Early Theatre
A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama

Performative Print: A Printing Anomaly in The Coblers Prophesie

Frances Eastwood

Volume 26, numéro 2, 2023

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108248ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.12745/et.26.2.5267

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

McMaster University Library Press / Becker Associates

ISSN

1206-9078 (imprimé)
2293-7609 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Eastwood, F. (2023). Performative Print: A Printing Anomaly in The Coblers Prophesie. *Early Theatre*, *26*(2), 57–77. https://doi.org/10.12745/et.26.2.5267

Résumé de l'article

Signature F2r of The Coblers Prophesie (1594) by Robert Wilson brings the reader to an abrupt halt – it contains a page-stopping stage direction in gargantuan type. This article examines whether the outsized print was a botched job by the printer Thomas Scarlet or an intentional ploy to engage the reader. The anomaly suggests that printers exercised agency in textual production and collaborated in the creative impact of printed material. Play-texts exist at the intersection of print and performance, and this case study poses larger questions about the complex relationship between the theatre and the printing house in early modern England.

Early Theatre
26.2 (2023), 57–77
https://doi.org/10.12745/et.26.2.5267

Frances Eastwood

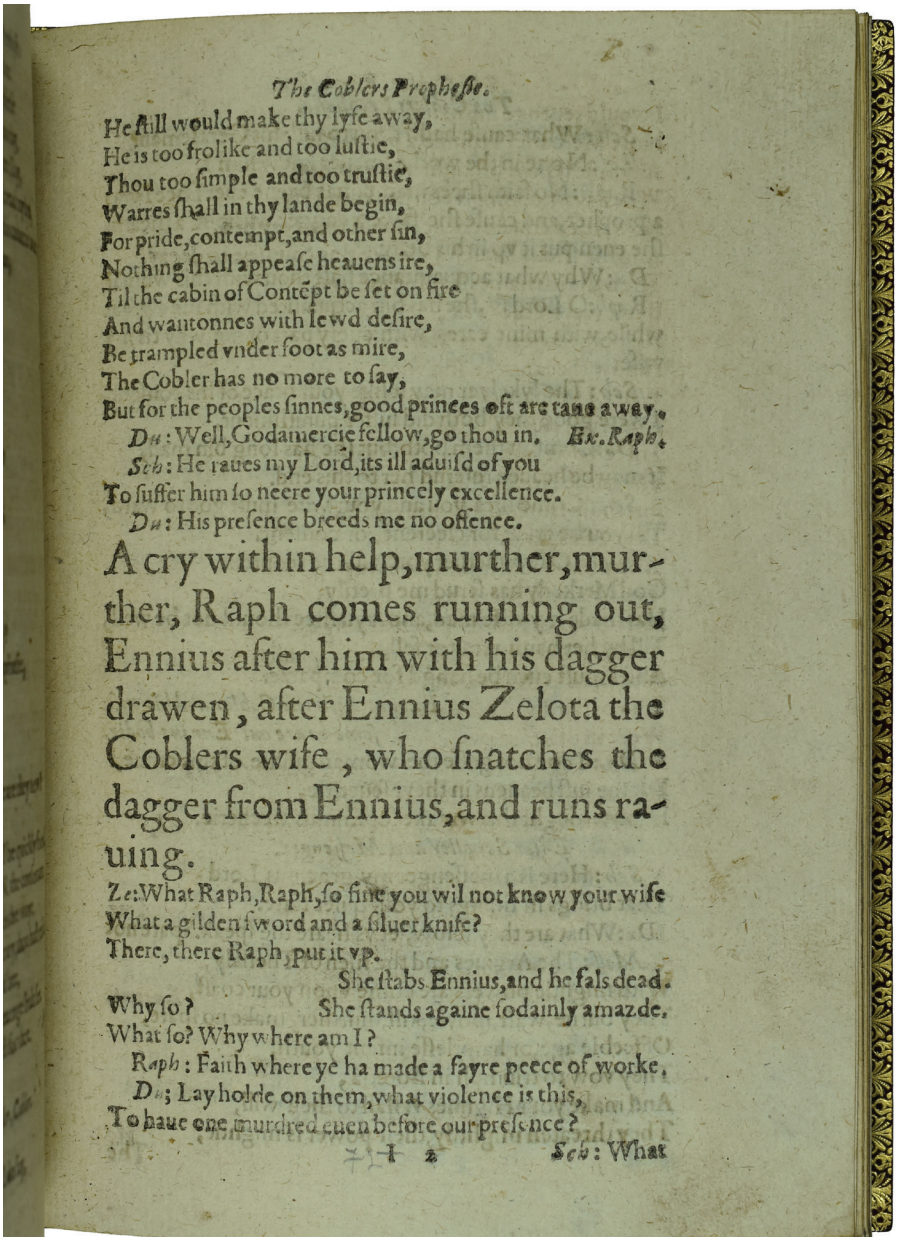
Performative Print: A Printing Anomaly in *The Coblers Prophesie*

Signature F2r of The Coblers Prophesie *(1594) by Robert Wilson brings the reader to an abrupt halt — it contains a page-stopping stage direction in gargantuan type. This article examines whether the outsized print was a botched job by the printer Thomas Scarlet or an intentional ploy to engage the reader. The anomaly suggests that printers exercised agency in textual production and collaborated in the creative impact of printed material. Play-texts exist at the intersection of print and performance, and this case study poses larger questions about the complex relationship between the theatre and the printing house in early modern England.*

Robert Wilson's play *The Coblers Prophesie* contains a striking textual anomaly: the outsize stage direction at signature F2r.[1] A surprising section of large print (Figure 1) brings the reader to an abrupt halt. The play, performed around 1587, was printed in 1594, and the title-page imprint suggests that the printer responsible for the anomaly was John Danter working for Cuthbert Burby.[2] The stage direction, however, along with the rest of the F gathering, was printed by Thomas Scarlet who thus becomes the principal focus of this article.

Looking at the discrepancy in type size between the dialogue and the stage direction on F2r provides an entry point for a range of broader observations. First this particular page encourages a closer look at the craft of printing, as well as collaborative creation between print houses, with a focus on the specific practices of Thomas Scarlet. In addition, the anomalous print encourages a broad overview of early modern typographical conventions suggesting how in the sixteenth century these practices remained fluid and as yet unhardened into accepted convention. As a result, the printed page continued as an exciting space for innovation. This paper furthermore suggests that the typographical inventiveness of Scarlet's print house may briefly lift the veil on early modern staging practice thereby

Frances Eastwood (fce22@cam.ac.uk) is a bye-fellow at Christ's College, University of Cambridge.



The Coblers Prophesie.

He ſtill would make thy lyfe away,
He is too frolike and too luſtie,
Thou too ſimple and too truſtie,
Warres ſhall in thy lande begin,
For pride, contempt, and other ſin,
Nothing ſhall appeaſe heauens ire,
Til the cabin of Contẽpt be ſet on fire
And wantonnes with lewd deſire,
Be trampled vnder foot as mire,
The Cobler has no more to ſay,
But for the peoples ſinnes, good princes oft are tane away.
Du: Well, Godamercie fellow, go thou in. *Ex. Raph.*
Seb: He raues my Lord, its ill aduiſd of you
To ſuffer him ſo neere your princely excellence.
Du: His preſence breeds me no offence.

A cry within help, murther, murther, Raph comes running out, Ennius after him with his dagger drawen, after Ennius Zelota the Coblers wife, who ſnatches the dagger from Ennius, and runs rauing.

Ze: What Raph, Raph, ſo fine you wil not know your wife
What a gilden ſword and a ſiluer knife?
There, there Raph, put it vp.
She ſtabs Ennius, and he fals dead.
Why ſo? She ſtands againe ſodainly amazde.
What ſo? Why where am I?
Raph: Faith where ye ha made a fayre peece of worke,
Du; Lay holde on them, what violence is this,
To haue one murdred euen before our preſence?

Figure 1. Robert Wilson, *The Coblers Prophesie* (London, 1594; STC: 25781), F2r. Image courtesy of The Harry Ransom Center, Carl H. Pforzheimer Library (Pforz 1073 PFZ).

highlighting a moment of dramatic importance which might otherwise be missed by the reader. The uncontrolled nature of the type at signature F2r appears to reinforce the manic content of the lines in which the chaotically printed stage direction evokes a scene of madness. This last contention prompts us to consider printers as co-creators of literary texts rather than passive facilitators. Kirk Melnikoff in *Elizabethan Publishing and the Makings of Literary Culture* has persuasively shown us how booksellers shaped literary production in the late sixteenth century.[3] Meanwhile Alice Leonard's monograph *Error in Shakespeare: Shakespeare in Error* has explored textual error as an important component of reader reception.[4] This article builds on the ideas of both scholars and suggests that trade printers also exercised agency over the texts they handled and contributed to the generative shaping of reader experience.

Printing Errors

The most straightforward explanation of our anomalous stage direction is that it is an error — one of many compositor's mistakes in a poorly printed text.[5] Note for example the wrong signature at the foot of F2r, which is misprinted as I2. Authors regularly castigated early modern printers for their amateur-level work. John Stockwood remarked in his prefatory epistle to Lambert Daneau's *Commentarie* that neither the 'printer', 'nor their Compositors & workmen' were 'alwaies very skilfull'.[6] Richard Mulcaster regretted that error often crept into texts because of 'the printers, setters, and correcters ouersight', and complained that they 'letteth manie errors abide in their work'.[7] Hugh Broughton raged against 'pieuish printers' who 'greadie of vnhonest gaynes' 'defaced' and 'corrupted' his work.[8] In his prefatory material to *Christes Teares Ouer Ierusalem*, Thomas Nashe, while acknowledging his own errors, nevertheless highlighted the 'Printers faultes'.[9] His harangue became an outcry in *The Vnfortunate Traveller*, printed by Scarlet in 1594, in which Nashe traduced 'Printers' as 'madde whoresons' (an accusation which specified or at least included Scarlet) and drew the attention of his 'Gentlemen readers' to the numerous errata generated by Scarlet's print house.[10] A second edition of *The Vnfortunate Traveller*, printed in the same year, advertised its superiority as being 'newly corrected and augmented' on its title-page.[11] The amended edition ironically introduced an anomaly of its own: it names Thomas Scarlet as its printer, but, according to research done by Chiaki Hanabusa, John Danter executed a substantial section of the printing.[12] We find a reverse omission in *The Coblers Prophesie*, which names Danter as the printer without acknowledging that Scarlet printed a short section.[13] In light of these observations, the

outsize stage direction in *The Coblers Prophesie* may be viewed as representative of a fledgling play printing industry in which inaccuracies were rife.[14]

Printer's mistakes, which can be characterized as either errors or inconsistencies, certainly litter *The Coblers Prophesie*. In his seminal book *Material Texts in Early Modern England* Adam Smyth helpfully defines 'printed error' as being 'text (whether letter, word, phrase, or number) that appears in a form that was unintended by any of the agents of a book's production: authors, compositors, printers, publisher's.[15] Errors include misspelling and misattributed speech prefixes, both of which we find in *The Coblers Prophesie*. At B1r the line of the charm 'Doth found that which euerie pace' should read 'euerie place', as it does at D4v. At B2v the speech prefix for the soldier 'Soul' at the start of the page should read 'Cont' for the character Contempt as noted by the catchword on B2r as well as by the context. After the entry of Mars at F1r, the first speaker should have the speech prefix 'Mer' for Mercury, not 'Mar' for Mars. These accidental errors cause confusion and may distort the reader's comprehension of the text. Other textual inconsistencies, though distracting, are less disruptive. An example of such non-standardized slips might be the nominal prefix '*Souldier*' (C2r), which is variously abbreviated on the same page to '*Sould*' and '*Soul*', while overleaf becoming '*Sou*' (C3r), and even '*So*' (C2v). In a sliding scale of anomalies, which include both unintended mistakes as well as minor inconsistencies, the outsized stage direction appears to be an egregious error.

But to categorize this giant stage direction as an error seems misconceived. To make mistakes over single words is understandable, and as Nashe complains, printers' workshops were perennially guilty of this, but for a compositor to choose the wrong font for seven lines of print without noticing or correcting the forme seems implausible. Furthermore, a trade printer would likely have been keen to keep a stream of work flowing in from an ambitious bookseller-publisher such as Cuthbert Burby. Marring a whole page of print would clearly have been counter-productive, and, as Kirk Melnikoff notes, Burby gave nearly all his copy to Scarlet.[16] We therefore cannot bracket the gargantuan stage direction with other accidentals as an error and must instead see it as a conscious decision by the print-house to use large type. The stage direction in *The Coblers Prophesie* is an intentional anomaly.

Printing Practices

Several scholars have pursued a more plausible hypothesis. Their contention is that the use of large print in *The Coblers Prophesie* was not an error but a deliberate

solution to an unexpected problem. The consensus is that a sudden gap in the text generated the emergency, and this unwanted blank triggered remedial action. Printers then used large font to fill this troublesome space. An early proponent of this theory was Irene Mann, who suggested that the textual hiccup in *The Coblers Prophesie* resulted from some form of censorship either enforced by the licensing authorities or, as Mann maintains, defensively self-imposed by the printer.[17] She concluded that the extant sheet F was a cancel sheet replacing an original sheet F that had been hurriedly cut down.[18] Mann speculated that such censorship was because of the play's overtly political nature. She suspected that the figures of the marginalized military Sateros and the effete god Mars, who both stalk the pages of the play, might have been satirical depictions of recognizable political figures.[19] Mann argued that the cancellans, the new sheet F, excised potentially seditious material and that the outsize stage direction filled the awkward space left by this redaction. W.W. Gregg and Fredson Bowers subsequently endorsed this cancel sheet hypothesis.[20] These scholars saw the anomalous stage direction on F2r as a telltale sign of the removal of the cancellandum, the original sheet, and the later insertion of a newly printed replacement sheet.

Mann added a further twist by suggesting that there were in fact two compositors involved in the printing and that the second compositor was responsible for the post print run replacement of the F gathering.[21] More recently Chiaki Hanabusa has built on Mann's observations to establish that the printer of sheet F was not simply another compositor in Danter's workshop but came from a different printing house. Hanabusa establishes that the F sheet contains worn type that is not used elsewhere in the quarto.[22] He moreover identifies that this worn type belonged to Thomas Scarlet and that Scarlet's workshop was responsible for the anomalous stage direction.[23]

While Hanabusa's identification of Scarlet as the second printer in *The Coblers Prophesie* does not preclude Mann's assertion that the F gathering was a cancel sheet, shared printing does allow for an alternative and less sinister explanation of the textual gap. In this scenario we may attribute the lack of text to a compositor's miscalculation when casting off sheet F.[24] Hanabusa implies that the mistake originated with Danter's workshop wrongly calculating the amount of text to be handed over to Scarlet, but was one that Scarlet needed to rectify if Danter's workshop had already embarked on printing the short G gathering.[25]

We might nevertheless remain sceptical about mistakes generated by miscalculation in *The Coblers Prophesie*. This supposed error seems even more curious since it occurs in a passage of dramatic poetry from a play rather than less predictable prose because regular verse lines are easier to number off. [26] It is moreover an

anomaly which becomes more striking if it recurs, as it does, in the workshop of Thomas Scarlet.

Outsize type seems to have been a feature of Scarlet's printing house. Large stage directions appear in another blank verse play printed in his workshop, *Edward III*, at signatures E1v and E2r.[27] Richard Proudfoot and Nicola Bennett in their 2017 edition of the play posit yet another explanation for this unwanted space, that the copy text came from the author's foul papers or was the playing company's prompt book and that the unforeseen gap may have arisen following a section of wording that was inadequately marked up for deletion.[28] Proudfoot and Bennett imply that two compositors carried out the printing, that they set type from a manuscript, and that only after the apportionment of text and only after printing had begun, did they realize that a section had been deleted and that the newly truncated portion of text would need some creative reconfiguring on the page. In light of the financial pressures on printers to turn a profit, to avoid wasting paper, and to execute their work with celerity, the inventive bodge of large print being used as a filler seems plausible.

Whatever the catalyst, the net result of these scholarly suppositions is the same. In all three scenarios — Mann's repressive censorship, Hanabusa's careless casting off, or Proudfoot and Bennett's failed deletion — the consequence is an unseemly blank. Scarlet would have found himself with insufficient text to fill his allotted sheet and might reasonably have resorted to outsize type as a shop-specific solution.

Shared and Split-Print Practice

The need for space-filling appears to be a bugbear that particularly affected shared or split-print projects. Where a textual hole created by redaction or misnumbering might have been smoothed over in a single, continuous print run, the problem became more intractable when two compositors, working simultaneously, were involved. Shared printing, as Peter Blayney asserts, was '*extremely* common' among printers at this time and seems to have been a standard part of Scarlet's practice.[29] In the section that follows I consider the different forms of printing practiced in his workshop and the signature solution adopted to address the awkward gaps that occasionally arose.

The most obvious method of shared printing was when two workshops divided a print job. Such forms of partnership characterized Scarlet's working practice. A quick survey of the English Short Title Catalogue reveals that at least six of his other texts involved collaboration with other printers over the period 1592

to 1595. In 1592 Scarlet printed sheet A of *Thirteene Sermons* while Danter was responsible for the rest of the sheets.[30] In the same year *The Sermons of Master Henrie Smith* involved printing by Thomas Orwin and R. Robinson as well as Scarlet.[31] *Spirituall Preseruatiues Against the Pestilence* and *A Suruay of the Pretended Holy Discipline*, both printed in 1593, involved Richard Field alongside Scarlet.[32] *Orlando Furioso* by Robert Greene was predominantly printed in 1594 by John Danter, but Scarlet printed the single G gathering.[33] The same partnership in the same year tackled *The Vnfortunate Traueller* and *The Coblers Prophesie*. The fact that Scarlet took on four of these joint projects with Danter, three of them in 1594, may reflect a particular partnership between these two printers. Collaboration certainly facilitated faster production; perhaps it also suggests Scarlet's need for money. Arber notes that Scarlet was fined in December 1593 for keeping an apprentice for seven years without presenting him, and consequently he may have been short of funds.[34] Small additional print jobs may have been a welcome source of necessary income, and Danter may have been charitably supporting Scarlet with piecemeal work. Alternatively, of course, without a second apprentice, Scarlet may have only been able to accept smaller commissions or been forced to outsource his own work to others.

Incidents of outsize print occur in some of these collaboratively produced books. In *Vincentio Sauiolo* Scarlet's co-printer was Joan Orwin.[35] An example of large print occurs at signature R4v. *The Estate of English Fugitiues* signature ¶¶ L4r also contains anomalous large print.[36] The entire ¶¶ L gathering interrupts the regular run of signatures, suggesting a later sheet insertion similar to Irene Mann's proposed cancel sheet in *The Coblers Prophesie*.

The case of *Edward III* demonstrates an alternative category of split-print. Proudfoot and Bennett assert that the printing of the 1596 edition involved only Thomas Scarlet's workshop and that the printing appears to have been continuous. Proudfoot and Bennett believe, however, that two compositors, X and Y, were involved in setting up the formes. This manner of split-printing involves two compositors working simultaneously in the same workshop rather than two different print houses. Proudfoot and Bennett surmise that this split-printing facilitated faster output, in which X was responsible for setting the outer forme while Y was responsible for the inner forme.[37] In this scenario compositor X was responsible for a single forme with its signatures 1r, 2v, 3r, 4v, and compositor Y was responsible for the second forme with its signatures 1v–2r, 3v–4r.[38] An even more accelerated method of compilation may have been achieved by the setting of half-formes. In this scenario compositor X and Y worked together on the same forme in which X would, for example, have been responsible for signatures 1r–2v

and compositor Y for signatures 3r–4v.[39] Proudfoot and Bennett consider that the 1596 quarto of *Edward III* (Q1) was set either by formes or half-formes. This style of split-printing facilitated a more streamlined process and swifter print run. The jumbled order of setting the pages nevertheless led to a lack of narrative continuity, and compositors were less aware of the context in which their section of print operated.[40] This practice in turn led to a greater number of errors. Proudfoot and Bennett give the neat example of the wrong speech prefix being repeatedly used on signatures B3v, C1r, and C2v of *Edward III* in which Lodowick is mistakenly denoted as 'Lor' (Lorraine).[41] The copy-text could presumably have designated both characters by the abbreviation 'Lo', rendering the names indistinguishable without the necessary context and consequently becoming a source of error for a compositor.[42] Scarlet's working practice relied heavily on a range of shared and split-print techniques that then made the occurrence of mistakes, including unwanted gaps, more likely.

The printing practices of Thomas Scarlet, especially different types of composite printing (between different print houses, different print runs, or different compositors), may have resulted in unwanted gaps that the print house tackled with their hallmark solution of outsized type. In what follows, however, I want to suggest that this signature style was not simply a technical response to a problem but may have been adopted as a deliberate strategy to animate the text and shape reader response.

Anatomizing the Anomaly

I shall first focus on the magnified print in *The Coblers Prophesie* and evidence that presentation of this stage direction seems to have been deliberate and carefully executed. Arguing that the compositor in Scarlet's print shop made intentional decisions to enlarge the stage direction, I shall then go on to examine other texts in which early modern printers adopted the same technique.

We can start by thinking about what other choices were open to Scarlet to fill the purported hole in the text in *The Coblers Prophesie*. It is important to establish that Scarlet had plenty of options and that, despite other possibilities, Scarlet chose the awkward solution of gargantuan type. In making this assertion, we need to look at the printing alternatives that his workshop rejected. The next section, therefore, considers the detailed set up of the forme for page F2r.

The printer's anomaly in *The Coblers Prophesie* comprises seven lines of double pica roman print in place of twelve lines of standard pica.[43] Those seven lines of large text would have normally comprised four lines in standard print, leaving

eight further lines to fill. Techniques Scarlet could have adopted if he wanted to fill a troublesome space on the F forme include putting the abbreviated stage direction '*Ex. Raph*', which occurs at F2r, on a new line in an unabbreviated format as he does at F2v ('Exeunt with the Cobler and his wife'). The stage direction below at F2r, 'She stands againe sodainely amazde', could similarly have had a line of its own rather than being bunched up on the page with the antecedent speech. All four stage directions on F2r could have been preceded and followed by a blank line, as in the format for mid-scene directions at F3r, F4r, or G1r. In addition, the compositor could have adopted a tapering style of stage direction as he did at G1v. Implementing even some of these strategies would have given the compositor the extra lines he needed. The compositors therefore seem to have provocatively rejected common, more unobtrusive solutions and instead filled the page with enormous type, which creates an ungainly effect and highlights rather than hides the mistake. It certainly seems perverse for printers to draw the reader's attention to a problem that they could easily have disguised in a more conventional and less noticeable manner.

Perhaps then we should consider an alternative interpretation. As well as being a space-filling strategy, could this inclusion of outsize type have been an intentional printer's intervention? The choice of lines for enlargement appears deliberate rather than haphazard, drawing the reader's eye to this particular passage of text. Did Scarlet turn a necessity (a gap in the text) into a virtue (deliberately provocative print)? Was his solution opportunistic, creating an imaginative prompt for the reader out of a textual irritant? What is particularly striking about the composition of F2r, as noted above, is the cramped format of the print surrounding the anomalous stage direction. This crowding brings into doubt a claim that the large-scale print was only designed to fill an unwanted space. Perhaps instead we should entertain the idea that someone made this choice for its striking effect. In thinking about this possibility, we have flipped our problem on its head. Rather than explaining the outsize typography as purely a printer's solution to an unwanted gap, we could regard it as a deliberate inclusion of emphatic print that had to be squeezed between the restricted margins of the page. The peripheral text surrounding the stage direction is noticeably cramped, and a strategy of space-saving rather than space-filling may better explain the congested typography that is a feature of the rest of F2r.

Emphatic Signalling

We now have a proposition whereby our printer's action becomes an intentional inclusion of outsize print as a deliberate experiment to draw the reader's eye. In running with this thought, we must consider whether printers commonly used inventive typography to guide reader response. Inspired by Claire M.L. Bourne's *Typographies of Performance in Early Modern England*,[44] I want to think about how typographical practice continued to be fluid in the sixteenth century and created a space for experimental design to guide reader reception. Bourne begins her discussion by looking at examples of typographical signalling that have become obsolete and hence seem strange and noticeable to us now. One of Bourne's examples is the use of pilcrows in early modern play-texts designed to alert readers to a change in speaker. We see such visual cueing in *New Custome* (printed in 1573).[45] The pilcrow that immediately follows each speech prefix prompted a reader, otherwise unfamiliar with reading vernacular drama, to a switch in voices. Bourne points out that over time, as readers became more comfortable with reading play-texts, such visual prompts became vestigial and fell away.[46] Printed plays subsequently identified changes in speaker with the simpler innovation of an indented and italicized speech prefix as we see in *The Coblers Prophesie*.

Other conventions, however, had not yet become sufficiently embedded to be adopted as a matter of course at the printing date of Wilson's play. For example, while printed plays presented speech in roman font, italic type usually but not consistently signalled speech prefixes and stage directions. *The Coblers Prophesie* demonstrates inconsistent use of this convention, and the play's stage directions appear both in italics and in roman font on consecutive pages F3v and F4r. Printers clearly used type experimentally if not consistently to signal to the reader the textual difference between the spoken word and stage business. If then, at this relatively early period of popular play printing, dramatic conventions still showed fluidity, we might speculate that there was room for other forms of experimentation with typographic strategies to guide the reader to a change in tone or a particular emphasis. This signal to readers, I suggest, is the function of the outsize stage direction at F2r.

Printers typically used large type for headings. The effects of outsize headings are now so conventional that we barely give them a second thought but instead respond unconsciously to their promptings. Large, emphatic type appears authoritative, suggesting a summative overview of a passage, while indicating some form of break with the preceding print. Bourne notes such use of headings in the act divisions of Elkanah Settle's *The Empress of Morocco*.[47] She summarizes

the typographic layout and its effect in the play-text as follows: 'the heading "Act the Second, Scene the First" is set in a roman type larger than the type used to print the dialogue and isolated from the rest of the text by horizontal rules above and below. Like all the numbered scene divisions in printed plays before, this arrangement was designed to inaugurate a new unit of action'.[48] Headings guide readers and are one of several cues that help them navigate the text. We see examples of conventional headings in *A Notable Discouery of Coosenage*, one of the coney-catching pamphlets written by Robert Greene that Scarlet printed in 1592.[49] After the preface to the reader, the text begins with what has now become a standardized form of heading where 'THE ARTE OF CONNI-CATCHING' appears both in upper-case and large type to distinguish it from the text that follows.

In the same quarto, however, we can also see a form of subheading; the large type and isolated positioning of 'The art of cross-biting' at C2v makes these words a less formal division that acts more as a point of emphasis. Here we see part of a pattern that developed in Scarlet's print practice in which outsize lettering was repeatedly used for increasingly informal emphasis and summation. In *Vincentio Sauiolo* the outsize print at R4v acts like a subheading, emphasising the author's point and capturing his informal tone: 'What the reason is, that the partie unto whom the lie is given, ought to become Challenger: and of the nature of lies'. Likewise, in *The Estate of English Fugitiues* the inserted sheet uses an outsize statement not so much as a subheading but as a chatty moment of emphasis in the voice of author: 'But now to the other pointes of your mislike'. Looking at these other texts printed by Scarlet, we can see that such emphatic moments signalled by outsize type are part of his distinctive house style.

Scarlet's large print modulates narrative tone and rhythm, attempting to create a pause and add emphasis for the reader. We cannot say definitively whether the compositor in the print shop or a suggestion by the author always initiated the decision to use large print. While there is a tendency to defer to authorial intention for the creation of meaning, Peter Blayney counsels us in *The Publication of Playbooks* to consider the agency of the printer: 'if we want to investigate the text of a play — the relationship between what the typesetter saw in the manuscript and what appears on the printed page — we need to study the printer'.[50] The regularity with which large type occurs in Scarlet's texts reinforces this view. Kirk Melnikoff suggests that each Elizabethan printer and publisher 'held to his or her own distinct habits', and Scarlet fits this model with his idiosyncratic use of outsize type.[51]

Novel Stage Directions

I now want to explore the very purposeful way in which this emphatic use of type functioned in stage directions. A striking example of this deliberate selection of text for emphasis occurs in the outsize stage directions in Scarlet's *Edward III* on E1v and E2r. The stage direction at E1v reads: 'Enter King Iohn of Fraunce, his two sonnes, Charles of Normandie, and Philip, and the Duke of Lorraine'; on the opposite page, E2r, another stage direction states 'Enter the King of Bohemia with Danes, and a Polonian Captaine with other soldiers another way'. In split-printing between two compositors working alongside each other in the same shop, the two pages would have been set up by the same compositor Y whether working on single formes or half-formes. Pages E1r and E2v would have framed our two anomalous pages as part of the outer forme possibly set up by compositor X. The outer forme proscribed the limits of compositor Y's inner forme pages. Y's page E1v by necessity had to begin with the word prescribed by the catchword on E1r, while Y's page E2r had to end with the catchword that caught the opening of E2v. The outer forme thus delimited the parameters of the inner forme and to that extent took precedence.[52]

The recalibration of type on the pages E1v and E2r in the inner forme, however, involves just one compositor and provides the latitude to be creative. Within the parameters set by pages E1r and E2v, compositor Y could space and set the print as he wished for signatures E1v and E2r. This may explain why the outsize stage directions in this play are symmetrically split over two consecutive scenes on two adjoining pages. The typesetter chose to spread the burden of space-filling over two signatures creating an aesthetically interesting mirroring effect between the two scenes. The choice of accentuated type seems not only intentional but deliberately reflective. The typography encourages the reader through visual equivalence of the stage directions to see these two scenes as a pair, and the symmetry in turn encourages reader reflection. In a play that has no scene or act divisions, the large type became a way of helping readers navigate the undifferentiated material in front of them.

I now want to think in more detail about the creative solution consciously adopted by compositor Y and its impact on the reader. The magnified lines in *Edward III* act like an emphatic heading as they follow a striking break in the plot. While the first section of the play concerns the king's suppression of the revolt in Scotland and his ensuing infatuation with the countess of Salisbury, these stage directions follow immediately from the king's change of heart where he revokes his lustful ways in order that he might pursue his country's glory rather than his

own carnal desires. The inflated stage directions visually signal this break in the action. The large print signposts an abrupt change in plot, focus, and tone for the reader, while the emotional locus shifts from an introverted gaze on England, Edward, and his domestic entanglement to a broader outward perspective on foreign affairs and the martial valour of the Black Prince. The stage directions thus emphasize the tonal rupture by describing the amassing of the French and Polish armies threatening English interests. Not only is this change in narrative direction highlighted, but so too is the implied change in location from English to foreign soil. The duplication of large print simultaneously encourages the reader to note the parallels between two scenes of staged enmity and resistance. Reiteration reinforces the sense of antagonism and strength ranged against England.

On stage this change in dynamic would have been obvious, signalled by the two flamboyant military parades that the stage directions evoke. The printed page captures these grand mirroring moments in arresting stage directions visually cuing the reader to see a dramatic reversal of events. Without this typographic signalling a reader might overlook this dramatic switch. The compositor's design emphasizes both the importance and the twinning of these two episodes. Bourne captures this ability of the printer to shape the reader response when she states that: 'Stationers needed a more-than-cursory understanding of how plays *worked* in performance as well as a fine-tuned sense of readerly competencies. They creatively appealed to those competencies by using typography as a way of managing readerly attention'. [53] The outsize stage directions in *Edward III* demonstrate the print shop's deliberate patterning of the page as a means of galvanizing their reader.

With this deliberate design in mind, we can return to *The Coblers Prophesie* to question why Scarlet's print house felt a similar need to emphasize in massive type the madness played out on stage. Remediation often involves loss, as Bourne points out, and printed plays lost all the immediacy and excitement of the performed piece. The enterprising compositor may have been experimenting with how to present vibrant drama via the stasis of the printed page. Some early modern writers suggest a contemporary awareness that the vivacity integral to performance was lost in print. Bourne compellingly traces the dissatisfaction voiced by John Dryden. In his 'Epistle Dedicatory' which prefaced his play *The Spanysh Fryar* (1681), Dryden noted the dispiriting experience of reading a play in print, when 'I have sometimes wonder'd, in the reading, what was become of those glaring Colours which amaz'd me'. Dryden was aware of how acting created an energizing illusion that was often stripped away when the bare bones of the text confronted a reader. He describes how the remediation of performance on the

page resulted in 'nothing but a cold dull mass, which glitter'd no longer' before concluding that having taken up 'what I suppos'd, a fallen Star' he then found himself 'cozen'd with a Ielly'.[54]

The contention of this paper is that not only the poet but the compositor himself tried to stimulate the operation of the reader's fancy and counteract the flattening, two-dimensional effect of print. I want to raise the possibility that the gargantuan type in *The Coblers Prophesie* was a deliberate cry for attention just as it is in *Edward III*, and that these play-texts actively used print in a visually animating manner to reflect the liveliness of performance. Outsize text signals amplification — a turning up of the volume. These stage directions shout at us. They cause the reader to pause and register a new unit of text, but they also suggest the boisterous confusion of the action that they outline.

What might we say about the readers being targeted? T.H. Howard-Hill maintains that 'the early editions of Plautus, Seneca and Terence were primarily reading texts'.[55] Readers might relive the experience of a play they had already seen, relishing the vitality of the performance in their quieter hours of leisure. Richard Jones certainly envisaged this reception for his printing of *Tamburlaine*. His prefatory remarks address his 'curteous readers' and express his hope that his 'two tragicall discourses': 'wil be now no lesse acceptable vnto you to read after your serious affaires and studies, then they haue bene (lately) delightfull for many of you to see, when the same were shewed in London vpon stages'.[56] Printed texts could thus act as 'backwards-looking' mementoes of a live performance, what Bourne terms 'souvenirs'.[57] The text might also have aimed to reach a separate group of readers who were approaching the play for the first time via print and looking not for retrospective memories but fresh entertainment. Bourne emphasizes this alternative spur to publication:

> playbooks were initially designed not as proleptic textual archives of performance but as commercial objects for contemporary readers. Scholarship in the history of reading over the last two decades has pushed back against the performance-oriented criticism of the 1980s and 1990s, which insisted that performance was the dominant 'end' of playwriting. It might have been the first 'end', but early modern playbooks are now understood to have been viable and popular entertainments in their own right. [58]

In either scenario, printed playbooks needed to convey the energy of performance while finding themselves confined by the stasis of the page.

However roughly the stage directions shook the reader, when transposed to print, staged actions nevertheless might lose their vitality, the text inadequately conveying the noisy action that they prompt. The F2r stage direction in *The Coblers Prophesie* signals an auditory spectrum of discordant sounds: the unspecified 'raving' and 'cry within' alongside the unattributed but specific shout of 'help, murther, murther'. Lucy Munro mulls on the acoustic 'gap between reading and performance' in other play-texts, concluding that this seemingly intractable difference between the vibrancy of the stage and its pale replication on the page might have been mitigated in part by 'a culture in which texts were regularly read aloud'.[59] The outsize stage directions demand emphatic recital.

The discordant sounds the stage direction textualizes would have been accompanied by equally disruptive action. The lines call for a moment of outrageous indecorum when the intrusion of a mad artisan's wife, Zelota, disrupts the ordered dignity of the court. She pursues the courtier Ennius into the presence of the King and then proceeds to tear the dagger from his hands before running about frantically and finally stabbing Ennius to death. This brief direction, which only takes a moment to read on the page, stands in for a performance that would have elastically expanded on stage through extended, improvised play. An extempore performance of madness would have been a frenetic climax to the drama, but print flattens out this moment and makes it easy to overlook. The written direction only licences rather than fleshes out this frenzied playing. Scarlet's magnification of the type appears to be an attempt to counter the anticlimactic inertia of the page. The unseemly appearance of the stage direction itself instantiates the manic indecorum of Zelota's madness. In suggesting that this printing anomaly was a moment of typographical experimentation and bravura, I want to think further about the fraught depiction of madness on stage in contrast with its abbreviated and insipid appearance in print.

The Depiction of Madness in Commedia dell'Arte on Stage and Page

We can see the dramatic importance of madness by comparing Wilson's scene with similar depictions of insanity in Italian commedia dell'arte where in at least one case an ecstatic reaction to live performance can be contrasted with the sketchy overview offered in print.[60] I draw specifically from the scripted commedia scenarios of Flaminio Scala's *Il Teatro delle Favole Rappresentative* (*The Theatre of Tales for Performance*), printed in 1611, a collection of arguments (scenarii) that shows madness to be a commonplace of commedia.[61] Throughout Scala's scenarii men and women, servants and masters experience bouts of insanity, whether an

assumed antic disposition or a condition brought on by magic or suffering. Pedrolino's lunacy in *Il Cadavente* (The Toothpuller), results in 'nonsensical answers' and 'various crazy acts' (3.5, 3.8 and 3.14).[62] Since scenarii lack stage directions, they licence the zani to improvise. As is typical of mad characters in commedia, Pedrolino returns to sanity at the end of the play when he drops his act (3.19), heightening the contrast between decorous and indecorous action. *Li Duo Fidi Notari* (The Two Trusty Notaries) has the innomarata, Isabella, 'pretending to be mute and possessed by demons' (1.4). She 'jumps on top of Pedrolino', a lewd action copied in the next scene when she jumps the Capitano. Like Pedrolino, she also drops her assumed madness at the end of the play. Madness in commedia is particularly associated with female derangement. *La Forsennata Principessa* (The Demented Princess) considers Isabella's madness in a tragic vein, although the improvised routines of speaking nonsense and violent assault remain. Most famously, *La Pazzia di Isabella* (The Madness of Isabella) stages female lunacy.

I propose first to look at the obvious synergies between *La Pazzia di Isabella* and *The Coblers Prophesie* before examining how the sketchy outline offered by Scala's printed scenario offers a pale reprise of the animated activity on stage. The commedia piece and the English play have much in common. The Italian Isabella is 'running mad' (3.14), beating Spavento and Arlecchino and finally stabbing Flavio while in *The Coblers Prophesie* Zelota similarly 'snatches the dagger from Ennius, and runs rauing' (F2r); Zelota concludes her frenzied actions by mimicking Isabella's actions and stabbing the man. The Italian commedia describes Isabella as 'dressed like a lunatic' — a feature which may have been used in Wilson's play. The Italian scenario specifies some of the crazy speech that Isabella utters, noting that she 'bursts out in wild denunciation' (2.16); Zelota similarly spews nonsense earlier in the play — 'Bid the tankerd bring the conduit home. / Ile buy no plumme porredge' — and frenziedly dashes about the stage 'snatching at euerie thing she sees' (A4v). Extempore performance would have been integral to these scenes. Farcical rather than poignant, Zelota's madness presumably evoked hilarity. The fact that this loss of control takes place at court and in the presence of the King, an indecorous moment reprised with pathos by Ophelia in *Hamlet* and earlier echoed by the significantly named Isabella in *The Spanish Tragedy*, would nevertheless heighten the shock of this grotesquely ludic display.

The stock scenarios of commedia recur throughout English drama and implicitly carry with them a repertoire of traditional actions that actors would carry in their heads rather than need to have scripted. The absence of details about this action from written records necessarily impoverishes the experience of reading the text of a play reliant on extempore performance. The outsize stage direction

in *The Coblers Prophesie* redresses this imbalance — it creates a startling hiatus for the reader while instantiating the stage's electrifying breach of decorum on the printed page by affronting the reader's sense of print propriety. The text subsequently restores order and print size, however, as Zelota, like Isabella, returns to her senses at the end of the play. In her own research Bourne concludes that printed playbooks 'preserve traces of theatrical practice, and even specific performances', and this appears to be the case in *The Coblers Prophesie*.[63]

The depiction of female insanity became the calling card of the most famous actress of commedia, Isabella Andreini, a principal member of the 'I Gelosi' company. Richard Andrews quotes from the diary of Giuseppe Pavoni, describing Andreini's startling performance of insanity before the Grand Duke of Florence in May 1589, in which, 'Isabella left such stir and amazement in the audience that her fine eloquence and talents will be praised for as long as the world lasts'.[64] Pavoni stressed Andreini's extemporal style: 'Overcome thus by passion and giving full reign to her rage and fury, [she] went out of her mind, and ran through the city like a madwoman, stopping first one person and then another, and speaking first in Spanish, then in Greek, then in Italian and many other languages, but always nonsensically'.[65] Pavoni goes on to describe the 'ditties' she sang and the parts she played in other voices. Such improvisation was her signature act and was clearly a tour de force.

Although the playing of madness that gripped Pavoni was flamboyant, the page version of this action is distinctly underwhelming. Scala's scenario gives madness the barest outline in print, simply noting that in act 2 Isabella 'bursts out in wild denunciation' and 'in the end she turns completely demented' (2.16). The third act gives more detail in speeches for Isabella based on jingling rhymes and nonsense, but the scene concludes with a general licence to play 'similar crazy things' (3.8). The stage direction in *The Coblers Prophesie* is similarly brief, deeming Zelota's '*rauing*' self-explanatory. As in *La Pazzia di Isabella*, the stage direction at F2r licences a player familiar with the stock routines imported from commedia to extemporize.

The Indecorous Denouement

The outsize stage direction at F2r of *The Coblers Prophesie* highlights the dramatization of madness. The Scarlet workshop may have initially devised this typographical experiment as a practical solution to fill an unwanted space in the printed text. The choice to highlight these particular lines, however, is far from arbitrary, and their striking format creates an unsettling emphasis. The Scarlet

print house may have been turning necessity to their advantage, but they intentionally picked lines that could imaginatively enact the thrill of performance on the printed page. This characteristically emphatic house style underscored for the reader the importance of the moment on stage. While no scripted dialogue guides the reader as to how long or how important these improvised scenes were, the outsize print draws attention to the dramatic moment. Dryden's despair at being cozened with a 'jelly' when confronted with the deflating effect of printed drama is here reversed. The printer's surprising typography prompts readers to see not a 'cold dull mass' of print but to engage their imaginations and conjure up the more brightly glittering star of performance. Scarlet's singular intervention alerts us not only to his own agency but to the potential power of other printers to shape the texts that passed through their hands. His deliberate and repeated use of outsize print suggests that early modern printers exercised some influence over the texts they handled and actively contributed to shaping reader response.

Notes

I am extremely grateful to Dr Aaron Pratt, Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Curator of Early Books and Manuscripts at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas for generously sending me the image from *The Coblers Prophesie* without charge. I would also like to thank *Early Theatre*'s peer reviewers for their insightful and constructive comments.

1 Robert Wilson, *The Coblers Prophesie* (London, 1594; STC: 25781), *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*, F2r. Subsequent references cite signature numbers in this edition.

2 For varied conclusions about the play's performance date; see Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue,* vol. 3 (Oxford, 2012), 167; David Kathman, 'Wilson, Robert', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004); H.S.D. Mithal, Introduction, in *An Edition of Robert Wilson's Three Ladies of London and Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*, ed. H.S.D. Mithal (New York, 1988), xli–xlii; David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), 194–5, https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674734364; Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (London, 1991), 69, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198819455.001.0001; W.R. Streitberger, *The Masters of the Revels and Elizabeth I's Court Theatre* (Oxford, 2016), 176, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198719670.001.0001; and Frances Eastwood, 'Riotous Reform, Staging Complaint, 1561–1595', PhD thesis (Cambridge University, 2022).

3 Kirk Melnikoff, *Elizabethan Publishing and the Makings of Literary Culture* (Toronto, 2018).
4 Alice Leonard, *Error in Shakespeare: Shakespeare in Error* (Basingstoke, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35180-9_5.
5 On the prevalence of printer's error see Adam Smyth, *Material Texts in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2018), 75–136.
6 Lambert Daneau, *A Fruitfull Commentarie Vpon the Twelue Small Prophets* (Cambridge, 1594; STC: 6227), *EEBO*, ¶5r.
7 Richard Mulcaster, *The First Part of the Elementarie* (London, 1582; STC: 18250), *EEBO*, 107.
8 Hugh Broughton, *An Epistle to the Learned Nobilitie of England Touching Translating the Bible from the Original* (London, 1597; STC: 3862), *EEBO*, H2r, HIv.
9 Thomas Nashe, *Christes Teares Ouer Ierusalem* (London, 1593; STC: 18366), *EEBO*, *4r.
10 Thomas Nashe, *The Vnfortunate Traveller* (London, 1594; STC: 18380), *EEBO*, A3r, A3v.
11 Thomas Nashe, *The Vnfortunate Traveller* (London, 1594; STC: 18381), *EBBO*, A1r.
12 Chiaki Hanabusa, 'The Printing of the Second Edition of Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594)', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 104.3 (2010), 277–97, 280–1, https://doi.org/10.1086/680939.
13 Chiaki Hanabusa in 'Shared Printing in Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (1594)', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 97.3 (2003), 333–49, 335, https://doi.org/10.1086/pbsa.97.3.24295756.
14 For overview of the native medieval and classical conventions of manuscript playtexts and their subsequent transmission in print, see T.H. Howard-Hill, 'The Evolution of the Form of Plays in English During the Renaissance', *Renaissance Quarterly* 43.1 (1990), 112–45, https://doi.org/10.2307/2861794.
15 Smyth, *Material Texts in Early Modern England*, 77.
16 Melnikoff, *Elizabethan Publishing and the Makings of Literary Culture*, 13.
17 Irene Mann, 'A Political Cancel in *The Coblers Prophesie*', *The Library* 23.2 (1942), 94–100, 100, https://doi.org/10.1093/library/s4-xxiii.2-3.94.
18 Ibid, 96.
19 Ibid, 100; Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, 69, 71.
20 Fredson Bowers, 'The Headline in Early Books', *English Institute Annual: 1941* (1942), 198; W.W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, vol. 4 (London, 1939–59; repr. 1962), 1669, cited by Hanabusa, 'Shared Printing in Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy*', 335.
21 Mann, 'A Political Cancel in *The Coblers Prophesie*', 98.

22 Hanabusa, 'Shared Printing in Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy*', 335–7.
23 Ibid, 335.
24 Ibid, 343.
25 Ibid, 346–7.
26 Richard Proudfoot and Nicola Bennett, 'Introduction', in *King Edward III* by William Shakespeare, ed. Richard Proudfoot and Nicola Bennett (Bloomsbury, 2017), 1–132, 117, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781408191347.00000040.
27 *The Raigne of King Edward the Third* (London, 1596; STC: 7501), *EEBO*, E1v, E2r.
28 Proudfoot and Bennett, 'Introduction', 121.
29 Peter W.M. Blayney 'The Prevalence of Shared Printing in the Early Seventeenth Century', *PBSA* 67 (1973), 437–42, 440.
30 Henry Smith, *Thirteene Sermons* (London, 1592; STC: 22717); Hanabusa, 'Shared Printing in Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy*', 345.
31 Henry Smith, *The Sermons of Master Henrie Smith* (London, 1592; STC: 22718).
32 Henry Holland, *Spirituall Preseruatiues Against the Pestilence* (London, 1593; STC: 13588); Richard Bancroft, *A Suruay of the Pretended Holy Discipline* (London, 1593; STC: 1352).
33 Robert Greene, *The Historie of Orlando Furioso* (London, 1594; STC: 12265); Hanabusa, 'Shared Printing in Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy*', 335.
34 Edward Arber, ed., *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640 A.D.*, vol. 2 (London, 1875–1894), 864, noted by Hanabusa, 'Shared Printing in Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy*', 347.
35 Vincentio Saviolo, *Vincentio Sauiolo His Practise* (London, 1595; STC: 21788).
36 Lewis Lewkenor, *The Estate of English Fugitiues vnder the King of Spaine* (London, 1595; STC: 15564).
37 Proudfoot and Bennett, 'Introduction', 118. For discussion of motives for shared printing, see Peter W.M. Blayney, *The Texts of 'King Lear' and their Origins: Nichlolas Okes and the First Quarto* (Cambridge, 1982), 50–2, 57.
38 Proudfoot and Bennett, 'Introduction', 118.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid, 118–19.
41 Ibid, 121.
42 Ibid.
43 Hanabusa, 'Shared Printing in Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy*', 340.
44 Claire M.L. Bourne, *Typographies of Performance in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198848790.001.0001.
45 *A New Enterlude No Lesse Wittie: Then Pleasant, Entituled New Custome*, ([London], 1573; STC: 6150).

46 See also the discussion of 'paraphs' by T.H. Howard-Hill, 'The Evolution of the Form of Plays in English During the Renaissance', 144.
47 Elkanah Settle, *The Empress of Morocco* (London, 1673; Wing: S2678).
48 Bourne, *Typographies of Performance*, 270.
49 Robert Greene, *A Notable Discouery of Coosenage Now Daily Practised by Sundry Lewd Persons, Called Connie-Catchers* (London, 1592; STC: 12280).
50 Peter W.M. Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', in *A New History of Early English Drama,* ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York, 1997), 383–422, 391.
51 Melnikoff, *Elizabethan Publishing and the Makings of Literary Culture*, 6.
52 Proudfoot and Bennett, 'Introduction', 119.
53 Bourne, *Typographies of Performance*, 184.
54 John Dryden, *The Spanish Fryar* (London, 1681; Wing: D2368), *EBBO*, A2v, cited by Bourne, *Typographies of Performance,* 262.
55 T.H. Howard-Hill, 'The Evolution of the Form of Plays in English During the Renaissance', 135.
56 Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great* (London, 1590; STC: 17425), A2r–A2v, A2r.
57 Claire M. L. Bourne, 'Typography after Performance', in *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Tiffany Stern (London, 2019), 193–215, 196.
58 Ibid.
59 Lucy Munro, 'Alarums, *Edward II* and the Staging of History', in *Christopher Marlowe, Theatrical Commerce, and the Book Trade*, ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Roslyn L. Knutson (Cambridge, 2018), 68–80, 76–7.
60 For a more extensive discussion of the influence of commedia dell'arte on *The Coblers Prophesie* see Eastwood, 'Riotous Reform, Staging Complaint', 98–133.
61 Flaminio Scala, *Il Teatro delle Favole Rappresentative* (Venetia, 1611).
62 Quotations and scene numbers for the English translation of Scala's scenarios reference *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: A Translation and Analysis of 30 Scenarios*, ed. Richard Andrews (Lanham, MD, 2008).
63 Bourne, 'Typography after Performance', 193.
64 Giuseppe Pavoni*, Diario Descritto di Giuseppe Pavoni delle Feste Celebrate nelle Solennissime Nozze delli Serenissimi Sposi, il Sig. Don Ferdinando Medici e la Sig. Donna Christina di Lorena Gran Duchi di Toscana* (Bologna, 1589) in Andrews, ed., *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala*, 237.
65 Ibid.