audience members with more efficient pathways to the seats (new passages installed) as well as better seats (larger boxes). But the alterations also increased the projection of the performers’ voices (because of the ceiling height) and increased the visual access to the stage (because of the slimmer pillars and raised seats). All these changes benefited the management and performers by creating a more attractive, and therefore competitive, theatre.

Managers of Theatre Royal Drury Lane increased the capacity of the theatre over the years in fits and starts. In his book *The Theatrical Public in the Time of Garrick*, Harry William Pedicord gives detailed figures for the theatre’s revenue and seating capacity based on his examination of box office receipts. In 1747, the theatre’s capacity hovered at about 1,268 people (Pedicord 10-11). The “house was enlarged again in 1762... to a capacity of about 2,362” (11). As all of the texts I researched suggest, Garrick attempted the 1775 Adam renovation because he was “interested in beautifying his house inside and out, in making it attractive and enticing to the
public love for show and comfort, and in making the theatre still more valuable as property in the forthcoming sale of his share in the Patent. But he [was] not as interested in enlarging its capacity” (Pedicord 14). This left the theatre to “probably seat an audience numbering somewhat under the maximum of 2,362 persons established for the 1762 alteration” (14). The house on April 18, 1785 most likely held close to the maximum number of spectators due to the fact that *The Author on the Wheel* premiered at the benefit performance for Mr. Bannister. Benefit performances routinely brought in the most revenue, and that money was turned over to the beneficiary of the evening. The amount of spectators that filled the theatre would increase significantly during Henry Holland’s renovation in 1794; instead of 2,362 persons, the Holland theatre could seat approximately 3,611 spectators (Leacroft 155). But during 1785, the theatre could boast of a full house if twenty-three hundred pairs of eyes gazed upon on the stage on any given evening.

With the stage set, the actors poised in the green room, and the audience seated in the boxes, pit, and galleries, I now turn to the performance of *The Author on the Wheel* on April 18, 1785.

*The Author on the Wheel Performed*

I group my information regarding *The Author on the Wheel* into three categories. The first category includes extant evidence of the actual performance of the play. This includes the manuscript and the material circumstances surrounding its acquisition by the Larpent Collection as well as newspaper notices both advertising the play beforehand and reviewing the play after the fact. The second category includes secondary sources which contain references to *The
Author on the Wheel. In this category I have placed an article and three books: Judith Fisher’s 2003 article “Audience Participation in the Eighteenth-Century London Theatre,” Alldardyce Nicoll’s 1927 book History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama: 1750-1800, Dane Farnsworth Smith and M.L. Lawhon’s 1979 book Plays about the Theatre in England, 1737-1800, and Tiffany Stern’s 2000 book Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan. The third category of this section investigates the cast involved in the production. Since the The Times (then The Daily Universal Register) notice includes the list of players in The Author on the Wheel, I present research briefly describing the career of John Bannister, the lead performer of the play, and list the other cast members who performed that evening. All this information, I believe, creates a space for this little-known yet highly meaningful play in the broader course of theatre scholarship.

Extant Evidence of The Author on the Wheel

Currently resting in the Larpent Collection at the Huntington Library in California, the actual manuscript of The Author on the Wheel journeyed through the centuries and through at least two countries prior to arriving at its present home. After the institution of the Licensing Act of 1737, all plays desiring production required a trip through the discerning hands of the Lord Chamberlain for approval (Brockett 243). In order to accomplish the large task of reviewing every play destined for the stage, the Lord Chamberlain created the Examiner of Plays position and chose William Chetwynd as the first examiner in 1738. In 1780, John Larpent filled the role of Examiner and continued to review plays until his death in 1824 (“Catalogue of John Larpent Plays”). Around 1832, John Payne Collier and Thomas Amyot bought the collection and then
sold it to the Earl of Ellesmere in 1854 (“Catalogue of John Larpent Plays”). The collection of plays resided in the library at the Bridgewater House until passed to the Huntington Library in 1917. Allardyce Nicoll (the author whose works I reference throughout this dissertation) studied the collection and brought to attention the enormity of the find to theatre scholarship. The collection, still housed in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, includes plays submitted for review from 1737 to 1834 because Larpent held in his possession not only the plays he personally reviewed, but also the plays reviewed since 1737. *The Author on the Wheel*, then, fits squarely in to this category since the manuscript is dated 1785.

Though I have not had the privilege of studying the original copy of *The Author on the Wheel*, I worked closely with the microfiche version of the play which I have photocopied for my own use. The play spans forty pages and begins with a title page signed by manager Thomas Linley. The frontispiece of the manuscript states the full title (*The Author on the Wheel, or A Piece Cut in the Green Room*) and bears the label “20 Small” meaning it is in the collection of small plays located in cabinet 20 (see Appendix). The plays in the collection divide into categories based on their physical size, and then break down in each category alphabetically. I presume the handwriting is that of the author’s, but it may likely have been that of a professional copyist employed by Drury Lane. The handwriting, occasionally, proved difficult to read even though it is in English. In the rare occasions in which I could not decipher a word, I presented the copy to my colleagues for a second opinion. In all, I was able to completely “translate” the play, save for only two words (one on page 42 and one on page 43). I include sample pages of the manuscript in its original version in the appendix for the reader’s perusal. I believe my copy
bears faithful and accurate representation of the play, and I have taken great pains to preserve the integrity of *The Author on the Wheel*.

In addition to the actual script of *The Author on the Wheel*, I found several newspaper entries announcing the performance of the play. *The Daily Universal Register* (now known as *The Times*) carried its first announcement of the performance nine days in advance on the ninth of April in 1785. The same announcement ran in the paper on three occasions that year: April ninth, April fifteenth, and the day of the show, April eighteenth. The announcement included the lineup of the night’s performances, a night which happened to be a benefit night for the actor John Bannister. The evening’s entertainment was comprised of the following: a musical prelude called *Sons of Anacreon*, Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, and finally the “comic sketch” *The Author on the Wheel*. Each announcement lists the cast for each part of the evening, and Mr. Bannister understandably held if not the biggest, then the most impressive roles. In *Sons of Anacreon* Bannister sang the “celebrated Anacreontic Song” as well as “Two Imitative Songs” (“The Daily Universal Register,” April 15th). In *The Winter’s Tale*, Bannister played the role of Florizel. And in *The Author on the Wheel*, Bannister played the part of Mask (not the largest part, but the part with a place for the actor to perform imitations, a popular talent of the day). I include the images of the newspaper announcements below.
Figure 7. “The Daily Universal Register.” *The Times*, April 18, 1785. Microfilm Reel #1. Announcement of Bannister’s benefit performance to be performed that night.
In addition to the newspaper entries announcing the upcoming performance of the play, a very brief review of the play appeared in the April twentieth edition of *The Daily Universal Register*. The paper regularly featured a “Theatre” section reviewing actors’ performances and authors’ works. The witty newspaper writer wrote a short, yet helpful review of the entertainment presented on April eighteenth:

Bannister junior’s benefit turned out to be a *bumper*, and no wonder, when the entertainments commenced with the School of Anacreon. The stage never gave so noble a representation of the festive board, and the songs, &c. were all admirably executed. On the Winter’s Tale, we will only observe, that Miss Bannister [John Bannister’s sister] played Hermione with great justice. Her theatrical abilities are at present very respectable, though modesty prevents them from blooming into that full display which they promise. The Author on the Wheel is a pleasant *jeu de’sprit* [a witty, humorous work], and well suited to a benefit; but though it has considerable merit, is better in conception than execution. The author will probably improve it against next season. (‘The Daily Universal Register,” April 20th)
This review in the newspaper, I feel, solidifies the play’s place in the history of Drury Lane and in the history of theatre scholarship. To begin, I as a researcher know, almost to a certainty, that the production of *The Author on the Wheel* actually took place. Even if a play resides in the Larpent collection, its presence does not guarantee that it saw the stage. The newspaper review conclusively states that Theatre Royal Drury Lane produced *The Author on the Wheel*. In addition, the lineup advertised earlier in the month and week went on as scheduled. Because this spectator witnessed first-hand the performance of *The Author on the Wheel*, I can firmly place it in the category of not only “eighteenth-century plays” but also “eighteenth-century plays produced.”

The review bolsters my research as well by commenting on the execution of the performances. The reviewer felt Bannister did well for himself, but turned his attention more to the overall choices of the evening and did not concentrate as much on Bannister’s performances. The reviewer thoroughly enjoyed *Sons of Anacreon* and also delighted in Miss Bannister’s performance in *The Winter’s Tale*. Miss Bannister, John’s sister, apparently possessed too much modesty for the stage. But the newspaper’s account of *The Author on the Wheel* illuminates the great interplay between the stage and backstage, and between fact and fiction.

The writer starts out the review of the comic sketch by affirming the decision to produce *The Author on the Wheel* for Bannister’s benefit night. The humor rippling throughout the play most likely pleased the crowd, and the character of Mask allowed Bannister to display his imitative talents. Since a benefit night directly benefitted one or two actors directly, a large, happy audience equaled success. But after this accolade, the reviewer states that the play is “better in conception than execution.” How wonderfully this reviewer succinctly acknowledges
the many overlapping spaces and interstices of this play! On the page, the reader may slowly travel through the expanding and morphing spaces of the performance space, the practitioner space, and the audience space. But in the theatre, the spectator must have been continually adjusting to the fluctuating spaces both on the stage and in the imagined backstage. However, the live audience does not experience space in the theatre in a linear fashion, and therefore may have been better suited to traverse and even enjoy the theatre turned inside-out. Layering reference upon comment, the review ends with a tongue-in-cheek remark that places the whole performance once again in the realm of shifting spaces: the reviewer surmises that by revising the play for next season, the author of *The Author on the Wheel* should turn (or return) to the wheel.

The Cast of *The Author on the Wheel*

On April 18, 1785, *The Author on the Wheel* debuted at Theatre Royal Drury Lane as the final performance of the night. According to the announcement in *The Daily Universal Register*, the cast included Mr. Palmer, Mr. (James) Aickin, Mr. Baddeley, Mr. Suet, Mr. R. Palmer, Mr. Phillimore, Mr. (Edward) Alfred, Mr. (John) Bannister, jr. Though the announcement does not specify which roles were played by which performer, it is clear that Bannister played the part of Mask. John Bannister designed his benefit night around his most praised strengths; therefore, he wisely included *The Author on the Wheel* to display his crowd-pleasing imitative talents. In this final section of the factual spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*, I give details about the life of the star performer of this short play in an effort to round out my discussion of the circumstances surrounding the play’s life on the Drury Lane stage.
Returning to Gay McAuley’s taxonomy, I point to her emphasis on the body in the theatre:

The theatre building and the spaces it encloses have a powerful bearing on the meanings created by the performance… but in themselves they communicate in only limited and relatively simple ways… The stage, even when set and lit ready for the performance, will keep the spectators’ attention for a very short time if no actors are present, for in the theatre it is the presence of the actors that makes the space meaningful. It is through the body and the person of the actor that all the contributing systems of meaning (visual, vocal, spatial, fictional) are activated, and the actor/performer is without doubt the most important agent in all the signifying processes involved in the performance event. (90)

The theatre spaces create meaning, but the bodies in the spaces multiply and deepen that meaning ten-fold. The actors who performed in *The Author on the Wheel* connect the fictional and factual spaces of this play by inhabiting both of these worlds; while shifting between the fictional and factual spaces, the actors simultaneously shift the spaces and make the backstage the stage *and* the audience space the performer space. As I argue in chapter three, it is the movement between and amongst the spaces that activates the kinetic potential of the spaces. Movement, of both the inanimate and the animate, necessitates a consideration of boundaries that points back to the interstices between the spaces. These flashpoints of contact create meaning through interaction and overlap. And so I present a look at the bodies negotiating these flashpoints of contact in *The Author on the Wheel.*
Mr. John Bannister junior, star of The Author on the Wheel, graced the stages of London from 1760-1836. John’s father Charles was a “much-loved London singer and comic actor” (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 267). Garrick put Bannister Jr. onstage for the first time at Drury Lane in 1778; he performed the role of Dick in The Apprentice by Arthur Murphy on a benefit night for his father Charles (268). This first performance allowed John to demonstrate his abilities for comedy in a popular form: “The young actor immediately stamped his own personality on the character (Dick), employing his inherited talent in ‘A Variety of Imitations,’ and taking off the foibles of well-known actors so successfully that the veteran Bensley, one of those satirized, called on him and begged for mercy” (268). After this successful start, Bannister continued to perform on the stages of Theatre Royal Drury Lane, the Haymarket theatre, and stages in the surrounding provinces. He died on November 7, 1836 after a long and prosperous career.

Two extant primary sources provide details about Bannister’s experience with The Author on the Wheel. First, the newspaper announcement advertising the performance of The Author on the Wheel in 1785 supports the argument for Bannister’s imitative skills. According to the newspaper, “Mr. Bannister, jun. will introduce various imitations” (“The Daily Universal Register,” April 15th). The character of Mask is the character in the play that performs the imitations, and Bannister used this character to fully exploit his well-known talent of mimicry. Secondly, John Adolphus wrote a biography of Bannister’s life entitled Memoirs of John Bannister, Comedian (1839). This two-volume work provides an in depth view of Bannister’s life; unfortunately, it does not mention The Author on the Wheel. Adolphus does include a sentence recording Bannister’s performance on that day, however, saying “Bannister also played
Douglas [in Henry IV part one]; and for his own benefit, on the 18\textsuperscript{th} of April 1785, Florizel, in ‘The Winter’s Tale.’” (Adolphus 117). Bannister’s legacy in late-eighteenth-century London theatre may not rival that of the major players, but even a cursory glance into the scholarship available reveals this actor a successful star.

\textit{The Author on the Wheel} in Secondary Sources

Researching this short play intensively, I have unearthed four sources that list or discuss \textit{The Author on the Wheel}. I do not dare assume that no other secondary sources outside of my list include reference to this play. However, I do believe my investigation is thorough and reliable. This dissertation reflects my present knowledge of the play in theatre scholarship, and in the future I will add to my research any discoveries I make regarding the play, as well as add any new work written after the conclusion of my dissertation.

In order of publication date, I begin with Allardyce Nicoll’s \textit{A History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama, 1750-1800} published in 1927. As noted earlier, Nicoll played a key role in bringing the plays in the Larpent Collection to the attention of theatre scholars. In his book Nicoll describes the theatres, tragedies, comedies, and other forms of drama throughout the first four chapters (xi-x). His “Hand-List of Plays” (231-364), however, makes up the real showpiece of the work. The entry on \textit{The Author on the Wheel} is listed in section one entitled “English Plays and Operas” under the heading “Unknown Authors” (Nicoll, \textit{History} 319). The entry lists \textit{The Author on the Wheel} as an “entertainment” performed at Drury Lane in 1785. Nicoll also indentifies the manuscript as “20, small” in accordance with its placement in the Huntington Library.
While the list of plays creates a space for *The Author on the Wheel* in the repertoire of Drury Lane in 1785, it does not make any comment upon the content of the play, thereby failing to contribute substantially to the scholastic conversation about the play. The next secondary source includes two full pages devoted to the plot of this play. Dane Farnsworth Smith and M. L. Lawhon’s *Plays about the Theatre in England, 1737-1800* exists as a sequel to their former book which considers the same subject but in the years 1671-1737. According to the authors, they focus the attention in the present study “on those dramatic pieces or those portions which concern themselves directly with the dramatists, actors and managers, audiences, and theatres of the period” (17-18). *The Author on the Wheel* fits soundly in the chapter titled “The Author as Character” (158-176).

Smith and Lawhon describe the plot of the play which illustrates the eighteenth-century author at work. They introduce *The Author on the Wheel* as an “entertainment [that] depicts the dual problem of revising a play that has failed in its first performance and of placating its wealthy gentleman author, Vainwit” (170). Smith and Lawhon describe the play, and then comment on the veracity of its content: “The author of *The Author on the Wheel* was well acquainted with the theatre of his time. Even in his day the would-be dramatist with money received more consideration in the playhouse than did the aspiring, penniless playwright.” (171-172). This comment reveals the authors’ view of the powers of financial clout in the theatrical world. Whether or not this is always true may be up for debate, but Vainwit’s monetary success surely allowed him more access than might be given someone else in the same situation. The fact remains that all of the players involved in Vainwit’s play felt the impact of the failed performance; some felt it financially, while others felt it physically. The authors support this
argument claiming, “Usually, the wrecking of a play on the first night is described solely from the viewpoint of the disappointed author, but here is emphasized the practical experience of actors who nightly must face the possibility of a barrage of hisses, if not of fruit” (172). The actors’ perspectives are emphasized, but the author still claims the central role and point of view. Placing the author in a central role shifts the focus from the performance space to the practitioner space, and grants the audience temporary access into the (however fictional) backstage world.

Moving on chronologically, the next secondary source I have found to reference The Author on the Wheel is Judith Fisher’s article “Audience Participation in the Eighteenth-Century London Theatre” housed in the collection Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance edited by Susan Kattwinkel (2003). In this article, Fisher gives an overview of audience behaviors during this time period and focuses one half page to the activity of pelting: “One of the most frequent and dangerous activities, mainly practiced by the gallery spectators, was pelting. The anonymous play The Author on the Wheel offers an amusing insight into the evacuation of objects on stage.”

6 The major pitfall of Smith and Lawhon’s discussion of The Author on the Wheel concerns the character of Mask. Mask performs imitations in the short piece. This part went to Mr. Bannister on his benefit night so that he might display his comedic talents. Smith and Lawhon, however, state that Mask is a female character. According to the authors, “After the actors and manager agree on a play to replace Vainwit’s, one additional scene shows the indignant playwright attempting to plot with Mask, an actress noted for her imitations, to get even with the actors. She first explains her art to him…” (171). While Smith and Lawhon accurately describe the plot of The Author on the Wheel, this seemingly small mistake taints the whole discussion. Why the authors consider Mask a female I do not know. The evidence pointing toward the contrary is mighty: Mr. Bannister played the part of Mask and throughout the scene Vainwit refers to Mask as “Sir” and “man” on several occasions. A few examples of the lines that prove Mask is a male: VAINWIT. Why sir, you’re a prodigy of universal powers! (12); VAINWIT. Why sir my last piece paid me very handsomely, though it was damned. (12); VAINWIT. Oh death, man can you be so blind to your own interest? (12); VAINWIT. It’s mighty well sir (12). Apart from this rather glaring mistake, the Smith and Lawhon account in Plays about the Theatre in England, 1737-1800 turns the reader’s attention toward this little-known play and exemplifies the eighteenth century’s fascination with all things behind the curtain.

7 I contacted Judith Fisher after I first read this article in 2007. Having an interest in objects thrown at the stage, I was immediately intrigued by the excerpt from the play, and shortly after I found the complete script of The Author on the Wheel to read. After reading the play, I realized that I wanted to research this play more extensively. I contacted Dr. Fisher and asked for any advice in this research. She directed me toward the Smith and Lawhon book and her own dissertation. Her guidance helped me greatly in the beginning stages of this study.
players’ understandable fear of being pelted” (Fisher 60). She illustrates her point by including dialogue between Sock and Thespis that gives first-hand experience of the frightening (yet funny) occurrence. Fisher’s demonstration of the evidence of pelting buttresses her larger argument of the rights felt and possessed by the eighteenth-century audience (60).

The final secondary source I include is Tiffany Stern’s *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (2007). Stern gives details regarding rehearsal practices and how they involve the actors, managers, and authors all in different ways. She includes *The Author on the Wheel* in two different sections. As I have described in chapter one, Stern uses *The Author on the Wheel* first to illustrate how authors lacked substantial control over their product. Stern uses a quote from the play by the character Buskin to show the ability of the actor to hurt the performance. Buskin did not even study his part for the final act because he felt certain that the audience would not allow the play to go on till the end. The ability to damn a play from the inside combined with the ability of a cabal in the audience to damn a play from the outside constructed a very dangerous ground on which to mount a production.

Stern next references the play to describe the period in between first and second performances. “The time between first and second night was spent in frantic revisions, mostly made by the author. *The Author on the Wheel* (1785), shows how sometimes only a day would be allowed for revisions—and how, even then, the author was not necessarily invited to be present” (284). This of course leads to the humorous situation of Vainwit attempting to attend the revision session in disguise. Stern also points up how this play is yet another example of the part-based rehearsal process of eighteenth-century theatre in London: “*Author on the Wheel* [sic] also illustrates the way actors received and learnt their revised parts, and, again, suggests that
revisions were not always rehearsed” (284). Stern is referring to the “principal lady” in the play who asks for her revised part to be sent to her home so she might rehearse and be ready for the second-night performance (Author 32).

To summarize, *The Author on the Wheel* proves itself to be a great resource for scholars studying the practices of eighteenth-century London theatre. In addition to information about playwrights, actors, and managers, the play provides a look (however fictional) at rehearsal and revision processes in the late-eighteenth century. The cast information, primary sources, and secondary sources presented here is thoroughly researched list that will continue to grow as I continue to excavate. For scholars investigating this play in the future, this dissertation will be a rich source of both history and theory regarding *The Author on the Wheel*. 
CHAPTER THREE
FLYING SPACE

If *The Author on the Wheel* demonstrates anything, it is the truly enormous impact of the spectator. Audience members hold immense power in the palms of their hands. Gathered in a common space, both theatergoers and theatre performers exist, for that time, in a moment unique to that space and to that time, a moment impossible to recreate ever again. The relationship between players and audiences creates an energetic connection that stirs deep within the souls of all present. Anything can happen.

Gay McAuley clearly designates the actor’s moving body as the most important factor in the theatrical spatial hierarchy. As stated in chapter two, McAuley believes that “it is through the body and the person of the actor that all the contributing systems of meaning (visual, vocal, spatial, fictional) are activated, and the actor / performer is without doubt the most important agent in all the signifying processes involved in the performance event” (90). This is especially exciting for my study, as I take great pleasure in charting the connections and pathways between and through the spaces of the theatre. The spaces, as I have demonstrated throughout this work, interconnect and overlap in ways that complicate and enrich both the fictional and factual worlds of *The Author on the Wheel*. The performance space, practitioner space, and audience space all pulsate with theoretical potential, but it is the movement of bodies amongst the spaces that allows for any meaningful rumination at all.

My consideration of movement in *The Author on the Wheel*, then, would most logically follow the movement of the actors’ bodies within the play. But I want to take a different path. In this chapter, I investigate the movement between / amongst spaces made by the thrown object.
The thrown objects I am referring to are the apples and pears hurled toward the stage by the fictional audience in *The Author on the Wheel*. Fictionally, the thrown object in this play travels during the performance of Vainwit’s play, and therefore the spectator does not see the object fly onstage (the stage in this case representing the green room). Factually, the thrown object may have travelled from the audience space to the performance space (the performance space, again, representing the green room). The object moving across these fictional and factual spaces instantly and markedly shifts the spaces involved; the performance space becomes an audience space as the actors watch the drama unfold, while the audience space may turn into a performance space through the very act of the spectator invading the space of the stage.

Throwing an object across the boundary of the stage into the fictional world challenges the sharp divide created between onstage and offstage, and between the front of house and the back. McAuley points to this divide in her attempt to emphasize the potent nature of the performance space:

> The two groups [spectators and performers] have their designated areas within that space that is, in traditional theatres, quite rigidly demarcated and conceptualized in terms of front and back… the divided yet nevertheless unitary space in which the two constitutive groups (performers and spectators) meet and work together to create the performance experience, is the privileged domain that I shall call the *performance space*. (25-26)

The thrown object, though seemingly a mutinous refusal of the authority of the performance space, actually functions as a joyous declaration of the space created in that specific moment of time. Activated by the bodies in the space, the object proves the existence of the “divided yet nevertheless unitary” space.
In this final chapter, I follow the object thrown from the audience space to the performance space in three ways. First I examine the historical phenomenon of the thrown object in eighteenth-century London theatre. Secondly, I describe the definition(s) of “prop” as laid out by theatre scholars Gay McAuley and Andrew Sofer and apply these definitions to both the props and thrown objects in *The Author on the Wheel*; through this application, I explore the object’s movement through boundaries of definition from “object” to “prop” based on its journey through the very specific spaces of the audience and the stage. Changing identity from an object to a prop, the thrown object both acquires and produces new meaning. Finally, I argue that the thrown object in *The Author on the Wheel* effectively acquires and produces this meaning through a manipulation of the three poles of performance analysis as described by Ric Knowles, author of *Reading the Materialist Theatre*. Knowles employs the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall to apply the concepts of encoding and decoding to the theatre, and I build on the theory of both scholars by situating the thrown object spatially and imaginatively amongst the performance text, the conditions of production, and the conditions of reception in *The Author on the Wheel*.

Through this line of inquiry I attempt to connect the threads which I have been weaving throughout the dissertation. Fictional space, factual space, and flying space interconnect and change both an object’s and a person’s identity. Just as the spectator becomes a performer through his or her spatial negotiations of the theatre, the object crosses the threshold between reality and fiction, between house and stage, and between outside and inside. I believe the thrown object provides a rich ground on which to further explore the shifting spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane; just as the theatergoer travels from the outside to the inside, so the object penetrates the fiction of the stage and burrows its way into the performance space and the
practitioner space while successfully altering the spaces, the people, and even some things in between.

Throwing at the Theatre: When Audiences Attack

Though now far removed from most mainstream American twenty-first-century theatre experiences, the act of pelting remains somewhat in the minds of spectators, if only theoretically. For example, *Rotten Tomatoes*, a website devoted to film news, compiles reviews written by journalists and online critics. If a movie gets more bad reviews than good reviews, the website indicates the failure with an icon depicting a “splatted” rotten tomato; this indicates that poor performance deserves a thrown rotten tomato (*Rotten Tomatoes*). In the section, “Frequently Asked Questions,” the following question appears: “Why is the site called ‘Rotten Tomatoes’?” The answer follows with a to-the-point response: “Back in the days of the open theaters, when a play was particularly atrocious, the audience expressed their dissatisfaction by not only booing and hissing at the stage, but throwing whatever was at hand—vegetables and fruits included. Hence the name Rotten Tomatoes.” (*Rotten Tomatoes*). Cartoons regularly picture a performer on a stage bombing while the crowd reacts by throwing fruit and vegetables (and maybe even the occasional anvil). In my life, I have never witnessed a spectator to hurl an object toward a stage in a traditional theatrical setting. However, archival documents demonstrate occasion upon occasion of pelting, and these occasions are not bound by geographical or temporal borders.

A high point in history for the thrown object is the theatre of the Futurists in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Michael Kirby’s *Futurist Performance* states that

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1 During a melodrama put on by a community theatre company in Lancaster, California, the audience received bags of popcorn. This popcorn was intended to be thrown at the actors, especially the villains. These acts of pelting were condoned and even encouraged by the theatre practitioners. The case of sanctioned throwing still provides an opportunity for an investigation of theatre spaces, but in this section I focus on the unwanted and unexpected throw.
Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published his Futurist manifesto in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909. Declaring the need for speed, weapons, and war Marinetti articulated his thrust for the Futurist movement toward danger and energy, and away from apathy and genteel society. The Futurists performed poetry, theatre, and music across Europe and began to face disgruntled spectators ready to demonstrate their disagreement. To give just one example of the power of the projectile, I include a short description from the December 3, 1921 edition of the *Times*:

> Few [of the scenes] could be understood because the showers of beans, potatoes, tomatoes, and apples often drove the actors off the stage… the audience grew so furious towards the end the actors could hardly be persuaded to come on stage at all. … A vase, several saucers, and five and ten centesimi pieces were hurled at the actors, and the leading lady received a severe blow over the eye from an unripe tomato. The occupants of the orchestra stalls suffered considerably from tomato juice and beans. And the performance came to a premature end when the actors themselves began to hurl vegetables and fruit back at the audience. (as quoted in Kirby 16)

According to this newspaper report, the audience members present at the performance played a large role in the drama that occurred that night. Not only did the spectators throw fruit and vegetables, but they threw dishes and even money. This battle scene was reenacted many times by the Futurists and the spectators. Pelting soon became customary. Though this is an extreme example, it clearly demonstrates the power of the live moment. Actors and spectators risk bodily injury at most, and property damage at least. Expected or not, the thrown object brings a danger to the performance for all involved.
Though the practice of pelting brought undeniable danger to the theatre, it may in fact be considered a staple of eighteenth-century theatre in London. As I have shown in these two different examples, pelting hit various places at various times. The eighteenth century felt the blow deeply, and theatres in London during this time provided venues for the attacks. Leo Hughes’ *The Drama’s Patrons* includes a section on the act of pelting. He devotes almost ten pages to this subject, and makes his feelings regarding the matter very clear. This act of “hoodlumism” (43) was, according to Hughes, a continuation of the “conduct of the noisy and irrepressible segment of playgoers” (43). The author shares his findings of the phenomenon through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. French dancers and actors often bore the brunt of the missiles, but Hughes points out that audiences showered fruit and vegetables upon the British as well (45). The theatres threatened to punish those that threw projectiles at the actors or at other audience members, but it seems that police interference only came when an injury occurred to an audience member (49). *The Author on the Wheel*’s account of pelting squares with Hughes’ description, for the actors merely laughed off the incidents and did not seem to care at all since no one was hurt. *The Drama’s Patrons* may decry the practice of pelting (as the eighteenth-century actors may have as well), but for my purposes the thrown object takes on a life of its own in my highly magnified examination of the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*.

**Throwing in *The Author on the Wheel***

To begin an exploration of the spatial negotiations involved in pelting, I want to pause and imagine the actual act of the throw. Pelting impacts the performance of a play in a way that other forms of audience participation do not. When an audience takes pleasure in the onstage action, it has the ability to react with applause and cheers. Likewise, when an audience disagrees
with or simply dislikes the action onstage, it can take advantage of the live moment as well.

Audiences expressed delight and dissatisfaction audibly as well as visually. Audibly they may have yelled and hissed, and visually they may have stood and gestured. But in addition to these seen and heard markers of discontent, audience members, in the case of pelting, take up arms and hurl missiles, sometimes of the edible sort: *The Author on the Wheel* mentions apples, oranges, and pears specifically. In this situation, the actors onstage had, up until this juncture, experienced only a picture of violence by the audience; this scene took place apart from their physical, material reality. However heated the audience became, the conflict remained removed from the body of the performer.

But now an audience member takes up an object. It is an orange he obtained from the fruit seller in the theatre. He feels the orange in his hand; it holds a certain weight, substantial, but not heavy. He feels the firm coat of the fruit in his hand, as he lifts his arm, arches his back and, creating a tension in the shoulder down to the fingers, pushes the orange forward with the whole arm, as the arc of movement travels down through the arm until the last moment when the wrist follows and the fingers release the orange. Though the missile has left the thrower’s body, he will still feel the after effects of the throw; his arm continues down on the arc of its journey, bending the body slightly forward, the severity of the angle depending on the force of the throw. It is at that point, the point of release, that the orange lives a highly-charged life of its own.

Traveling through the air on a trajectory toward the second party, the projectile crosses the vacant territory between spectator and performer, and between thrower and receiver. Hovering, traveling, flying, floating; the fruit carries with it not only physical power but ideological power as well. Passing over the crowd en route to the stage, the thrown object’s kinetic potential drains as its cultural capital gains. At the moment of the throw, hope, fear, desire, and wonder all
collide midair while the object continues forward on its remaining flight plan. About to land, the orange zeros in on a target, while the thrower, ripe with expectation, helplessly watches from the sidelines, unable to make any impact now. On the other side, the performer may have been lucky enough to sense the impending doom and has quickly taken shelter or moved out of the object’s path. But those unfortunate enough not to detect the airborne assailant or not to have any place to hide aid in the completion of the journey of the thrown object. The orange hits and bursts, and spews juice and seeds over the recipient. A sudden pain comes to the victim, who has provided an abrupt end to the orange’s excursion. As the missile slides off, the residue of juice and skin (and maybe an emerging red welt) testify to the orange’s brutal voyage. Success comes to the thrower, and humiliation comes to the throwee.

This audience member transferred his rage to the body of the orange; this rage, however, cannot make any impact until it crosses through the air unaccompanied by human hands. The act proves key. The act of throwing brought (metaphorical) life to the orange and (metaphorical) death to the performer. Connected by an inanimate object, both performer and spectator feel the power of the throw. Distance proves no obstacle to the expression of dissatisfaction. In a sense, the distance between performer and spectator provides for a more potent manifestation of unhappiness. At arm’s length, the actor and spectator might come to blows, and make direct physical contact through punches and kicks. But the act of throwing introduces a third party, the opportune orange, and joins the two entities in a great circuit of energy. Beginning, middle, end; the throw supplies all three. Talk about a performance.

The performance of the throw unfolds in two ways in The Author on the Wheel. Two separate sections in this play describe encounters with pelting. Both encounters happened during the performance of Vainwit’s play the night before, however, the encounters come from very
different perspectives. How space functions in regards to the thrown object hinges on the perspective of the parties involved. Whether the spectator threw the object with malice or in jest and whether the actor dodged or felt the blow both factor into the meanings created in and by the spaces. In the first occurrence, Vainwit describes the thrown object in terms of audience space, audience class makeup, and audience intent. After Drama the manager asked if Vainwit really believes that spectators formed cabals to oppose his play, he replies:

VAINWIT. Think so! Why my dear sir I know it—I can prove that dozens of Irish-chairmen and bricklayers, laborers with concealed bludgeons went in bodies to the one and two shilling galleries; deputy editors and puny paragraph writers were placed in the pit: and Fish-women dressed in silk gowns and balloon hats were hired to hiss and cry “off” during the performance. (34)

In this description, Vainwit accuses the gallery spectators of carrying concealed. Those enjoying the performance from the galleries possessed a good vantage point from which to watch the drama and throw fruit at it. The galleries (specifically the second and third galleries, not the first gallery which made up the row of boxes) stood higher than the stage. Though separated by the pit, the gallery spectator might easily throw an object toward the stage and hit the mark; the object would travel forward and down due to gravity. An object thrown from the pit might hit the stage, but the throw would need to be executed with considerable force to achieve a line-drive. Thus, the position within the audience space helps or hinders the spectator desiring to pelt an actor onstage. Vainwit blames the missiles on the laborers in the galleries, and this would have been a relatively safe assumption to make based on the pelting practices of his day. The author of the failed play views the attacks as premeditated malice, while the alleged perpetrators might have viewed their actions as fair retribution for the terrible play. The space from which
one views not only the act of pelting but the reason for the pelting determines one’s feelings on
the subject, whether good, bad, or indifferent.

The second (and more insightful) description of pelting occurs in the green room. The
actors who performed in Vainwit’s play the night before gather for the cutting session and swap
stories of the failed performance. All seem to have had some bad experience upon the stage, and
a few experienced pelting directly. I include the section of dialogue in its entirety for a thorough
analysis:

    THESPIS. Indeed I began to think it a service of danger [performing the entirety
    of Vainwit’s play] and am rather alarmed at the consequences—for in the 3rd act
    last night where the chambermaid was to give me a slap on the face, a large apple
    came whizzing from the gods, and probably on putting the back of my hand on
    my cheek to prevent her blow, I saved my eye being knocked out, for it came full
    in my palm.

    SOCK. ’Tis devilish wicked to laugh but faith I can’t help it.

    BUSKIN. Pray what tickles your fancy?

    SOCK. Why the ridiculous situation poor old Mrs. Rant was in last night.

    THESPIS. I went away after I’d done in the act. What was it?

    SOCK. Why sir some pleasant gentleman upstairs, not satisfied with what she
    was saying, threw a Windsor pear with such vehemence against her headdress that
    it unfortunately gave way and exposed her bald pate and a few hairs of a side. Ha!

    Ha! (all laugh)
THESPIS. The Gods saluted me with a few apples and oranges, but having a large wig on they did me no other damage than making the powder fly about. There were certainly apples and oranges enough to have set up a fruit shop.

SOCK. If the Author’s Muse had borne any comparison with the floor last night ‘twould have been the most fruit-full one that ever appeared on the stage. (37-38)

This rich piece of dialogue unveils the consequences of pelting from the inside out. The targets face, arguably, the most unpleasant side of the affair. Thespis and Mrs. Rant experienced the audience’s wrath first-hand, while the other actors either watched the attacks or learned of them afterward. The perspective of each person involved in the act matters greatly; it means the difference between pleasure and pain, and between laughter and crying. How do the characters in *The Author on the Wheel* negotiate the spaces of the theatre while in the line of fire?

Thespis’ first recorded experience presents a comical image for the stage. This short piece of dialogue not only provides a look at audience behavior, but it also provides a look at actor techniques. During a scene in Vainwit’s play, Thespis and the chambermaid apparently involve in some kind of conflict. The chambermaid was to slap Thespis on the cheek, and to “prevent her blow,” he placed the back of his hand on his cheek which was to be slapped. In this manner, the actress would seem to be slapping his face, while she really was only making contact with the palm of his hand. The apple comes into the scene when an audience member in the gallery throws the fruit toward the couple. Instead of stopping the apple with his face, Thespis stops the apple with his hand; indeed, Thespis might have stood in shock for a moment holding the unexpected apple.

In this instance, the risk involved in eighteenth-century acting becomes very clear. Imagine if Thespis had not lifted his hand to his face in preparation for the slap; an apple would
have hit him square in the face. Injury could result from an apple connecting with any body part, but the face is an especially sensitive area. The actor paradoxically was attempting to avoid physical pain. The method of executing a “stage slap” in this case not only prevented actual injury to the actor resulting from the opposing actor, but it prevented actual injury resulting from the audience. The differences in the dangerous acts are many. The stage slap was rehearsed, while the thrown apple was most likely more spontaneous. The stage slap was designed to bring minimal pain to the recipient, while the thrown apple directed toward the face was most likely out for blood. But the most important difference between the two acts of violence lurks in the spaces occupied by the participants. The stage slap originated on Vainwit’s page, took shape in the rehearsal spaces, and finally (almost) came to life on the stage. The thrown apple originated at the fruit stand, traveled to the audience space of the gallery, then crossed over the pit and into the stage. Both the practitioner space and the audience space guide the potentially injurious acts to the performance space. In the end, the performers become spectators and the spectators become performers; this effectively shifts all three spaces into the performance space.

Thespis describes his next experience, and it turns out to be an experience somewhat less dangerous than the first. He tells the other players in the green room, “The Gods saluted me with a few apples and oranges, but having a large wig on they did me no other damage than making the powder fly about” (38). In this description, Thespis first locates the audience members involved by calling them “gods.” As I stated in the first chapter, the nickname “gods” applied to the spectators in the second and third galleries. Thespis then jokingly claims that they “saluted” him with apples and oranges. He describes the end result of the pelting in terms of the location of the thrown object: the fruit did not hit his body, but it did hit his large powdered wig.
The dialogue in *The Author on the Wheel* at this point reveals much in terms of shifting spaces when observed from up close. First, the location of the audience members supports the argument that the spectators in the galleries executed most of the throwing. Thespis confidently blames the gods for the attacks, so either a) he saw the original location of the fruit or b) assumed the space from which the fruit came. Therefore, the spectators watching *The Author on the Wheel* from the galleries momentarily stood in for the perpetrators in the theatre during Vainwit’s play. The actors in the performance space representing the practitioner space of the green room verbally create an image of the audience space that can be compared in real time and space to the actual audience space of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. When the object moves from the gallery to the stage, not only do the spaces shift (audience space becomes performance space) but identities shift as well (spectators become performers, and vice versa). The audience member in the gallery might even shift into a theatre practitioner: hitting Thespis’ wig with the apple, the thrower assumes the role of crazed costumer. As the apple flies, so the spaces transform. The movement of the object sets the proverbial dominoes in motion.

**Theorizing the Prop**

The thrown object relies on motion for meaning. Without movement, the object remains static in one space. The thrown object also relies on motion for identity; without the throw, the fruit is food for consumption. But after a person hurls the object, the object transforms into a weapon. Even if the goal of the spectator is not to hit or hurt an actor, a piece of fruit thrown toward the stage carries with it a clear meaning: I do not approve of this performance / script / person. Motion, then, is a key characteristic of the thrown object; but even the motion has no meaning apart from the spaces in which it travels. The object travelling through specific (though...
shifting) theatre spaces creates meaning not because of what it is, but because of where it is going.

The stage prop follows a path not totally unlike the path followed by the thrown object. In fact, the stage prop and the flying orange seem to bear striking similarities. To begin my investigation into the distinctive but somewhat overlapping qualities of the prop and the thrown object, I return to the spatial theory Gay McAuley lays out for the different areas of the theatre. McAuley describes the spaces of the theatre inhabited by actors as “energized” (90). This then leads to the idea of the prop onstage: what do the objects that are on the stage mean apart from the energizing actor? She states:

> Objects² on the stage tend to merge into the background, and they become meaningful only when handled, looked at, or referred to. It is through the agency of the actor that objects are brought to the attention of the audience, and it is the actor that creates the mobility that is characteristic of the theatrical function of the object: the actor can, with a gesture or an act, transform a walking stick into a machine gun, a bundle of rags into a baby, a chair on a table into a mountain. The set conveys a limited amount of information in the absence of the actor, as has just been stated, but becomes a powerfully expressive instrument when occupied and activated by actors. (91)

McAuley places weight and value not on the material object but on the “activation” of the object. The key difference between the thrown object and the prop thus far is that the prop does not

² McAuley prefers the term “stage object” to “prop” because she feels the term “prop” holds connotations that are outmoded: “The words prop and property convey in themselves a suggestion of the range of functions objects have traditionally filled: both a support (or prop) to the actor and a means of bodying forth certain qualities (or properties) pertaining to the character, place, or situation” (175). Her use of the word “object” aims for a less supportive role for the thing onstage than the “helpful” connotation of the prop.
require motion for activation. As stated in the above quotation, McAuley believes that an object becomes meaningful through the agency of the person onstage; later in her analysis she further spells out her idea of the “thing” as “prop”:

In general it can be said that the stage object is inanimate, and it is either brought into the presentational space by an actor, or is already present. Furthermore, it is of such nature that it can be touched, moved, or displaced by the actor. The crucial factor in defining the stage object is thus human intervention… A thing onstage becomes an object if it is touched, manipulated, or even simply looked at or spoken about by an actor. (176)

In short, the actor brings the prop to life through some kind of intentional act, whether he or she actually moves the object or merely directs the audience’s attention toward the object. Using this definition, the stage objects in *The Author on the Wheel* include Vainwit’s manuscript, the note presented to Drama by the prompter, a pen used by Drama to make the cuts to the script, and Drama’s watch.

Though Gay McAuley deals with the stage object in terms of the spatial negotiations in the theatre, Andrew Sofer dives into the complex identity of the prop more fully in his book *The Stage Life of Props* (2003). His goal in this text is to explore “the power of stage objects to take on a life of their own in performance” (2). To this end, he provides a collection of case studies that he examines using production analysis; his book, then, focuses in on the “stage careers” of five different props from the medieval communion wafer to the skull in Jacobean drama (5). Sofer’s introduction thoroughly spells out his use of the word prop, and it is helpful here to provide another way into the study of the thrown object.
According to Sofer, “a prop can be more rigorously defined as *a discrete, material, inanimate object that is visibly manipulated by an actor in the course of a performance*” (11). His definition is more “rigorously defined” than the dictionary definition which does not create a distinction between props and other things that are on the stage (11). Further, and different from McAuley’s definition:

It follows that a stage object must be “triggered” by an actor in order to become a prop (objects shifted by stagehands between scenes do not qualify)... The distinction between props and other kinds of stage objects, then, is a matter neither of diminutive size nor potential portability but actual motion. The prop must physically move or alter in some way as a result of the actor’s physical intervention. (12)

Thus, if an actor looks meaningfully at an object onstage, McAuley would consider this an example of “human intervention” and therefore consider the object a prop, while Sofer would not include “a look” in the realm of physical intervention. For Sofer, the aggregate of things on the stage require activation that not only calls the audience’s attention to the object, but an activation that physically “move[s] or alter[s]” the items in some way.

Though the two scholars differ on the ways in which an object may be activated in order to transform into a prop, both agree that an object is not a prop because of what it is, but because of what it becomes onstage (Sofer 12, McAuley 176). For example, the manuscript in *The Author on the Wheel* plays a large role in the overall story. The characters talk about the absurdity of the script while Vainwit praises its merits. But until a character manipulates the script in some way, it is just a stack of papers. Vainwit’s script moves through the performance space as a prop. The manager crosses out lines on the pages in order to makes the cuts necessary
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for another performance. Vainwit eventually loses all patience, grabs the script, and storms out of the room. Visibly shaken, Vainwit describes the desecration done to his masterpiece:

VAINWIT. Blockheads! Coxcombs! Butchers! / Surveying his manuscript wishfully and in great agitation / Here’s a cut! One of the finest passages in the whole piece. How spitefully it’s crossed out—this is that damned fellow Drama’s own doing; I know the stroke of his own pen from a million {still turning over the leaves of the manuscript eagerly} Crossed! Dash! Cut! Whole pages black! Black! Nothing but black! These cuts could never have been made with common pen and ink—some of the strokes are as broad as my thumb and have that dingy, sooty appearance as if they had been made with lamb-black and a painter’s brush.

(41-42)

This description shows the extent to which the manuscript was, in Vainwit’s eyes, artistically and literally violated. We next see the jilted author entreating Mask to join his scheme; Vainwit holds his manuscript tightly throughout this section, as he is convinced someone might steal it away from him. Finally, he leaves for good with his brainchild in tow. The prop of the script played a part almost as large as the main characters; in fact, the script practically built the wheel upon which Vainwit was fixed. Because the characters activated the script through physical / human intervention, the stack of papers transformed into a prop.

To this end, the script in The Author on the Wheel aptly exemplifies the aforementioned definition of “prop.” To dive even further into the theoretical meanings associated with the objects on stage, Sofer includes a more detailed description of the prop, stating, “a prop is an object that goes on a journey; hence props trace spatial trajectories and create temporal narratives as they track through a given performance” (2). Vainwit’s manuscript completes a journey
through the backstage of the theatre during the performance of *The Author on the Wheel*. But if the audience buys into the representative life of the script beyond the stage, they will realize that the script actually journeyed much farther than the backstage of the theatre. The script came into being through Vainwit’s pen, travelled to the theatre, came to life in rehearsals (both individual and whole), and then sat in the hands of the prompter during the performance. The performance of the script (which technically occurred before the performance of *The Author on the Wheel*) rightly assumes all the focus of the play. Therefore, the script, though physically onstage journeying through the practitioner areas, fictionally moves throughout the city, the theatre spaces, and the minds and bodies of the cast and crew. The prop in this light does trace a spatial and temporal narrative as a physical object onstage as Sofer describes, but also crosses the confines of the stage boundaries as a result of its weighty implications. Not just a stack of papers physically manipulated by the actors onstage, the script in *The Author on the Wheel* travels through spaces while creating spaces. In the fictional spaces of the play as well as the factual spaces of the theatre, the script continually shifts the spaces on its journey through time and space.

### Thrown Objects as Props

Andrew Sofer’s description of the prop’s spatio-temporal journey creates an opening in which the thrown object might enter the discussion. As stated above, Sofer desires to trace the journeys that props make throughout a performance. He continues this thought by articulating one of his goals in *The Stage Life of Props*:

> My first aim in this study is to restore to the prop those performance dimensions that literary critics are trained not to see. These include not only the three-
dimensionality of objects as material participants in the stage action, but the
spatial dimension (how props move in concrete stage space) and the temporal
dimension (how props move through linear stage time). Although these are the
dimensions that allow the object to mean in performance, they are precisely those
liable to drop out of sight when the prop is treated as a textual rather than as a
theatrical phenomenon. (2)

Sofer mentions two ways that props move in a performance: throughout the actual confines of
the stage and throughout the stage time. Using an example from The Author on the Wheel, a
reader could track the movement of the manager’s watch. In Scene One, Drama and Vainwit
discuss the performance of Vainwit’s play the night before. Drama decides to let Vainwit come
to the cutting session, but suggests that Vainwit attend in disguise. As Harwood has already
pointed out, most of the actors are situated in the green room waiting for the meeting. In Scene
Two, Drama and Vainwit enter the green room and begin the meeting. Drama stays in the green
room until Vainwit’s dramatic exit, and then leaves the stage a few lines before the scene ends.
That is Drama’s last appearance onstage. His watch travels with him throughout his two scenes.
Spatially, the watch moves concealed on Drama’s person throughout Scene One and Scene Two,
and shows itself to the audience very briefly at the end of Scene One:

DRAMA. Let me see: (takes out his watch) ‘tis past eleven. The actors are
waiting for me in the green-room—suppose therefore I introduce you to them, not
as the Author, but a friend of mine who was present at the play last night, and you
will then hear ingenuously their sentiments on its merits, or demerits. (35)

The watch moves throughout the stage with Drama; wherever Drama moves, the watch moves
with him. To the audience, the watch stays hidden and only inhabits the stage for a moment.
But physically, the watch travels with Drama and accompanies him in all his blocking. In this way, the watch moves throughout the stage space as well as throughout the practitioner space of the Drury Lane green room and scene room.

The temporal dimension of the watch follows a simpler trajectory. The linear stage time of *The Author on the Wheel* is approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. The watch travels about in Drama’s pocket throughout the play, and travels onstage throughout Drama’s part in most of Scene One and Scene Two. The stage time filled out by the watch serendipitously mirrors the representation of the prop. The watch signals to the audience as a timepiece, and functions as a marker of the time for the manager and the cast of Vainwit’s play. In the factual life of the watch, the prop does not need to work or even need to be a real watch. When the manager pulls out the watch and declares “‘tis past eleven,” the time in the universe of the play is past eleven. As the watch ticks on, so the time in the cutting session goes on. The watch, as Sofer describes, *means* in performance through space and time, but does so by the “activation” of the actor. Because Drama carries the watch onstage and handles it in front of the audience, the watch moves on a trajectory throughout the time, space, and story of *The Author on the Wheel*.

Sofer’s definition provides a place for objects used in a performance as planned by the author or director. What I propose is an extrapolation of Sofer’s definition of the prop to theoretically include the thrown object. Substantial differences separate the prop from the thrown object, but I would like to put those differences aside for the moment for the purpose of exploration. How does the thrown object function when considered a prop? What journeys (both spatial and temporal) does the thrown object make? How might these journeys mean in ways similar to the prop? And how does the thrown object in *The Author on the Wheel* shift in space and identity just as the fictional and factual spaces shift in space and identity? Fleshing
out these questions while theorizing possible answers, I conclude the discussion of space in *The Author on the Wheel* with an investigation of the fluid spaces present in this play both in the text and in the theatre.

Textually, *The Author on the Wheel* already seems to conflate the thrown object with the prop throughout the green room discussions. Thespis humorously recalls his situation the night before on the stage; he endured a barrage of apples and oranges. Sock chuckles about his memory of Mrs. Rant losing her headdress to a Windsor pear. If *The Author on the Wheel* had included a scene of the characters performing the play, oranges and apples would serve as props for the disgruntled spectators to throw. Since the scene of the performance is only described and not demonstrated (or even reenacted), the fruit thrown at the fictional cast remains in the realm of the world offstage. These “props” in a sense went on spatial and temporal journeys in the minds of the characters. The audience must visualize what the scene would have looked like by joining the characters in their imaginations / memories.

But now, I direct your attention to the thrown object from two different standpoints: first, from the fictional spaces of *The Author on the Wheel* (during the fictional performance of Vainwit’s play), and secondly, from the factual spaces of *The Author on the Wheel* (the spaces of Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1785). In the first two chapters of this dissertation, I charted the shifting spaces occupied by the characters in the play as well as the characters involved in the production of the play. The thrown object moves through the spaces of the play while moving through the spaces of the theatre. How does the thrown object inhabit these spaces, and what happens when the fictional and the factual collide?

The journey of the thrown object begins at the point of acquisition. After describing the various roles that props play, Sofer postulates that each different “life” of a prop (whether
practical, referential, etc) “begins when an object is plucked from the world and placed upon a stage, where it uncannily becomes at once itself and other than itself” (29). In a similar manner, the thrown object is plucked from the world and placed (flung) upon a stage. From where in the world, then, was the thrown object plucked? Fruit and vegetables seem to be the most prevalent throws. Scholars have found evidence of fruit sellers in the actual building of the theatre. If you will recall, the fire of 1672 allegedly originated in the orange seller’s stand under the stairs. Fruit provided nutrition for the theatre spectators who desired sustenance. In its original role, the fruit functioned as a snack available to audience members. The fruit that came from a seller in the theatre occupied a place in the audience space of the theatre; spectators needed access to the fruit seller in order to procure the food. Some thrown objects, however, most likely would have come from the outside world and traveled in the possession of a spectator to the theatre. In both cases, the object would have been “plucked” from the world and placed, though not yet upon the stage, in an audience space in the theatre. At this point, the fruit begins its transformation from an innocent-enough snack to a weapon cocked and ready.

How does the fruit execute this transformation? The food becomes a weapon in the same manner that an object becomes a prop: when “triggered” (Sofer 11) by an actor. The spectators do not qualify as actors in a technical sense, but throughout this study I have attempted to show how, in the case of The Author on the Wheel, the audience members emerge as the stars of the show. It follows, then, that an object “triggered” by an audience member might be now considered a prop. The object is “visibly manipulated” (Sofer 11) and moved through “human intervention” (McAuley 176) by the spectator-cum-performer. The crucial difference between the prop and the thrown object is space. The prop goes on a journey from the practitioner space to the performance space, while the thrown object begins its journey in the audience space and
travels to the performance space. Both objects are triggered by human intervention. Both objects exhibit motion. Both objects end up on the stage proper. But the spaces from which the fruit fly alter the spatial trajectories and temporal narratives that the objects trace.

The spatial trajectory travelled by the thrown object calls attention back to McAuley’s description of the theatergoing experience: one that “emphasizes this sense of inward progression” (51). From this perspective, the thrown object follows a flight plan similar to the path of the spectator: further and further into the theatre building until he or she reaches the boundary of the stage. The edge of the stage presents the dividing line between the world and the stage, and between spectator and performer. When the spectator hurls an object toward the stage, the spectator’s journey into the inside of the theatre instantly lengthens. Though the spectator has, thus far, experienced “penetration further and further into the building until [the spectator] reaches the point beyond which one cannot go” (50), the object now infiltrates the performance space in a forceful attempt to know. The demarcation between spectator and performer shatters as the object declares the materiality of all present. Entering the stage perpendicularly from the audience space, the object now becomes a part of the performance: an undeniable, dangerous, and meaningful part of the performance.

The moment the thrown object crosses the threshold of the stage marks a crossing over from one world to another. This moment of crossing holds immense power and dynamic potential, as McAuley states in her description of theatre spaces:

As all analysts of space point out, it is at the outer edges of a given space and particularly at the interface between two spaces, at the border zones that the analysis becomes most interesting. This is certainly the case in the theatre, where the interface between stage and auditorium, practitioner and audience space, has
been dramatized and elaborated through numerous conventions over the theatre’s long history. (86)

McAuley names the interface between the audience and the performer as a space of interesting analysis. I believe the thrown object succeeds in making known the interface between these two spaces, even though, as she points out, theatres have long attempted to keep these spaces separate. The throw crosses the space separating the audience and the performer while illuminating the chasm of difference between the two spaces.

**Production and Reception**

In addition to illuminating the differences amongst the spaces in the theatre, the thrown object also changes the ways in which meaning is made in those very spaces. To examine the meaning-making process that occurs during the throw, I turn to the scholarship of Ric Knowles, author of *Reading the Materialist Theatre*. In this 2004 work, Knowles states that his goal “is to articulate and apply a method for achieving a more precise and more fully contextualized and politicized understanding of how meaning is produced in the theatre” (9). Knowles uses a variety of frameworks including cultural materialism and semiotics. However, his model for performance analysis borrows heavily from the work of cultural theorists in the 1970s and 1980s who studied audience response. As Knowles posits the question of “precisely how audiences produce meaning” (17) in a given theatrical event, he cites the work of these theorists and summarizes with “The shared assumption underlying all of this work is that cultural productions neither contain meaning nor uni-dimensionally shape behavior and belief; rather they produce meaning through the discursive work of an interpretive community and through the lived, everyday relationships of people with texts and performances” (17). The rejection of a one-way
street down which meaning travels from the stage to the audience allows for a more faceted
analysis of audience reception that includes the meaning-making process of the spectator.

Critical to Knowles’ theory of this meaning-making process is the work of theorist Stuart
Hall. Knowles identifies two of Hall’s articles (“Encoding / decoding” and “Cultural Studies:
two paradigms”) in which the author articulates a theory of audience reception and the process of
both producing and receiving meaning. Hall’s theories include “making connections and
observing disjunctions between the ideologically coded material conditions for the production of
signs and the similarly coded material conditions in and through which those signs are received,
decoded, interpreted, and used” (Knowles 18). Hall argues that the receiver at the point of
consumption possesses an ability to resist the dominant hierarchies of the producer, and that even
though the signs are encoded in a certain way, the consumer can decode the sign “against the
grain” (18). For Knowles, then, the concepts of encoding and decoding help to flesh out his
triangular model of performance analysis which includes the performance text (the script, the
design, etc), the conditions of production (the actors, the stage and backstage spaces, etc.), and
the conditions of reception (the advertising, the ticket prices, the audience spaces, etc). All these
work together to create the overall theatrical experience. According to Knowles:

“Meaning” in a given performance situation—the social and cultural work done
by the performance, its performativity, and its force—is the effect of all these
systems and each pole of the interpretive triangle working dynamically and
relationally together. The degree to which reception is (pre)determined by
culturally dominant contexts and mechanisms of production, and the degree to
which resistant meanings are available, *depends upon the amount of productive tension and slippage within and among the corners.*\(^3\) (19)

The spectator experiences the event in the context of her or his own history, assumptions, and prior experiences. The theatre company presents the event with certain goals for revenue and maybe goals to convey certain aesthetic or moral values. But the spectator holds the power at the point of consumption to interpret the text in a way unique to her or his situation. Far from a congregation of cultural dupes, the audience receives the performance’s meaning—and perhaps perceives its intended meanings—while simultaneously reinterpreting and making their own meaning. All the factors of production and reception combine to form a moment in time and space that gives life to an experience in which one may demonstrates acceptance, resistance, or something in between.

Stuart Hall’s theory of encoding and decoding offers a useful framework for considering the fictional spectators of Vainwit’s play in *The Author on the Wheel.* Further, Ric Knowles’ three-part application of Hall’s theory to theatre helps to illuminate the “tension and slippage” amongst the spaces of the fictional performance of Vainwit’s play. The conditions of production, the conditions of reception, and the performance text all contribute in creating an opportunity for the audience to make their own meanings out of Vainwit’s play. In the case of this performance, the audience made meaning not only through reinterpretation and resistance of the text, but also made meaning by means of a physical invasion of the stage space through a counter-performance originating in the house.

The conditions of production of Vainwit’s play appear the most fleshed out in *The Author on the Wheel.* Indeed, the whole play revolves around a behind-the-scenes look at Vainwit’s

\(^3\) Italics my own.
work. Set in the backstage of the theatre, Drama the manager works with the actors and the author to make the play at least watchable for the second night’s performance. As detailed in the previous chapters, the rehearsal process for the play included meetings of the group as well as individual rehearsal. We know that at least one member of the cast felt the impending doom of the first performance; Buskin did not learn his whole part because he did not believe the audience would stand to watch the entire show. The actors may have approached the performance with some trepidation, though the author firmly believed in the merit of his piece. These conditions of production made for a performance already fraught with division. The actors openly despised the play and ridiculed the author, while the manager, though maybe not a fan of the play either, put on a brave face in an attempt to salvage the performance of the second night. The author, of course, fought for his work until the bitter end. The production never did see a second performance, so the first night became the last.

The conditions of reception of Vainwit’s play depend on the perspective of the individual spectator. The audience members we know of watched the show from the galleries, the boxes, or the pit. Each spectator traveled a unique path to her or his seat; travelling from outside to inside, the spectators exerted different mental and physical efforts to arrive at the theatre the night of the show. The conditions of reception for the fish-women in the boxes included coming in to the show late and intoxicated. Vainwit believed that all these spectators came predetermined to oppose the show; this condition of reception would heavily impact the meaning-making process for the spectator. In fact, since the audience members allegedly came in cabals to oppose the piece, the conditions of reception could be read as in the category of conditions of production: the audience members prepared to perform a role in the evening’s entertainment, albeit unbeknownst to the cast and crew. Whether the house was filled with malicious intent or the
spectators merely reacted to the awful performance, the conditions of reception allowed for the audience to resist the performed text by performing a work of their own.

The third category of Knowles’ model, the performance text, resides in the spaces in between the conditions of production and reception both spatially and temporally. The performance text includes Vainwit’s manuscript and the performance space energized by the actors’ bodies and movements. Spatially, the script traverses through the backstage areas of the theatre before, during, and after the first night’s performance. Drama makes the cuts necessary for a better performance, but Vainwit objects and seizes the script right before his dramatic exit. Temporally, the script lies in that dynamic period of time between the first and second performance; the cast must perform again, but to do that the script must undergo substantial revision and cuts. Hovering between the outside world and the inner stage, and between the failed performance and the anticipated second night, the script (in this case the actual performance text) slides from hand to hand conceptually and materially. The audience’s ability to make meaning from the performance text is continually revised and renegotiated because of the competing conditions of production and reception.

_The Author on the Wheel_ Consumed

During the performance of Vainwit’s play, members of the audiences threw fruit at the stage repeatedly. According to Thespis, “There were certainly apples and oranges enough to have set up a fruit shop” (34). All the projectiles named in _The Author on the Wheel_ began life as food for consumption. In addition to apples and oranges, pears made the list of items hurled toward the stage. The audience members either bought the fruit at the theatre to eat before, during, or after the show, or they brought fruit from outside of the theatre for the same reasons.
Eating during a performance during the late-eighteenth century in Theatre Royal Drury Lane was a common and sanctioned act. This practice would have added ammunition to the spectator desiring to throw something at the stage. Even after the spectator eats the apple or the orange, the core or peel still remains as a possible weapon with which to fire at the performers.

The fruit begins as an object for consumption. At some point, the spectator paid for the apple and resolidified its status as commodity. In the possession of the spectator, the apple acts as a product for the nourishment of the audience member. The apple’s purpose is to be consumed by its owner. At the point of the throw, the apple shifts from a product of consumption to an agent of production. During this shift, the object fills Andrew Sofer’s definition of a prop as “something an object becomes, rather than something an object is” (12). No longer an object to be consumed by the spectator, the apple now lives as an object that actively participates in the performance. This shift in identity correlates with the shift in identity of the spectator; no longer a consumer of the performance on the stage, the spectator now participates in the performance while producing both a spectacle for others to consume as well as an obstacle for the performer to negotiate. By throwing the apple, the spectator causes the prop to enter into the designated performance space while simultaneously creating a new performance space. Moving from consumption to production, the spectator now actively engages with the performers and spectators in a new role of author and performer.

As Ric Knowles thoughtfully points out, “The degree to which reception is (pre)determined by culturally dominant contexts and mechanisms of production, and the degree to which resistant meanings are available, depends upon the amount of productive tension and slippage within and among the corners” (19). The spectators consuming the production of Vainwit’s play demonstrated their right to form resistant meanings by penetrating the
performance space. The thrown object passes over the audience from the space that created the conditions of reception into the very space which enabled the conditions of production. Because of the intense yet playful “slippage within and among the corners” of *The Author on the Wheel*, resistant meanings are available to an unlimited degree. When consumers begin producing, the spaces, people, and everything in between change; turned inside out, the audience space, practitioner space, and performance space invert and resettle into their new identities. Constantly shifting, the spaces in *The Author on the Wheel* seem never to rest and appear to relentlessly resist any firm definition.

The thrown object travels from the outside in and mirrors the experience of the spectator, an experience of “penetration further and further into the building until one reaches the point beyond which one cannot go” (McAuley 50). Throughout this chapter, the thrown object stands in for the recalibrating identity of both spaces in the theatre and people at the theatre. Audience members penetrate the building from the outside to the inside, while theatre practitioners move into the space similarly, but from an alternate view. The perspective of each individual will impact her or his journey into and out of the space. Whether performer or spectator, backstage or in the house, invested or indifferent, or even factual or fictional, the characters in the production of *The Author on the Wheel* all meet for a moment in the performance space as the drama unfolds. In this dynamically charged space, it may very well be possible to go beyond the point which one cannot go. Just watch out for flying fruit.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The Spectator as Critic

Throughout *The Author on the Wheel*, an intriguing thread weaves together the fictional, the factual, and the flying spaces of the theatre. That thread is the idea of the spectator as critic. In the play, Vainwit refers to himself as a critic and reveals that in addition to playwrighting, he crafts his opinions for the public to read. Several examples demonstrate that Vainwit does not necessarily base his criticism on merit, but on other factors. First, after learning that the cast and manager will be making cuts to his masterpiece, Vainwit threatens with the following:

> VAINWIT. They cannot be so ignorant, such dolts to make objections! If they do I’ll give critiques on their acting in all the newspapers in the style of Aesop and the Trunk-makers, sign myself an impartial critic and poison ‘em in the opinion of all the public. (36)

The critiques Vainwit would make in this case link directly to the actors’ disapproval of Vainwit’s script. Vainwit believes in his own genius, but he does not trust others to see the beauty of his work. As the scene in the green room reveals, he is correct in assuming that the cast will not share his opinion of his play.

In another instance, Vainwit identifies himself as a practicing critic, though this time the criticism is on the other extreme. After reading the cuts made by the cast, he laments about the pain of not only the cutting of his piece, but more importantly *who* is doing the cutting. Vainwit moans:
VAINWIT. But here, here’s the worst cut of all. Mrs. Exit’s part given up, she who I have been puffing so long. This cuts as home as Brutus in the heart of Caesar. (45)

Vainwit has “puffed” this actress for a long time, and now he feels betrayed by her fickle attitude. In this instance, the criticism again veers from a merit-based system to a quid pro quo arrangement. In Vainwit’s eyes, he has been scratching Mrs. Exit’s back, and now she should scratch his.

Finally, after revealing his true identity as the author to the cast, Vainwit once again threatens with the most dangerous weapon that he possesses. Since the actors so cruelly mocked and destroyed his work, Vainwit declares:

VAINWIT. I’ll exercise the power of pen against this theatre puff the other into fashion. I’ll prejudice the public to consider this a mere bore, and make the other as popular and attractive as the Learned Pig! (44)

Vainwit highly values the power of his opinion in the eyes of the public. Though this most likely is just another example of his vanity, it is important to note that the power of the pen did indeed matter. Though Vainwit’s opinion might not be of any concern to the cast and manager, this thought may have sat uneasily in their minds. As theatre practitioners, this group of people relied on the public’s favor and patronage for their livelihoods. Just how true might Vainwit’s threats be?

The idea of the spectator as critic plays a large role in not only theatre history scholarship but in literary history as well. Dane Farnsworth Smith devoted his book *The Critics in the Audience of the London Theatres of the London Theatres from Buckingham to Sheridan* (1953) to this very idea. According to Smith, “One of the commonplaces of literary history is the fact
that the age of English classicism, extending roughly from 1660 through the eighteenth century, is also pre-eminently the age of criticism” (13). In an age of increasing codification and formulation of drama and poetry, critics and those aspiring to be critics abounded (14). Smith goes so far as to suggest that “literary criticism [in this time period] has a place in the minds of all readers” (12), and that this span of time demonstrates an age in which “both author and audience were influenced as never before or since by contemporary critical theory and by the classical ideal that the exercise of individual judgment is the first duty of man” (11). As literacy rose, so did the opportunity for linguistic expression in newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets. Combined with the perceived right to judge as an individual, increased literacy among the public of London allowed theatrical criticism to flourish. At the time of *The Author on the Wheel*, critics in the audience were a staple of the theatre scene (and of scenes in the theatre).

How does the spectator as critic interweave the three threads of this dissertation? First, the spectator / critic lives in the fictional spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*. Vainwit might be considered an author / critic, but most likely this is Vainwit’s first foray into the theatre world. True, he has pockets full of farces, but none have yet to see the light of the theatre. So Vainwit’s role is that of a theatergoer who opines on the theatres and performances in London. In addition, the audience watching the performance of Vainwit’s play included “deputy editors and puny paragraph writers… in the pit” (34). Critics ready to judge the play attended the performance. If you will remember, Vainwit believed these writers were “placed” in the pit to damn the play. Either way, the fictional drama in *The Author on the Wheel* felt the pressure of the critic, both from the inside and out.

Secondly, the factual spaces of *The Author on the Wheel* grant a space in history for the spectator as critic. As demonstrated in chapter two, *The Daily Universal Register* ran a short
review of Bannister’s benefit night that took place at Theatre Royal Drury Lane on April 18, 1785. The critic praised Bannister’s performances of that evening, writing “The Author on the Wheel is a pleasant jeu de’sprit and well suited to a benefit; but though it has considerable merit, is better in conception than execution. The author will probably improve it against next season” (*The Daily Universal Register*, April 20, 1785). The critic travelled to the theatre, entered the audience space, consumed the production, then exited the theatre back into the world; soon after, he produced this short review and sent it into circulation. *The Author on the Wheel* again lived in the public eye, though this time it was through the perspective of one person. The audience present on the night of April 18, 1785 experienced the performance of *The Author on the Wheel*. But those present and not present were able to see the performance (however faintly) through the lens of a real “paragraph writer.” As in chapter two, the “factual” spaces of *The Author on the Wheel* exist through the point of view of the individual. In this case, the play comes to my hands from the anonymous author who wrote the manuscript and the newspaper writer who wrote up the review. In both cases, the written word proclaims its firm grasp on history and research. From these texts comes a magnified, yet imagined portrayal of the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*. But I believe it a fully nuanced and documented portrayal, nonetheless.

Regarding the factual spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*, I want to pause to consider the role that the spectator on the stage played in the eighteenth-century theatre. Spectators routinely sat in seats directly on the stage and became, at least in some senses, a part of the dramatic action. Throughout this work I have not considered the idea of the spectator sitting on the stage, for I have begun with the assumption of a more heavily divided performer space and audience space. Though the practice of allowing spectators to sit on the stage was officially banned in 1762 by Garrick, evidence exists that the practice was sometimes allowed after that date for
benefit performances. The beneficiaries would want as many paying spectators to attend their shows as possible, so spectators occasionally had more opportunities to sit on the stage (Hatchuel 7, Pedicord 55), but only for a few years after the ban. Even if no spectators sat on the stage during the performance of *The Author on the Wheel*, the audience there that night in 1785 may have still held the memory of spectators on the stage.

How does this memory impact the reception of the factual space of the play? Though I have created a sharply divided picture of audience and performer space crossed only by the thrown object, the stage may have been an even more spatially ambiguous place than I imagined. Instead of imagining the audience members performing their respective roles in the auditorium, some might have made the imaginative leap that the spectators performed their roles upon the stage proper. In this case, the audience space would not only shift into the performance space once the spectator begins to perform, but the audience space would be physically layered upon the performance space. As the ban on spectators on the stage eventually peeled back the layers of meaning and performance that played upon the stage, the residual traces of the position spectators once held may have lasted well into the nineteenth century. Complicating and stirring up the idea of the three spaces, spectators on the stage create not only a new place from which to view (and be viewed), but also a new place from which to judge (and be judged).

Thirdly, the flying space in *The Author on the Wheel* thrives on the spectator / critic for realization. In the most basic application, the spectator who feels the right to judge a performance shifts seamlessly into the role of critic. Instead of voicing his critical opinion on the printed page, this spectator manifests his opinion materially in the theatre space. By throwing an object at the performers on a stage, the spectator dons the character of critic in a very tangible way. The words of the critic can show the power of the pen; critics are said to “tear a piece to
shreds” or “cut down” the author or actors. Vainwit specifically states that he will “poison” the actors in the opinion of the public. These words can symbolically “hurt” a career, but the thrown object can physically hurt a career. Without the filter of the written word, the critic who throws an object makes known his judgment upon the piece or performers in real time. A newspaper article must go through the mind and hands of the writer and printer before it touches the actor or author. But the fruit crosses the space between spectator and performer immediately and as well as publically. The danger for the performer onstage exists physically and / or symbolically based solely upon the role which the spectator chooses to play.

As I near the end of this study, I return as well to the end of *The Author on the Wheel* and the end of *The Critics in the Audience*. Smith ends his book with an investigation into the prologues and epilogues of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century plays. In his concluding chapter, Smith contends that prologues and epilogues allowed playwrights to directly appeal to the critics in the audience. These beginning or ending bits of poetry often contained direct reference to the spectator as judge, and they demonstrates to the reader just how powerfully the weight of the critic was felt. Smith argues that the prologue and epilogue “frequently served as a shield or defensive apparatus against criticism and critics” and that “these omnipresent versified preludes and postludes of dramatic pieces enabled the author or his friend to talk directly to the people who had assembled to see the performance” (144). In this form, the author could choose from a variety of tactics: flatter, cajole, frighten, or intimidate (144). In the epilogue, especially, the author could try and sway the audience’s opinion on the performance just seen and heard. These short texts allow the author one last chance to influence the spectator for the better.

*The Author on the Wheel*’s epilogue serves almost as an addendum to an epilogue. Since the entire play highlights the power of the spectator in the theatre space as well as the power of
the critic in circulation, the play usurps the epilogue’s frequently used function of deferring to the audience. The play tells a story of a cast hovering uneasily between two performances. The audience damned the first, and it is the audience who can damn the next. However, the audience is portrayed in different ways depending on the perspective. The author believes the audience to be unintelligent, malicious pawns in a scheme to bring down his good name. The cast believes the audience to be savvy, discerning patrons who demand high quality entertainment. As the cast and author shift into the role of spectator, they watch the audience with interest as the spectators play the part of judge. Depending on whom you ask, the audience in this case acts wisely or foolishly. The play is a combination of entreaties to the critics in the audience, and displays the ways in which an author might try to get them on his side.

The epilogue to the play, then, serves to doubly reinforce the “supreme” power of the spectator:

MASK. But real worth will never appeal from you
Who give to genius every meed that’s due;
If combs and fools advance their empty claim
Even rise to Laurel Crowning Fame,
But you best judges the fine touchstone hold
Which tells the counterfeit from real gold.
Oh! May true genius your guardian aid
And dullness still be sentenced to the blade
Your voice decides—it’s power supreme we feel
To fix—or take an author from the wheel. (49)
In no uncertain terms the author grants the spectators the ultimate authority on the dramatic piece. What I find interesting is the appeal to the audience’s fine taste and discernment; the spectators possess sharp minds that can sift the wheat from the chaff. Also, this epilogue does not entreat the spectator to be merciful or understanding. The author freely gives up all judging rights to the critic in the audience. The wheel on which the author places himself rests squarely in the hands of the critic.

As the author endures torture on the wheel (derision from the critics as well as watching his masterpiece be mutilated), in the end I believe it is not such a bad place to be after all. If the author is at least still fixed to the wheel, the play is still in the running. Revisions and cuts promise to give a play continued life, however uncertain. When Vainwit grabbed his manuscript and walked away, the possibility for theatrical life ended. Vainwit pulled the plug on his brainchild, and though he removed himself from the wheel, he effectively ended his career in doing so. Who knows the torture that the author of *The Author on the Wheel* endured? Whatever the extent, the author saw the play performed at least once. I bet it was worth it.

**A Look Back and a Look Forward**

Just as Gaston Bachelard saw the value in a close inspection of an image, I too have considered *The Author on the Wheel* as if under a magnifying glass. This method has revealed much, but has necessarily left out much as well. In this section, I pull the camera back and survey the results of my inquiries from a wider perspective. I reflect systematically on the benefits and limitations of my subject (the play *The Author on the Wheel*) and my methodology (textual analysis and spatial studies). In both cases, I consider what both theatre teachers and
theatre practitioners (and of course those bridging the two categories) have to gain from a study like mine.

Throughout the course of my research and writing for my dissertation, I was continually amazed by the breadth and complexity of The Author on the Wheel. This play, though short in length and minimal in set requirements, provided a vast canvas on which to examine the spatial negotiations in the fictional and factual theatre. The play, in my opinion, worked very well for this specific type of analysis. Because the story revolves around theatre practitioners and takes place within the backstage areas of a theatre, spaces of the theatre played a prominent role. Gay McAuley’s taxonomy of spatial function allowed me to consider the play from different, clearly demarcated angles. But in her taxonomy, as McAuley points out, though the list gives an initial feeling of separation, the spaces really do overlap and morph with ease. A scholar using the scientific method might find the easily shifting definitions unnerving, but I found that the categories that overlapped and collided provided the most interesting analysis opportunities. McAuley’s theories on the spaces of the theatre worked effectively and meaningfully with the spaces of The Author on the Wheel, and therefore I believe this choice ultimately benefited my study.

The Author on the Wheel, though ripe for spatial investigations, would fall short in other areas of inquiry. Spatially, the play moves with a freedom and cleverness that even the most spatially complicated plot would envy. But The Author on the Wheel would not provide a rich ground for other types of analyses. For example, the characters in the play reveal interesting bits of information about eighteenth-century theatre practices and theatre performances, but aside from this quality the characters would add little to the rich history of characters in eighteenth-century plays. In addition, the play does not provide any extensive set, costume, or prop
descriptions. The play would therefore be unhelpful in a study devoted to mechanical stage practices or theatre design. Without any real description or evidence of costume or sets, *The Author on the Wheel* would not aid the scholar concerned with technical aspects of the eighteenth-century theatre.

I am, at the end of the day, satisfied with my chosen methods and subjects. *The Author on the Wheel* allowed me to study a moment in theatre history closely and with an eye toward the imaginative. Different sections of my dissertation allowed for different entrances into the spaces as well. My second chapter of factual space supplied my research with a historical component that, I feel, imbues the dissertation with a solid grounding of synthesized primary and secondary sources. I was able to gather Drury Lane history and the history I could find regarding *The Author on the Wheel* and rehearse my archival and investigative skills, skills all scholars should practice and perform. Though I will admit the fact that chapter two was my least favorite chapter to write (I prefer more image-centered theorizing as opposed to fact-checking and footnote-scouring), I believe chapter two is the chapter that might survive the longest on its own. My detailed research into the performance of *The Author on the Wheel* is one of a kind; I imagine this type of “unearthing” will find a home in a journal devoted to eighteenth-century theatre or literature studies.

On that same note, the “unearthing” feature of my work will run into even more earth under which to look. Though my research into *The Author on the Wheel* presents a reasonably thorough and meticulous study, I admit my research is limited by my own inability to shift spaces. To further investigate the play, I plan on visiting several sites of interest. First, I will visit the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. My interaction with *The Author on the Wheel* has been through the mediated filter of a microfiche reader. The play does come in the
author’s original handwriting, which provides the manuscript with a (though small) connection to the author. This is actually one of the major benefits of my annotated script as part of this dissertation; the handwriting is hard to read, and my copy will provide the reader with an easily accessible document to study. But so much I have missed because I have not seen the manuscript with my own eyes. How does the paper feel? How light or dark are the pen strokes? What does it smell like? All these questions would come to light during my visit to the library. Also, an archivist in the library may be able to provide me with additional details about the play’s acquisition or history.

The second place that I will visit is the Harvard Theatre Collection at the Houghton Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Thanks to the incredible generosity of Dr. Louis Katzner and the Bowling Green State University Bookstore, I received an award for the cost of travel to and from Cambridge as well as lodging for a week to research at the Harvard Theatre Collection. The collection sparked my interest after I started looking into the history of *The Author on the Wheel*. When I located the microfilm copies of *The Daily Universal Register* and discovered who performed in the play, I then turned to find out more about the lives of the individual actors in the performance. As I have demonstrated, John Bannister played the role of Mask. Because of the newspaper announcement, I now have the list of the complete cast (though the newspaper announcement does not specify which actors played which parts). Bannister’s biography does not mention his performance in *The Author on the Wheel*. But the Harvard Theatre Collection contains a multitude of archives related to Theatre Royal Drury Lane in the eighteenth-century. Specifically, the collection holds a scrapbook containing newspaper clippings, playbills, letters, and manuscript notes pertaining to John Bannister, his father Charles Bannister, and John’s wife Elizabeth. In this collection of materials, I hope to find some evidence of the April 18, 1785
performance of the play. During my research trip that I will take the summer of 2009, I plan on gathering as much information as I can regarding *The Author on the Wheel*. This trip will greatly fortify my study, I am sure. After this trip, I will revisit my second chapter and craft it into an article for publication.

My third, and most ambitious, goal for this project is a trip to London to experience the Drury Lane theatre in person. Though the present building is the Henry Holland version and not the Wren structure redesigned by Robert Adam, the space of the theatre holds great value. Visiting the site of the theatre, I can observe the layout of the streets and try to visually reconstruct the arrangement of the buildings in 1785. Vinegar Yard is just a short walk away, and I could walk the distance that the Fish-women would have walked from the pub to the theatre. I could see a show at the theatre and experience the role of a Drury Lane spectator in the twenty-first century. Also, I could try to take the trip around the month of April to get a sense of the weather during that time of the year, and find out what conditions the cast and audience might have had to endure in order to get to the show. If I take this trip in the year 2010, I could (if only individually) celebrate the 225th Anniversary of *The Author on the Wheel*, and maybe campaign for a revival run at Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

This path I have charted will surely strengthen the study with new information and new ideas. But how can the information already present in this dissertation impact the work of both theatre teachers and theatre practitioners? As a theatre scholar and theatre artist, the overlap between the two identities oftentimes, for me, heavily rests on the scholarly side. What I have found, however, is that through teaching theatre, I am able to practice theatre sometimes just as much as in a traditional theatre setting. The liveness of the classroom provides that risky and powerful moment that theatre also creates. I believe my research put forth in this dissertation
can impact the work of theatre scholars and theatre practitioners, as well as the work of those who bridge the divide in theory and practice.

Jill Dolan wrestles with a similar topic in her book *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (2001). Her aim in this book is to “describe the theory / practice divide in all three interdisciplines [theater and performance studies, lesbian / gay / queer studies, and women’s studies]” and argue that “progressive academics need to translate and promote the usefulness of their work to wider audiences, and that activists need to respect and engage the potential of knowledge generated in academic settings” (3). Dolan’s “Road Map through Different Geographies of Learning” is especially apt for my own work in the spaces of *The Author on the Wheel*, and not just for the similar traveling metaphors we both make. She exhorts the scholar / artist to “Use theater and performance to experiment with theoretical ideas that seem abstract in print, but that become alive and persuasive when embodied in a classroom or on a stage” (91). In the following section, I outline several ways that my research fulfills this charge. By troubling the theory / performance divide, I want to use *The Author on the Wheel* as an entrance into the highly meaningful and sometimes electric spaces of the theatre classroom at work.

To begin, “Playing (with) Space in *The Author on the Wheel*” demonstrates the ever-shifting roles into which performers, practitioners, and spectators gracefully slide. On a more conceptual level, my explication of the changing identities of those involved in *The Author on the Wheel* makes evident the ways in which the theatre allows ample opportunities for role-swapping. Vainwit prowls the practitioner spaces of the theatre in the disguise of a theatre spectator and conceals his identity as the author of the failed play. But through his comments and stubbornness, he cannot help but reveal his true identity as the author. His performance as a
“neutral spectator” failed; his passion could not be tamed long enough to keep up the act. To some degree, I see myself as Vainwit in the theatre classroom. Though I perform the role of theatre teacher, my true passion for the craft becomes obvious through my perspective and words. But unlike Vainwit, my roles as teacher and practitioner do not compete but rather support each other in performance. Shifting identities from teacher to practitioner, I can see that there really needs to be no shift at all. Through this work, I have demonstrated how shifting roles, spaces, and identities do not necessarily cause tension and uncertainty. In some cases, as in the case of the theatre teacher / practitioner, the shift in roles allows for playful investigation and surprising discoveries. This, I believe, adds intrigue, complexity, and excitement in the theatre classroom and in the theatre.

In a more concrete application, the script of *The Author on the Wheel* might be useful for theatre history teachers in several ways. As I have done in my dissertation, a teacher may use the play as a starting point from which to explore various inquires into theatre history. The play is short enough that a class might read it together aloud. The class could study the play to learn about the different types of plays during the eighteenth century, especially plays about the theatre. A teacher could use the play to highlight eighteenth-century theatre practices such as the role of the author, the manager’s part in a production, the work of the prompter, and the part-based system of rehearsal and even performance.

The play reveals much about eighteenth-century spectatorship as well. Through an in-depth study of *The Author on the Wheel*, a class could learn about theatre structure and see the different audience spaces come alive in the play. As Vainwit describes the different people who inhabited the different sections of the audience space, students could envision the heavily-striated class-based architecture of the eighteenth-century playhouse. This could lead to a
discussion and investigation into the ways in which our present theatres contribute to or stray from a class-divided space.

Since the play requires little in the way of costumes, props, and sets, it could easily be performed in a classroom setting. In this way, students could try on the various roles represented in the play while they examined the myriad of layers of theatricality in the piece. An interesting exercise to perform, in my opinion, would be to attempt to execute Vainwit’s play as described by the actors and the manager. This would include crafting a script (using the characters of Daffadowndilly, Tom Touchet, etc.), casting the roles of the spectators (the laborers in the galleries and the Fish-women in the boxes, etc.) and performing the failed performance, complete with thrown objects. As I have explicated in chapter three, the thrown apple that interfered with the staged slap pitted the spontaneous against the rehearsed in a dangerous way. In a performance of Vainwit’s play, both the stage slap and the thrown apple would be rehearsed and choreographed for a safe execution. The behind-the-scenes work of a performance would become very clear to those constructing the moment of the slap/throw. In a performance of this sort as well, it would be interesting to note that the thrown object would slip into the role of prop in a traditional sense; the object would be a part of the script and travel a journey across the stage space. A class attempting a performance of Vainwit’s play could observe first-hand the ways that theatre spaces and theatre roles change in identity and meaning.

Conclusions

As the roles in the theatre shift, so do the spaces in which those roles play out. Using the spatial taxonomy of Gay McAuley, I have demonstrated the myriad of shifting spaces and identities in The Author on the Wheel. In the theatre, what is real and what is not often blend
together to form a hybrid of spaces and identities. In *The Author on the Wheel*, the audience space, practitioner space, and stage space interchange so rapidly and effortlessly that a stable, fixed space or identity is not readily found. I believe that this fluid state of identity contributes to the powerful and sometimes dangerous quality inherent in the theatre. Fluid identity and fluid spaces abound both in the front of the house and backstage. Though the experience of the theatergoer is one of “penetration further and further into the theatre building until one reaches the point beyond which one cannot go” (McAuley 50), it seems in the case of *The Author on the Wheel* that one may not ever have to reach that point. The actor playing the author puts on a further disguise in the green room. The actors in *The Author on the Wheel* play the role of actors in Vainwit’s play. The actor John Bannister plays the part of Mask who in turn further imitates contemporary actors of his day. Fictional audience members of Vainwit’s play put on disguises to go to the performance and play the role of the critic. And the audience member playing the role of critic penetrates most deeply of all by physically invading the stage space with flying fruit.

As I exit my role as author of this study, I find myself shifting roles once again from producer to consumer and from performer to spectator. And once this work is over, I invite the reader to shift roles as well and, perhaps, assume the role of critic. But provide opinions in words only, please. I’ve heard apples can smart.


“The Daily Universal Register.” *The Times*. April 9th, 1785; April 15th, 1785; April 18th, 1785; April 20th, 1785: Microfilm, Reel #1 (January-June 1785).


APPENDIX

SAMPLE PAGES FROM THE LARPENT COLLECTION MANUSCRIPT OF THE AUTHOR
ON THE WHEEL, OR A PIECE CUT IN THE GREEN ROOM

In this appendix I include sample pages from the microprint copy of *The Author on the Wheel*. Below the elegant cursive you can see my own penciled-in “translation” of the play.

1) Frontispiece of the manuscript
2) Dramatis Personae
3) First page of dialogue

Scene 1

A room in the Theatre

Dr. Fag

Dra. Fag has writ had a gentleman been here to inquire for me the morning?

Dr. Fag

Dra. Fag. Harwood has had a gentleman been here this morning?

Promp.

Promp. No sir.

Dr. Fag. Have the performers come to the alteration of the piece; it wants but a few minutes of the time.

Promp.

Promp. Most of the gentlemen are here sir, but one of the principal ladies is not present.

Dra. Fag. She has a violent cold, and cannot attend the rehearsal this morning.

Promp.

Promp. Yes sir, and she desires if you please, sir, and she desires if you intend...
4) Beginning of Scene Two

if they do, I'll give critiques on their
acting in all the news papers, in the
style of Boson and the Count-maker,
so run myself an impartial critic and
poison men in the opinion of the
Public. Best Wishes

Public.

Scene — Green-room

Thespis, Jack, Burbage & others discovered

Sack discovered

Thespis. Is Mr. Drury come, Haswood?

Haswood. Yes, Sir, he's in the other room with

a gentleman, expect him any minute.

Thespis. Ah, shes! think I quake.

Upon my honour, I think it quite
unnecessary to call us to any alteration
of the play. For it was as if a damned
last night as any piece were remem-

bered.