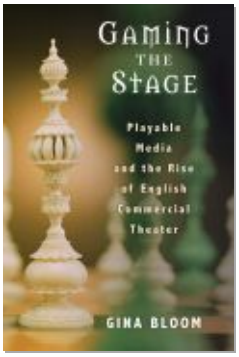
Three. Backgammon: Space and Scopic Dominance



THREE | Backgammon

Space and Scopic Dominance

The anonymous *Arden of Faversham* (c. 1592) ends with a backgammon game during which the eponymous character—who has managed to preserve himself despite almost a dozen murder attempts—is finally taken out.[1] The backgammon setting is instrumental to the scene, as Arden's game opponent and antagonist Mosby cannot call out the cue to the waiting murderers "'Now I can take you'" (14.229) until he rolls a number on the dice that enables him to capture one of Arden's game pieces. Readers of the play have often been confused about the game being played in his climactic scene, mistakenly thinking it to be a game of dice or cards.[2] These games do share some common features—backgammon, for instance, involves the use of dice—but the distinctions among them are significant. If, as I have been arguing, the mechanics and gameplay experiences of particular pastimes give us insight into how England's first commercial theaters operated as playable media, then we cannot conflate backgammon with other sitting pastimes. We have to take into account the particularities of this gaming platform and the modes of interaction that it invites.

Similar to board games such as chess, the focus of Chapter 4, backgammon requires its players (usually two) to move "men" strategically across a board. In backgammon the board has been divided into twenty-four marked spaces, called "points."[3] The points are arranged to create a linear track, so that each player moves his or her men in a different direction, attempting to be the first to reach the goal—usually getting all those men to a quadrant of the board called "home" and then removing them from the board. Like chess, backgammon encourages aggressive interaction: a man left alone on a point is called a "blot" and can be captured and removed temporarily from the board, thereby delaying the player's progression toward home. But backgammon differs from chess in that how far one's men move is determined by the roll of dice. In this, backgammon resembles the game of cards, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, has been called

a game of "imperfect information," because, unlike in chess—where possible moves are, at least in theory, visible to both players (who can see the board equally)—in cards certain information is structurally hidden from players.[4] The dice in backgammon produce a similar effect: they hide information, leaving it, in this case, entirely to chance. If, as I argued in the previous chapter, card games teach participants competency in negotiating imperfect information, then backgammon teaches the additional competency of mastering space in the face of aggressive opponents and unpredictable chance.

Backgammon may not be represented in dramatic literature nearly as often as dice and cards, but because of the ways backgammon depends on and builds its players' competencies in spatial navigation, dramatizations of the game onstage are fascinating case studies through which to investigate how the first commercial theaters worked more generally as game spaces. The first commercial playhouses were amphitheaters, usually round, with several tiers of seating and, as is illustrated in the only surviving drawing from the seventeenth century (Figure 16), a thrust stage that jutted out into a central yard, or pit.[5] The audience surrounded the stage on most sides, either standing around the stage in the yard or sitting in the galleries above. Theaters could be crowded and often disorderly, especially in the yard, which was standing room only and available to anyone who could afford the one pence admission price. Amphitheaters could thus prompt aggressive interaction among their socially and economically heterogeneous patrons, who competed for the best viewing spots. Entrepreneurs took financial advantage of this disorderly scene by offered patrons with economic means seats literally positioned above the fray, seats in the galleries. The most expensive of these seats—the perspective of the artist of the early drawing—looked down upon the stage and the yard, providing something close to a bird's-eye view of the action.

From our modern frame of reference, it is surprising that patrons would have paid more for seats in what they called the "two-penny galleries," but that we would call the nosebleed sections. Yet I want to argue that the seats had a unique value: they held out to patrons the fantasy of dominating through vision the tumultuous theater space and socially heterogeneous patrons and actors below them. High above the action, these patrons could abstract themselves not only physically but cognitively and emotionally from the chaos below. The economic logic of the two-penny galleries threatened to undermine the theater's operation as playable media, however. How could patrons who imagined themselves dominating the theater space through their vision engage fully in the dramatic action, playing vi-

cariously? If actors and playwrights were invested in cultivating engaged participants, willing to play along, rather than distant observers abstracted from the ludic action, then they had a vested interested in debunking the economic logic of the two-penny gallery galleries.

Critiques of this logic come to the fore especially powerfully at moments in plays when spectators become aware of their spatial positioning in relation to the stage, particularly when they are invited to think about what it means to watch from above—as happens in a staged backgammon game, as well as an actual one. This chapter examines two of the rare early modern plays that present backgammon matches onstage: *Arden of Faversham* and Henry Porter's *The Two Angry Women of Abington*. I show that as these dramas use backgammon to take up questions of visual surveillance and the navigation of space, they offer up direct analogies to theatergoing to suggest that theatergoer pleasure and power come not from abstract, visual surveillance of—but rather, risky, engaged interaction with—the ludic world of the boards.

THEATER SPACE AND SCOPIC DOMINANCE

Contending with aggressive "opponents" and unpredictable chance was as much a part of the spatial experience of the early modern playhouse as of the game of backgammon, especially in the case of amphitheaters, where patrons probably interacted physically with one another far more than is the custom in most theaters today. Because there were no assigned seats, patrons attending the more popular plays had to compete for the best viewing spots.[6] Even when they were not full, amphitheaters were set up in such a way as to encourage, or at least by no means inhibit, physical interaction among patrons. With plays performed in full daylight, moving around was all the easier and probably quite necessary, since, unlike in the indoor theaters, playgoers did not enjoy intermissions between every act: they would have needed to move about while the play was being performed in order to buy refreshments, relieve their bladders, and socialize with friends. Such movement presumably could become disorderly. Albeit to promote his antitheatricalist agenda, religious zealot Anthony Munday captures some sense of this chaotic movement in *A Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (1580), where he decries those "yong ruffins" and "harlots" who "presse to the fore-front of the scaffoldes."[7]

Navigating theater space must have been all the more troubling to patrons who considered themselves superior to ruffians and prostitutes. It is

not surprising that the first commercial playhouses—which brought people from all walks of life into the same space—established tiered seating, designating certain sections of the theater for patrons with economic means. For an additional penny beyond the one-penny price of admission to the yard, patrons could sit in the covered first gallery; if they paid more, patrons could sit in the upper tiers; and for even more, they could sit in the Lord's Rooms, the balcony above the stage. Though the amphitheater was still less formal in its architecture than many theaters today, tiered seating enabled these playhouses to present themselves as more *sociofugal* than *sociopetal:* that is, differently priced seats enabled patrons to conceive of the theater as a space that set people apart and offered a more individualized theatergoing experience (sociofugal) rather than a space that brought people together and produced a more collective experience (sociopetal).[8] To be sure, compared with private venues for playgoing (such as noblemen's houses, which were invitation only), early modern commercial theaters appeared to level social distinctions, presenting plays as cultural commodities that could be enjoyed in the same way by anyone who could afford the price of admission.[9] But it was precisely because the professional theater *seemed* to flatten social differences that there was pressure on the emergent institution to mark out social distinctions among patrons, and many theaters did so by placing a premium on certain viewing spots. There is, of course, no way to know whether patrons of means always, indeed ever, chose the two-penny galleries, just as there is no reason to presume that ruffians and prostitutes always stood in the yard.[10] In a commercial theater, anyone could sit anywhere after paying the demanded price. Yet regardless of how theatergoing worked in practice, it is clear that theater entrepreneurs designated seats in the upper galleries and Lord's Rooms as more valuable than spots in the pit and the lower gallery, attempting to create social distinction through the valuation of theatrical space. The priciest seats, I would maintain, offered a qualitatively different encounter with a play, a different experience of *play*.

Part of the seeming value of these seats is that they offered spectators a way to avoid aggressive "opponents" and unpredictable chance as they navigated theatrical space. For one thing, the galleries appear to have been much less crowded than the yard; entrepreneur Philip Henslowe's records for the Rose theater indicate that the galleries were probably only half full at most performances.[11] Even when the galleries were full, it was probably easier to lay claim to a seat in them than to an unmarked standing position in the pit, and the raking of the upper galleries limited the degree to which a playgoer's views might be blocked by other patrons' heads or feathered

hats, as would have been the case for those in the yard and in the lower galleries. The second generation of amphitheaters (including the Globe, the Swan, the Fortune, and probably the Rose) further decreased physical contact between patrons in the upper galleries and those in the rest of the theater by providing the former with separate entrances. Access to the lower gallery was through the yard—anyone in the pit could pay an additional penny to move to this gallery (e.g., if they desired cover from the elements or wanted to sit down)—but access to the upper galleries was gained through staircase turrets.[12] If the theater acts as a "container," creating a sense of community among those present, then it is no wonder that entrepreneurs could demand more money from those patrons eager to gain spatial distance from, and thus undermine communal bonds with, patrons they believed to be socially inferior.[13] In effect gallery seating promised (whether or not it delivered) a more "civilized" theatrical experience, claiming to eliminate some of the chance and aggression that characterized playgoing in amphitheaters.

But if theater financiers wanted to give wealthier patrons a formal space apart, why did they establish that space above and farther away from the stage? This placement is surprising given that throughout much of theater history, from the days of the ancient Greek amphitheaters to the indoor theaters of the early seventeenth century and beyond, the most privileged playgoers have been positioned closest to the stage. The bird's-eye view of the two-penny galleries has generally been associated with seats of *lowest* cost. This is still the case today. So why did entrepreneurs feel confident that patrons of means would pay *more* for the bird's-eye view in the emerging public amphitheaters? One way to make sense of this historically unusual spatial configuration is through an analogy to board games, which similarly position game participants and spectators with a bird's-eye view of the ludic action.

To understand the value—as well as the limitations—of the bird's-eye view in theaters and in board games, we might compare these playable media with a technology whose use of the bird's-eye view has been helpfully theorized: the map. French philosopher Michel de Certeau argues that the map offers the kind of pleasure one experiences when viewing the city of New York from atop an exceptionally tall building: the viewer is able "to be lifted out of the city's grasp," leaving behind "the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators."[14] The bird's-eye view transforms that entangling mass of the city into a "text" to be read: static, immobile, transparent, and accessible. Or, to rephrase this in the terms de Certeau uses elsewhere in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the

bird's-eye view transforms the moving, variable realm of "space" into stable, static "place."[15] De Certeau goes on to describe, however, the ways in which the daily practices of people who walk the city disturb the totalizing power that the bird's-eye viewer claims.

De Certeau's theories of the map can be productively extended to board games and theater, although only the latter has been attempted by others.[16] Yet historian of cartography P. D. A. Harvey has speculated that board games may be a form of "pre-cartography," demonstrating "a culture's disposition to replicate place in miniature" and "as viewed from above."[17] Regardless of whether we pursue the full cultural and historical implications of Harvey's conjecture, there are compelling reasons to link maps and board games in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although board games, including versions of tables, had been played in the earliest ancient societies, the rise of printing made it possible to produce game boards cheaply so that they were available to a wider range of players. The process for mass-producing game boards was similar to that used for producing maps: illustrations were printed, colored by hand, and then mounted on canvas or linen.[18] The material link between game boards and maps is perhaps most compellingly demonstrated in late seventeenth-century geographical board games such as *Le Jeu du monde* (Paris, 1645), whose board features nations of the world, as illustrated from a bird's-eye view: movement from space to space represents travel across the world (Figure 17).[19]

There are philosophical as well as material reasons to link gaming and mapping technologies. In his work on mapping, de Certeau turns briefly to an analogy with board games to underscore his distinction between "place" and "space." He compares the checkerboard to a "system of defined places" because of the way it "analyzes and classifies identities": the act of gameplay in checkers, according to de Certeau, exemplifies the sort of transgressive spatial practices that frustrate the "scopic and gnostic drive."[20] The *practice* of space "opens up clearings; it 'allows' a certain play within a system of defined places. It 'authorizes' the production of an area of free play (*Spielraum*) on a checkerboard."[21] We might say, then, that the game board is to *place* what gameplay is to *space*. That is, the game as form—with its grid lines, specified places, and conspicuous rules—is meant to discipline movement and furnish players with an intelligible plan for managing space. But the practicalities and pleasures of play necessitate less static, controlled, and abstract approaches to the board, requiring players to engage instead in dynamic, risky, and physically interactive navigations of space.

The example of board games supports but also complicates de Certeau's distinction between space and place, for gameplay, a spatial practice,

can transform the seemingly fixed visual regime of the game board.[22] Gameplay, for instance, has historically altered the game board's appearance: antecedents of the game of tables—which we now call by one of its variations, "backgammon"—were played on boards shaped like spirals, circles, and crosses as well as squares. Additionally, gameplay has changed the rules of the game: over the course of its history, the game of tables has seen variations in the number of players, the amount of interaction between men on the board, and the significance of capturing blots, among other things. There is some mystery about how games adapt and change over time, but the prevailing theory is that players reshape game rules to create more pleasurable playing experiences, and those variations are then reiterated over and over until they become institutionalized as the new rules of the game. As I suggest in Chapter 4, theatrical innovation and custom take shape through a similar process of reiteration and transformation. What I would underscore here is that if the theater stage—which from the eighteenth century onward would notably be called the "boards"[23]—was like a game board, then those in the upper galleries paid not just a financial but a ludic price for the ostensible advantages of their bird's eye view. Although positioned like board game players, seeing the action from above, these patrons risked becoming too abstracted from the "boards," and thus unable to influence their action and form. Unless they abandoned their fantasies of total spatial management, what I'll call *scopic dominance*, they risked losing the opportunity to play the play.

As I argue in the next section, *Arden* uses backgammon to develop a critique of fantasies of scopic dominance, delivering that critique through a narrative of male social conflict. Before turning to my reading of the play, it is worth noting that my discussion of the bird's-eye view in board games, theater, and masculinity is less part of a project to historicize vision than it is a way to theorize the social implications of different ways of interacting with space. Indeed, as will become evident below, characters in *Arden* and in *Two Angry Women,* attempt to master space visually even without access to an actual bird's-eye view. That said, I am interested in the ways these dramas deploy the topos of board gaming to query a fantasy of scopic dominance.[24] And what is perhaps most intriguing about the plays, especially in terms of their implications for thinking about theatrical space, is that both pursue this critique by problematizing vision itself. As if rendering in material terms the epistemological issues de Certeau raises, *Arden* and *Two Angry Women* dramatize the ways a literal failure to see undermines efforts to master space. Consequently, the dramas suggest that successful gamers—whether playing directly or vicariously and whether in a

backgammon match or a theater—ought not rely too much on an unstable visual regime but instead cultivate all their senses when they engage with playable media.

NAVIGATING SPACE AND PLACE IN *ARDEN OF FAVERSHAM*

The backgammon scene in *Arden* encapsulates elegantly the play's much broader and sustained use of geography and place to question an ideology of scopic dominance. *Arden*, which was based on a real murder that took place in Faversham, England, in 1551, is concerned with changing conceptions of land ownership in early modern England, dramatizing the ways a shift to a capitalist conception of land destroys the social relationships possible under a more feudalist system. Surveying and other emergent mapping practices were central to this shift, for by rendering the land in an abstract, textual form, such practices gave the landlord a fantasy of complete power and knowledge of the land and the tenants with whom he had increasingly less social contact.[25] Although the play's plot is centrally concerned with Arden's unfaithful wife, Alice, who colludes with her lover, Mosby, to have Arden murdered, the play repeatedly emphasizes Arden's status as a landowner who has benefited from emerging capitalist land practices, making many enemies in the process. The play thus serves in part as a "cautionary tale" about absentee landlords who, through surveillance technologies, treat the land primarily as a source of financial profit rather than as a paternalistic responsibility.[26] Land ownership was important, moreover, because it signaled social position, and thus *Arden* has also been read as a play about the perils of social climbing. Arden and his murderers are driven not simply by their appetite for land but by their belief that owning land will raise their social status.[27]

Indeed, the murderers' desire for "place"—in both geographic and social terms—is an overriding feature of their plot to kill Arden. Though they never manage to survey their target from that most auspicious of positions, the bird's-eye view, the murderers remain preoccupied throughout the play with surveillance and placement of Arden. One murderer, Greene, who believes Arden has unjustly taken his land, is somewhat obsessed with finding a specific locale for the murder, even though his hired guns, Black Will and Shakebag, are initially unconcerned with spatial propriety. When Black Will sees Arden for the first time after receiving the charge to commit the murder, he is eager to jump his victim immediately, but Greene holds him back. Through careful observation, Greene has learned that the

Nag's Head is Arden's "haunt" (3.38),[28] and he advises that Black Will attack Arden as he moves to this locale. Greene's murder strategy depends upon a sense of predictable, stable place, an unwise assumption. While Black Will waits in St. Paul's to capture Arden on his way to the Nag's Head, an apprentice lets down the window of his stall and, by chance, injures Black Will instead. In the flurry of activity, Arden escapes. Greene learns nothing from this experience. When he finds out how his plan went awry, he simply pursues another strategy of placing: "let us bethink us on some other place / Where Arden may be met with handsomely" (3.77–78) and again, "seeing this accident / Of meeting him in Paul's hath no success, / Let us bethink us on some other place / Whose earth may swallow up this Arden's blood" (3.107–10). The murderers may not have a bird's-eye view of their target, but they are nevertheless driven by a desire to master the spaces through which Arden moves.[29]

Greene's fixations with *emplacement*—with tracking Arden's movements in order to isolate a very specific place for the murder—make more sense when we bring the analytic of gender to bear on de Certeau's largely gender-neutral discussion of mapping.[30] Consider that the landowners who commissioned maps of their estates in hopes of dominating these spaces were predominantly men who were the heads of households. They used these maps to underscore and exercise their patriarchal power (despite having abandoned a sense of paternalistic care). Yet gender by no means guaranteed access to a position of social power, which, as *Arden* demonstrates, was not available to men such as Greene, Black Will, and Shakebag.[31] What is at stake, then, in these characters' pursuit of murder through strategies of emplacement? To answer this question, we need to think carefully about how gender and social status intersect in the early modern period, something many of *Arden*'s readers have overlooked in their debate about whether the play is predominantly a critique of the institution of marriage (and thus of early modern patriarchal systems) or of social climbing (and thus of early modern systems of social hierarchy).[32] The debate rests on a logical fallacy, for social status and gender were deeply imbricated in this period: social status helped *constitute* gender. My point here is not that *Arden*'s story of class conflict (between Arden and his male assassins) mirrors or intersects with its story of gender conflict (between Arden and his wife, Alice, or between Alice and her lover, Mosby), though that may be the case.[33] Rather, negotiations of power among men can be construed as "patriarchal," regardless of whether they involve or even have explicit implications for women.

Early modern patriarchy worked not only through the subordination of

women but also through men's subordination of other males, such as youths, second sons, servants, and vagrants.[34] Some such men attempted to overcome their disenfranchisement by climbing the ranks that were supposed to be closed to them and, through marriage or commerce, working their way into positions of social and economic privilege, wherein they could exercise authority over not only women but also men of lower status. Whether or not they achieved their goals, they bought into and thus helped bolster the mythos of what historian Alexandra Shepard calls "patriarchal manhood" by conforming to the codes of the club they wished to join. Men who failed to climb the ranks in this way and reap "patriarchal dividends" had other options, Shepard argues: they could pursue a different set of codes for masculine behavior, some of which directly countered patriarchal virtues. In this latter model of "anti-patriarchal" manhood, anarchic violence could be a sign of rather than a deviation from manhood.[35]

The play's staging of backgammon operates as a material analogy for contradictions within early modern masculinity, and thereby extends Shepard's argument. *Arden* dramatizes masculinity as achieved not simply through an individual's exercise of particular qualities or behaviors, but also through a contest with other men over sparse resources; masculinity is shown to be a competitive game that some men win and others lose. Significantly, those competing for masculinity are not necessarily playing the game the same way. Whereas backgammon encourages its players to be competent simultaneously in violent conquest (removing the opponent's men from the board) and spatial mastery (thinking strategically about where the game men are placed), the game of early modern masculinity calls for a choice between these: those pursuing antipatriarchal masculinity are better served by developing competencies in violent conquest, whereas for those pursuing "patriarchal" masculinity, the focus is on spatial mastery.[36] I would suggest that Arden's assassins Greene, Black Will, and Shakebag fail at their task because they strive, unsuccessfully, to integrate these two competencies. They attempt to master Arden's movements across the landscape in their plot to murder him, a plot that they believe will ensure their social advancement and thus win them the dividends of patriarchal masculinity.[37] But to succeed at the murder, the assassins must practice a kind of anarchic violence that better befits a code of antipatriarchal masculinity.[38]

The killers' violent actions are incompatible with their desire to master what de Certeau calls a "system of defined places."[39] The play suggests that their plots fail because murder involves significant risk—as does backgammon, a game that is as much about luck as strategy. Knowing well the rules

of the game and keeping track of where all the men are placed is not enough, as it might be in chess, a game with less imperfect information. Whereas skilled chess players can predict with some and often much accuracy when they will be able to capture the opponent's men, the practice of aggression in backgammon is largely unpredictable, being controlled primarily by the roll of the dice. Indeed, the drama turns Arden into something akin to a backgammon blot, also known in one early game treatise as *homo vagans,* a wandering man.[40] Arden spends much of the play wandering without protection toward his home and, like a blot, avoiding capture largely because of luck.[41] Arden's murder can be accomplished only when the killers come to terms with the risks and indeterminacy of their spatial practice, developing a style of play that given them closer access to, but paradoxically less control over, their target.

Greene hires Black Will to murder Arden because Black Will is known for approaching violence in just this way; but, ironically, when Black Will begins working with Greene, he adopts a less efficacious criminal style. Initially, Black Will exhibits the kind of rash overconfidence essential for the deed. Not only does he enjoy committing murder—as one character puts it, "My death to him [Black Will] is but a merriment. / And he will murder me to make him sport" (4.83–4)—but he doesn't need much instruction or planning, forging ahead as if on instinct. As he salivates at the prospect of carrying out the murder, Black Will compares himself to a thirsty, "forlorn traveller, / Whose lips are glued with summer's parching heat" and who wants only to "see a running brook" (3.92–4). Imagining himself as winding his way through an unknown landscape without a map, Black Will focuses on what lies directly in front of him and seeks only gustatory satisfaction; he will happily quench his thirst for murder with any live body he happens to come across. The money he will receive as compensation is just a bonus. But as Will's relationship with Greene develops, he begins to express other motivations for the murder, as if he has become subsumed by Greene's insistence on place, in both the social and geographic senses of the term. Like Greene, Black Will begins to describe the carefully plotted murder of Arden as a stepping-stone toward his own attainment of patriarchal masculinity. Black Will fantasizes about murder as an "occupation" that might win him respect and power: "Ah, that I might be set a work thus through the year and that murder would grow to an occupation that a man might without danger of law. Zounds! I warrant I should be warden of the company" (2.102–5).[42] He daydreams that the murder will elevate his economic and social status so much that he will wield power not only over Alice but over her lover as well: "Say thou seest

Mosby kneeling at my knees, / Off'ring me service for my high attempt" (3.84–85).[43] With the promise of riches and authority over other men, Will's accomplice Shakebag, too, agrees to fulfill Greene's plan, provided Greene can "give me place and opportunity" (3.101).

But the murderers' efforts at surveillance and emplacement of Arden fail again and again, and having traded in their rash overconfidence for the measured certainty characteristic of patriarchal masculinity, the murderers flounder when chance undermines their best laid schemes. For instance, after being unable to capture Arden on his way to the Nag's Head, the murderers happen upon Arden's servant, Michael, and having questioned him about Arden's whereabouts—"Where supped Master Arden?" (3.120)—they coerce Michael to take part in their conspiracy: "Thy office is but to appoint the place" (156).[44] When Michael fails to follow through on the plan, he defends himself from blame with a concocted story and then deflects the murderers' rage by giving them what they want, another *place* to do the murder: "you may front him well on Rainham Down, / A place well-fitting such a stratagem" (7.18–19). This particular place is less spatially confined than the earlier prospective murder spots have been, presenting further geographical challenges. Rainham Down was an open countryside around the town of Rainham, a place defined only in relation to other places: it was on the road from Rochester to Faversham.[45] But this plot fails because Master Cheiny and his men happen to come upon Arden and escort him out of harm's way. Rainham Down may well be a "place well-fitting" murder, but place is not enough; if Arden is like a blot or *homo vagans,* then the lucky arrival of Lord Cheiny and his "men" and their capacity to cover Arden as he wanders protect this blot from capture. And Black Will, rather than rushing onto the scene anyway and killing any man who blocks his path—the sort of behavior we would have expected from his earlier characterization—bides his time and waits for another well-chosen place and more carefully controlled circumstances.

The play thus underscores a conflict between the murderers' aggression and their pursuit of patriarchal masculinity by emphasizing tensions in their approaches to space. To be successful in capturing their man, the murders need to take more physical risks instead of fixating on placing their target; but their social-climbing agenda and their pursuit of patriarchal masculinity lead them to emphasize safe placement over risky, physical contact. One of the key ways that the play interrogates the murderers' fixations on placement, underscoring a conflict between their murderous aggression and their pursuit of patriarchal masculinity, is by literally problematizing their vision and thus frustrating what de Certeau would call

their "gnostic and scopic drive."[46] The play mocks the murderers for their strategies of surveillance and emplacement by suggesting that such strategies, which abstract the murderers from their intended victim, depend too much on an unstable visual regime. In *Arden* the mythos of spatial management that de Certeau associates with the scopic drive cannot be achieved because vision, in a very material sense, is easily impaired. In one especially interesting scene, Black Will and Shakebag fail to kill Arden because a fog rises, obscuring their view of him and leaving them incapacitated by sudden blindness.

> SHAKEBAG: Oh Will, where art thou?
> BLACK WILL: Here, Shakebag, almost in hell's mouth, where I cannot see my way for smoke.
> SHAKEBAG: I pray thee speak still that we may meet by the sound, for I shall fall into some ditch or other unless my feet see better than my eyes. (12.1–6)

Shakebag and Black Will's strategies of emplacement have rendered them so reliant on visual modes of perceiving and abstract modes of interaction that they are unpracticed in engaging their other senses to navigate space and interact with their target. As it leaves them "making false footing in the dark" and attempting to follow Arden "without a guide" (12.51–2), the murderers' visual impairment is a material rendering of the blindness of those who, according to de Certeau, walk the city streets, unable to see the "urban 'text' they write" with their movements.[47] Unlike de Certeau's urban walkers, however, *Arden*'s murderers stumble unproductively in the darkness. They are so fixated on engaging their eyes that they fail to realize they might be able to "see better" with their feet.

The play reserves its most trenchant critique of the murderers' scopic and gnostic drive for the climactic murder scene itself, however, where Arden is killed while playing backgammon with Mosby. How does this murder plot differ from the previous ones? To answer that question, we must approach backgammon not simply as a literary symbol but as an actual game, and thus benefit from drawing on our own experiential knowledge of what it feels and looks like to interact with and through the space of a backgammon board. Like prior murder attempts, the backgammon murder plot places Arden: Mosby will bring him back to the house and "play a game or two at tables *here*" (14.96; my emphasis). And Black Will goes further, specifying that Alice "place Mosby . . . in a chair" and Arden "upon a stool" (14.115–16) so that Black Will, when he rushes out, can drag Arden

to the ground to be killed. Whereas in previous scenes Arden has enjoyed the liberating benefits of movement, this new plot stabilizes him; he will be inside the parlor, sitting on a stool, and, most important, engaged with a board game. During the previous murder plots, Arden has been like de Certeau's urban walkers: blind to the text he writes with his movements and to his place in a/the plot, he nevertheless engages in subversive tactics that undermine his murderers, who believe themselves to have all the privileges of de Certeau's "voyeur-god."[48] The backgammon plot differs, though, in that Arden will not simply be an object of surveillance, subjected to the observation of others; as Arden plays backgammon, he will partake in a god's-eye view himself, gazing down on the game board while others gaze down on him. Occupying the position of player, rather than simply a "man" to be played, gives Arden the (false) sense of power and security his murderers possess.

The foolishness of Arden's fantasy of scopic dominance is strikingly foreshadowed in a dream he describes of having been in a deer park where preparations were afoot for a hunt. Notably, Arden reports that in his dream he occupied a bird's-eye view of the hunt, standing "upon a little rising hill / . . . whistly watching for the herd's approach" (6.8–9), only to discover that he was "the game" to be hunted (6.19). As in the hunt, Arden can be "taken" during the backgammon game because he looks down—in this case, at the board—rather than attuning himself to the social game around him. Indeed, the play cheekily suggests that were he simply to look up from the board, Arden might glimpse his murderers before they can attack. As the game begins and Black Will enters the room, Alice warns, "Take heed he see thee not," and Black Will registers concern, "I fear he will spy me as I am coming" (14.224–25). Part of the tension of the scene, then, stems from the precariousness of Black Will's scopic dominance: Arden can ruin the whole plot if he simply abandons his visual fixation on the game board.

But the most pressing tension of the scene stems from the way it materially links Arden's life to his competency at backgammon. Mosby has instructed the murderers to wait for him to utter the "watchword," "'Now I take you'" (14.100–1), before rushing out. Thus, theoretically, Arden may preserve his life if he manages to keep his blots from being captured by Mosby. Although earlier accounts of the historical crime describe Arden as having been killed while playing tables, the connection between the murder and the outcome of the game—between physical and ludic aggression—is far more prominent in the drama than in these other texts. The *Wardmote Book of Faversham* reads: "He was most shamefully murdred as is foresaid / as he was playing at Tables frendely w^{t} thesaid morsbye for

sodeynly cam out (of a darke house adioyning to thesaid plo[r]) / the foresaid Blackwyll." In the *Wardmote Book,* Black Will does not respond to a watchword that corresponds to a game move but simply comes out "sodeynly" [suddenly]. Holinshed's version of the crime story includes the watchword but suggests that Mosby ultimately uses it independent of the game context, confusing or angering Arden: "In their plaie Mosbie said thus (which seemed to be the watchword for blacke Wils comming foorth) Now maie I take you sir if I will. Take me (quoth maister Arden) which waie?"[49] In having Arden question Mosby's claim that he can take one of Arden's blots, Holinshed's account disarticulates Arden's fate from his and Mosby's performance in the actual backgammon game. By contrast, the drama goes to great lengths to connect these. In a scene that would take significantly longer to perform onstage than to read from a printed script, the murderers wait in the wings while the game is played, and they anxiously wonder if Mosby will ever manage to take one of Arden's men and speak the watchword. As the game proceeds, Black Will complains, "Can he not take him yet? What a spite is that!" (14.223). Finally, Mosby, in a climactic moment, declares that he is about to lose his final opportunity to capture a blot if he cannot cast a one on his next roll of the dice: "One ace, or else I lose the game" (14.227). The audience, like the murderers, wait with bated breath as Mosby throws the dice, turning up, Arden informs us, double aces (one on both dice).

For contemporary audiences who know anything about backgammon, as for early modern playgoers who would have been familiar with the popular game, Mosby's comment immediately conjures up a game puzzle: how might the board be set up so as to bring the match to this exciting crux? That the state of gameplay fascinated early playgoers is evinced by the famous frontispiece to *Arden*'s 1633 quarto edition, which not only represents this scene from the play but highlights the game board, angling it so as to give readers a bird's-eye view of the ludic action (Figure 18).[50] The illustration helps demonstrate the oddly ambivalent effects of this staged game scene. On the one hand it reveals this to be the climactic moment of the play, demonstrating how Mosby's report on the status of the game produces much-needed dramatic tension. Such tension kept early modern playgoers engaged in what easily could have become an anticlimactic murder scene: most theatergoers probably knew from historical accounts that the actual Arden murder happened during a tables match. The play's success depended on its ability to manufacture dramatic tension about the famous crime. On the other hand, however, and this is the point I would underscore, the illustration shows readers something that playgoers would

never have seen. Like the murderers positioned on the edges of Arden's parlor, playgoers did not have visual access to the game board, whose details could not be seen from afar. The staging of the scene thus belies a mythos of scopic dominance, insisting that theatrical pleasure—the sense of climax experienced with Mosby's gesture of casting the dice—is possible only when spectators use all their senses to play along with the game, becoming involved cognitively and emotionally with its unpredictable risks and aggressive interactions.[51]

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss in more detail the integrated modes of perception that the Arden murder scene calls upon its audiences to exercise; but before I leave the murder scene itself, it is worth observing how the backgammon topos, with its critique of scopic dominance, carries the play through to its tragic end. Whereas others have read Arden's house as a successful place for the murder because, unlike the locales of previous murder attempts, it can be carefully controlled,[52] I would suggest that the play uses backgammon to reveal fixity and spatial control as mere illusions, even at the play's end. When the murderers finally manage to kill Arden, they turn out to be falsely confident about their accomplishments, for like a blot in backgammon, even when Arden is removed from the boards, he is not permanently displaced. This plot development is in keeping with the drama of backgammon as a game. Unlike earlier versions of tables, where loss of a blot could end the game, in backgammon the game continues, and the captured blot has a chance to reenter the board onto the home table of the opponent. For instance, if Player A's blot has been taken and he or she then casts a one, the captured blot enters on the first point of the opponent's table, unless the opponent, Player B, has two or more men protecting that space. From this position on the board, the reentered blot can continue to be played. In fact, if Player B has a blot standing on the point where Player A's blot reenters the board, Player A may capture Player B's man even as it sits seemingly safe on its home table.

In his seventeenth-century manuscript on gaming, Francis Willughby explains how these game rules can be manipulated strategically by a player whose opponent has brought most of his own men home and, as he bears them off the board, appears set to win the game. The underdog player can strategically allow one of his blots to be captured, sacrificing this man so that it may later have a chance of penetrating the opponent's home table and keeping the underdog's chances in the game alive. Willughby uses this gameplay scenario to provide an etymology for the game of Irish, an English version of tables that is backgammon's closest cousin.[53] Drawing on English stereotypes about the barbarism of the Irish, he writes: "An Irish

man is never dead till his head bee cut of (the Irish having a custome to cut of the heads of all those they have killed), nor a game at Irish wun till the last man bee borne."[54] That is, in the game of Irish, as in backgammon, a player who seems defeated may revive his chances as long as his opponent still has men that need to be borne off the table. When Arden is captured, he, like a blot, is removed from the boards: his body is dragged offstage to an imagined field behind an abbey. But like a captured blot in a game of Irish or backgammon, Arden returns to the boards by stroke of fortune: snowfall captures the imprints of his murderers' feet so that the movement of Arden's body can be tracked by those who wish to solve the murder case. The "plot of ground" (Epilogue, l. 10) where Arden's body is found is by no means a final resting place for a character who resists placement.[55] Arden's game is not done. Not only is "his body's print" (Epilogue, l. 12) reported to have remained for years on the abbey grasses, but his body itself—or, rather, that of the actor playing him—takes up a position on the boards again, literally placed back on the stage so that Alice, confronted with it, can confess her crimes in response to Arden's telltale blood, which, "gushing forth, / Speaks as it falls" (16.5–6).

With Arden's eerie return to the boards to identify his murderers—an only slightly less spectacular move than in Holinshed, in which the murdered Arden, who has been moved to the countinghouse, suddenly gives "a great groan" and has to be murdered again[56]—*Arden* completes its dramatization of the social stakes of the parallel between gaming and theater. Like these playable media, masculinity turns out to be an aggressive contest where topping one's opponents does not guarantee lasting power over them: the competition goes on as long as the game does.[57] What is more, surveillance and emplacement of Arden undermine instead of facilitate the murderers' capacity to win this competitive game. It is through Mosby that the play best expresses this tragic paradox, linking it, significantly, to the bird's-eye view. Reveling in having "climbed the top bough of the tree / . . . to build my nest among the clouds" (8.15–16), Mosby both reflects on his successful social elevation and bemoans its impermanence. Even as he considers himself to have achieved social, spatial, and scopic dominance, he recognizes that he must now kill off his allies lest they try to supplant him and prompt his "downfall to the earth" (8.18). Rather than being emblematic of secure patriarchal masculinity, Mosby's bird's-eye view underscores the instability of place—in both social and geographic terms—and the impossibility of achieving scopic dominance. His decision to use a backgammon game with Arden as the setting for murder is the perfect culmination of his character's tragic perspective on spatial management and patriarchal

masculinity. The match Mosby plays against Arden dramatizes how those who pursue patriarchal masculinity, like inhabitants of the two-penny galleries, cannot play the game successfully if they don't take the risks.

THE TWO ANGRY WOMEN OF ABINGTON AND BLIND PLAY

Whereas *Arden* dramatizes the tragic consequences of investing in scopic dominance, Henry Porter's *The Two Angry Women of Abington*, whose backgammon scene begins instead of ending the play, dramatizes a comic alternative. It has been noted that Porter's play resembles and may even burlesque a number of Elizabethan plays, but its relation to *Arden* has yet to be recognized.[58] The affinities of *Two Angry Women* and *Arden of Faversham* go well beyond the similarities of their titles, specifying key characters and the English town from which they hail. Like *Arden*, *Two Angry Women* begins with suspicions of adultery. Mistress Barnes believes (in this play wrongly) that her husband is having an affair with Mistress Goursey, the wife of his close friend and neighbor. As in *Arden*, the suspected cuckold's failure to deal effectively with the problems of his household—in this case, his failure to intervene on his wife's behalf—leads to a breakdown of social, familial, and communal bonds, and finally to aggressive action and the threat of mortal violence. The primary site of that violence is, as in *Arden*, the English countryside, where the characters range for about a third of this play. When Mistress Goursey and Mistress Barnes learn that their husbands plan to patch up the women's quarrel by marrying their offspring—Francis and Mall, respectively—to each other, the women are irate. Mistress Goursey convinces her servant, Dick Coomes, to kill Mistress Barnes, and both women pursue the young lovers through the countryside in order to prevent their elopement. What follows is a game of elaborate chase, with characters attempting to find and confront each other but failing to do so because of bad fortune—a combination of comedic timing and various cases of mistaken identity.

Most notably for my purposes, characters' aggressions in *Two Angry Women* are initially acted out through a game of backgammon, played by the wives with their husbands and the theater audience as spectators. As in *Arden* the backgammon game produces and encourages, instead of containing or channeling, participants' physical aggression toward each other. But whereas the backgammon game in *Arden* is the climax of that play, in *Two Angry Women* it is the event that sets the plot into motion. The temporal placement of the game is a function of differences in genre. As a tragedy

Arden moves toward increased aggression and finally the death of the protagonist(s), whereas *Two Angry Women*, a comedy, moves from aggression and violence toward reconciliation. As a consequence, although both plays use backgammon as an efficient topos through which to query the relationships among spectatorship, playgoing, and patriarchal masculinity, their genres drive them toward different treatment of these issues. *Two Angry Women* uses its genre of comedy to imagine a less tragic conception of spatial practice along with a more multifaceted critique of the relation between scopic dominance and patriarchal masculinity.

The backgammon game that opens the play efficiently sets up this critique, though to follow its implications for theater as playable media, we must (as in our earlier analysis in *Arden*) read references to backgammon as clues about an actual game in play, not simply a set of convenient and witty literary metaphors. The game scene immediately draws attention to what is at stake in the spatial positioning of backgammon's players and game spectators. Masters Goursey and Barnes, initially planning to play a match themselves, decide instead to become spectators to their wives' game: "Our wives shall try the quarrel 'twixt us two / And we'll look on" (1.81–83). The husbands go on to present their spectatorship as a mode of control, using vision metaphors to describe their command over their wives and the game as a whole. For the husbands, spectatorship means scopic dominance. When Mistress Barnes quips that she is certain Mistress Goursey will "play me false" (1.85), or cheat—at the game and, by inference, through adultery—Master Goursey assures her, "I'll see she shall not" (1.86). Mistress Barnes immediately challenges Master Goursey's link between seeing and social control: "Nay, sir, she will be sure you shall not see. / You of all men shall not mark her hand, / She hath such close conveyance in her play" (1.87-89). But Master Goursey restates his confidence in scopic dominance and a visual basis for his patriarchal authority, "Is she so cunning grown? Come, come let's see" (1.90).

As the husbands assume something like a bird's-eye view of the game board, their perspective echoes that of patrons in the two-penny galleries, and arguably the play critiques the latter through its mockery of the former. The husbands' viewing position turns out to have detrimental consequences, for as they become increasingly abstracted from the backgammon game their wives play, they fail to track, and thus moderate, the women's mounting aggression. Although they believe their bird's-eye view gives them scopic dominance, in fact, this viewing perspective takes them out of the drama of the game the wives play. After the women have agreed on the stakes for which they will play—which at "a pound a game" are, the hus-

bands admit, "too much" (1.96; 98)—Masters Barnes and Goursey comment in abstract terms on the match, all the while missing its key ludic action because they don't play vicariously.[59]

MASTER BARNES: Master Goursey, who says that gaming's bad
When such good angels walk 'twixt every cast?
MASTER GOURSEY: This is not noble sport, but royal play.
MASTER BARNES: It must be so, where royals walk so fast.
MISTRESS BARNES: Play right, I pray.
MISTRESS GOURSEY: Why so I do.
MISTRESS BARNES: Where stands your man?
MISTRESS GOURSEY: In his right place.
MISTRESS BARNES: Good faith, I think ye play me foul an ace.
MASTER BARNES: No, wife, she plays ye true.
MISTRESS BARNES: Peace, husband, peace. I'll not be judged by you.
MISTRESS GOURSEY: Husband, Master Barnes, pray both go walk.
We cannot play if standers-by do talk.
MASTER GOURSEY: Well, to your game. We will not trouble ye.

[Master Barnes and Master Goursey] goes from them. (109–22)

The husbands' opening banter turns on a set of puns on the money wagered in the game and the women who wager it, "angels" and "royals" being names of coins. The banter recalls a point of tension in early modern debates about the ethics of gaming, as discussed in Chapter 1, with more permissive moralists arguing that games like tables were acceptable provided they did not involve high stakes, as this one does.[60] The husbands defend their wives' gaming by suggesting through puns that the women's natural nobility and innocence—that they are "royals" and "angels"—rescues their activity from the impropriety that would ordinarily be associated with betting coins as valuable as royals and angels. From one perspective the husbands have already failed in their claims to scopic dominance, for they misjudge their wives, who prove far from angelic in this scene and in the rest of the play. Because they are so busy out-punning each other in their own metagame, the husbands miss the ludic action that prompts Mistress Barnes's accusation of foul play. Mistress Barnes accuses Mistress Goursey of misplacing one of her men on the board, essentially moving it one space or point, an "ace," off its proper position.

The husbands have no way of knowing whom to believe because they have not been monitoring the action of the game; and one could say the

same thing about any theatergoers who, like the husbands, buy into a logic of scopic dominance instead of playing vicariously. Mistress Barnes's rebuke of her husband, "I'll not be judged by you," can double as a rebuke to those theater spectators who have commandeered ostensibly superior viewing positions in the upper galleries; they, like the husbands, cannot really judge the situation effectively because, despite their "better" seats, they cannot decipher if Mistress Goursey has, in fact, cheated in the game, let alone in the marriage. The rebuke is in keeping with the dialogue that begins the play, where Masters Goursey and Barnes discourse on the pleasures of "neighbor amity" (1.5), friendship between neighbors. Their paeans to the geographical closeness of friends quickly becomes a meditation more broadly on the virtues of spatial proximity and the problems of viewing any scene from afar. That which cannot be seen well, because too far away, cannot be judged effectively. Goursey says:

> Kind sir, near-dwelling amity, indeed,
> Offers the heart's enquiry better view
> Than love that's seated in a farther soil,
> As prospectives, the nearer that they be,
> Yield better judgment to the judging eye:
> Things seen far off are lessened in the eye,
> When their true shape is seen, being hard by. (1.9–15)

From its first moments the play considers the problems of spectatorship for those "seated in a farther soil." The judgment of the latter can be compromised, the play suggests, by distance, whereas those who view the action more closely will see its "true shape."

The "judging eye[s]" of Masters Barnes and Goursey become all the more compromised when, as the stage direction above indicates, they move away from their wives' game, leaving the women to play while the men look on from an even greater distance. The husbands' choice to abstract themselves further from the game board—not only physically but also cognitively and emotionally—is emblematic of their failed patriarchal management of their households; for Mistress Barnes's contempt for Mistress Goursey has become all too evident, and leaving the women more or less alone is obviously risky. Potentially serious animosity is virtually guaranteed in this case because there is not only pride but significant money at stake in the game. Indeed, backgammon's inherently aggressive ludic action escalates tensions between the women. Mistress Barnes, perhaps by mistake or as part of a cheating strategy, leaves one of her counters,

or "men," ambiguously placed on the board (between two points instead of clearly on one), leading Mistress Goursey, who needs to know where the counter is located if she wishes to capture it, to inquire, "Where stands your man now?" The pun on standing man as erect penis becomes evident when Mistress Barnes queries back, "Doth he not stand right?" and Mistress Goursey responds, "It stands between the points" (1.124), with "points" referring both to the marked spaces on a backgammon board and to the laces that join a man's doublet to his hose.[61] Mistress Barnes then accuses Mistress Goursey of using loaded dice—"methinks the dice runs much uneven, / That I throw but deuce-ace and you eleven" (1.125–26)—which would enable Mistress Goursey to move her men more quickly toward home and thus toward a win. Mistress Goursey takes offence at Mistress Barnes's far from subtle insinuation that Mistress Goursey's "game" (1.32) is not confined to tables. "I have read Aesop's fables / And know your moral's meaning well enough" (1.134–35). By the time the husbands return, casually asking, "Now now, women, who hath won the game?" (1.137), the situation is beyond repair, and the play suggests the husbands are largely to blame because of their failure as patriarchs to monitor and thus intervene in the tensions that have been building. The husbands' failures of engagement have disastrous consequence that, we might argue, could have been avoided: had they played vicariously, like good gamers, Master Goursey could have come to his wife's defense, and Master Barnes could have disputed his wife's charges of infidelity.[62] Again, the play's representation of the husbands functions simultaneously as a subtle critique of two-penny gallery theatergoers who abstract themselves from the play's dramatic action. When the husbands move away from the game board, but not off the stage (they have no stage direction to exit), they become even more firmly aligned with playgoers in the upper galleries.

When the husbands do finally attempt to intervene, they simply resume their earlier positions of scopic management over the game and their wives, and thus their efforts fall short. The husbands seem oblivious to the tenor of Mistress Barnes's accusations of infidelity. They take at face value the women's debates about foul play, presuming these pertain to the game alone. But the husbands fail to realize that their wives' argument about the game has exceeded its ludic context. Or, to put this in anthropologist Gregory Bateson's terms, the husbands misread the "frame" of the game: they believe that "this is play," when, in fact, on many levels the game has ceased to be play, aggression no longer contained within the game's ludic border.[63] The puns on foul play as adultery reach a fevered pitch with Mistress Barnes's facetious comment that if the outcome of the game depends

on "the bearing"—once players get all their men home, they must cast the dice to "bear" their men from the board, the winner bearing all her men off first—then Mistress Goursey will be victorious. Punning on "bearing" as sexual performance, Mistress Barnes submits that Mistress Goursey is exceedingly skilled at bearing, even trying to "bear one man too many" (1.145), to which Mistress Goursey responds, "Better do so than bear not any" (1.146), a sly comment on Mistress Barnes's failure to retain the sexual interests of her husband. Tensions reach their zenith when Mistress Goursey, having already accused Mistress Barnes of cheating in the placement of her man, as discussed above, now mocks Mistress Barnes for her bad cheating strategy: it is because Mistress Barnes has not "kept your man in his right place" (1.159) that Mistress Goursey has been able to "hit" (1.151) or capture the man. By this point the fractures are beyond repair, and the husbands' suggestions that their wives "keep within the bounds of modesty" (1.171) only aggravate matters. As Mistress Barnes storms out, now furious with her husband for chiding her, the husbands bemoan having left their wives with any responsibility for maintaining the men's friendship: men's minds, "[h]aving the temper of true reason in them / Afford a better edge of argument / For the maintain of our familiar loves / Than the soft leaden wit of women can" (1.228–31). From the play's perspective, men who hold such points of view are doubly to blame if they have chosen not to monitor more carefully the high-stakes game of backgammon their wives play.

The backgammon game in *Two Angry Women* lasts only one scene, but the competencies of backgammon it encourages in its players and their spectators, onstage and off, remain important throughout the play. The conflicts of the backgammon board spill out into the social relationships of the players and their spectators. Ultimately all of the play's characters, even those not present at the original game, will take up the skills of backgammon: navigating space in the face of aggressive opponents and unpredictable chance. In effect, the entire play becomes a game of tables. The characters roam around the theater boards—fictionally turned into a countryside space—trying to capture others or avoid capture while the theater audience has the chance to play along, wondering, maybe even wagering, on which side will win.[64]

From the start *Two Angry Women* presents scopic dominance as an impossibility as well as a hindrance to vicarious play. When the wives try to halt their husbands' plans for Mall and Francis to marry, the latter, with the assistance of Mall's brother Phillip, escape in an attempt to elope. The wives pursue their children, and the husbands pursue their wives; even

the servants take part in the chase. All of these plans go awry, however, when night falls, throwing the characters into total darkness. Used in ways reminiscent of *Arden*'s fog scene, the darkness trope is extended here, continuing for about a third of the play.[65] As in *Arden*, in *Two Angry Women* the trope of invisibility—only a trope, since early modern amphitheaters had no other light source besides the sun—speaks to both theatrical and social concerns. Through the trope of invisibility, the play queries the visual logic of patriarchal masculinity: characters pursue scopic dominance in order to attain patriarchal power that is unavailable to them by virtue of their status—and in this play, also their gender and age. And as in *Arden*, that pursuit fails repeatedly. However, *Two Angry Women* is able to go further than *Arden* to imagine a compelling alternative to this inherently tragic narrative. Alongside its scopically fixated social climbers (the two angry women, Phillip, and the servant Coomes), *Two Angry Women* dramatizes de Certeau's surprisingly powerful blind walkers through the characters of Mall and Hodge, another servant of the Gourseys. These characters do not attempt scopic dominance, but instead throw themselves into their blindness, abandoning vision so that they can engage in the messy, risky, and interactive world of (the) play. To put this in de Certeau's terms: rather than pursue a scopic regime of *placement*, Mall and Hodge revel in the pleasures and surprising power of *spatial practice*. Whereas for others, darkness—and the condition of blindness that accompanies darkness—is an impediment, to Mall and Hodge the inability to see makes for a better game.

The claims of the two angry women and Coomes on patriarchal masculinity are arguably specious by virtue of their gender and status, respectively, and the play mocks their social climbing by using darkness to expose the foolishness of their desires for scopic dominance. The drama presents Mistresses Goursey and Barnes as overly emotional women who allow their "pot quarrel" (1.179) to get out of hand, thereby disturbing the beneficial alliance of their husbands and the stability of their community. Their dangerous desire for patriarchal authority is efficiently displayed through their characters' dramatic function: blocking the comic resolution of marital concord. The two angry women spend most of the play trying to stop what almost everyone else believes to be an ideal marriage between Mall and Francis. The Gourseys' servant, Coomes, too, is presented as an overreacher. He accepts his mistress's mission to murder Mrs. Barnes in exchange for promotion in the ranks of servitude, along with "[m]oney, apparel" plus "sword and bucklers" (6.208). Even before his promotion

Coomes aspires to the part of patriarch in the Goursey family, treating Francis, his mistress's grown-up son, as if he is a child over whom Coomes has command.[66]

Coomes expresses his social superiority in part through the language of scopic dominance. He justifies his right to lecture "my young master" (8.301) Francis by figuring himself as a man with visuospatial knowledge: "I must needs say ye are a young man, and for mine own part, I have seen the world and I know what belongs to causes, and the experience that I have I thank God I have travelled for it" (8.304–7). Coomes draws on a commonplace of cartographic discourse—links among vision, travel, and knowledge—claiming that because of his more advanced age, he has had time to see the world through travel and thus is more informed than Francis about how to handle conflict resolution, "what belongs to causes." Francis and the Boy, another servant of the Gourseys, proceed to mock Coomes for claiming patriarchal authority on these grounds, questioning whether his travels are significant enough to merit such knowledge. Francis asks, "Why, how far have ye travelled for it?" and the Boy jokingly responds as if on Coomes's behalf, "From my master's house to the ale-house" (8.308–9). Coomes cannot have attained much knowledge because, they suggest, his travels have been limited in terms of geography and social context, comprising only the dependent realm of the master's house and what I have argued elsewhere to be the antipatriarchal space of the alehouse.[67] Any lessons in conflict management learned in these locales cannot be applied to the situation at hand, which is presumably well beyond Coomes's purview as a servant.

Coomes finds his social pretensions confounded even further when darkness falls, revealing the absurdity of his logic of scopic dominance. In part because Coomes equates knowledge and power with having "seen the world," he is incapable of performing authority when denied vision, experiencing instead total spatial dislocation. He and Mistress Goursey scramble to find each other in the darkness.

> MISTRESS GOURSEY: Where art thou, Dick?
> COOMES: Where am I, quotha? Marry, I may be where anybody will say I am, either in France or at Rome, or at Jerusalem they may say I am, for I am not able to disprove them, because I cannot tell where I am.
> MISTRESS GOURSEY: O what a blindfold walk have we had, Dick (9.74–79)

Deprived of vision yet continuing to invest in a logic of scopic dominance, Coomes imagines himself at the mercy of those who ostensibly can see: his location can be dictated to him by "anyone" who can claim to know of it. Whereas earlier he boasted of his authority as a traveler, he now fails to decipher differences among cities as distinctive as France, Rome, and Jerusalem. Coomes is utterly paralyzed by the darkness, yet nevertheless remains wedded to a visual regime that, he foolishly continues to claim, secures his authority.

The same is true of the two angry women. When Mistress Barnes finds herself lost and alone, she uses her torch as a guide. Nervous about being found by thieves, she sets the torch on a hill and then lies down nearby so that she can "look who comes, and choose my company" (13.22). But no scopic dominance results, for her enemy Mistress Goursey find the torch and attempts to take it. Although the visual regime has not served either of these characters in their pursuits of patriarchal authority—the darkness has undermined their ability to locate Mall and Francis, and to convince the couple to forgo their marriage—the women nevertheless remain committed to a link between vision and power, a point dramatized with some literalism when they engage for more than a hundred lines in a vigorous and protracted tug of war over the torch. Light, and the visual regime it emblematizes and makes possible, becomes the ultimate point of contention, as if winning the torch will secure these characters' authority over each other and over their husbands and progeny.

The play's questioning of scopic dominance extends beyond the case of characters whose pursuit of patriarchal authority appears foolish, for even Phillip, the first-born of Mr. Barnes, finds his claims to patriarchal masculinity confounded by the darkness. On account of his status and gender, Phillip may be socially superior to Coomes and the "angry women," but he is still considered a youth by early modern standards, being neither husband nor father, and thus has no de facto access to patriarchal privilege. Nevertheless, he is initially quite successful in enacting patriarchal authority over his family and friends. Though he and Francis are the same age, Phillip acts as his friend's advisor, presuming more power over Francis than Francis's own father. It is Phillip who checks Francis's raging emotions and who brokers the match between him and Mall.[68] When Phillip hears his father's idea that Mall should marry Francis, he gives it his approval: "Then, father, he shall have her! He shall, I swear" (3.302). It is Phillip, not his father, who goes to the Goursey's house to present the case, doing so successfully despite Francis's resistance to marriage.[69] Philip succeeds where Francis's own father fails.[70] Phillip is certain he can direct

Francis and Mall even in the wooing process. Indeed, commenting on Mall's wit, which has prevented other suitors from winning her hand, Phillip plans to negotiate this wooing himself, "Well, I do doubt Francis hath so much spleen / They'll ne'er agree, but I will moderate" (5.40–41). When Mall banters on and on with Francis, Phillip intervenes several times, forcefully urging, and finally simply commanding, his sister to accept Francis.

Like Coomes and the angry women, when Phillip attempts to control the people around him, he exhibits the scopic drive that is a marker of patriarchal masculinity. Phillip repeatedly directs the placement and visibility of his peers as well as his social superiors. When Mistress Barnes comes upon the wooing scene, Phillip directs Mall and Francis to "Stand aside / And closely, too, lest that you be espied" (8.159–60). It is he who chooses the coney green as the place for the young lovers to meet, instructing Francis, "let not thy mother see thee. / At the back side there is a coney green; / Stay there for me, and Mall and I will come to thee" (8.350–52). He orchestrates even the spatial positioning of his father and Master Goursey: "Stand you two hearkening near the coney green, / But sure your light in you must not be seen" (8.458–59). Moreover, in insisting that the other characters forgo torches, Phillip consigns them to darkness while they fulfill his grand plan. Everyone, even the erstwhile patriarchs of the play, put their literal blind trust in Phillip: "Come then," says his own father, "let's do as Phillip hath advised" (8.468).

The precariousness of Philip's authority is quickly revealed, though, when, like the other characters, he is deprived of light and fails to navigate space effectively without it. When Phillip enters alone in scene 10, he initially continues to play the patriarch with scopic powers but quickly finds that position untenable. His description of the darkness is paradoxical: "How like a beauteous lady masked in black / Looks that same large circumference of heaven. / The sky that was so fair three hours ago / Is in three hours become an Ethiope, / And, being angry at her beauteous change, / She will not have one of those pearléd stars / To blab her sable metamorphesy" (10.1–7). On the one hand, Phillip represents the darkness as a visual phenomenon, something that can be seen when he "[l]ooks" at the sky. But the absurdity of the conceit—seeing depends on light, so how can one see darkness?—emerges in the next set of lines. Without stars to form an ornamental contrast, the blackness of the heavens cannot be apprehended visually: nothing is there to "blab" the transformation of "beauteous lady" to "Ethiope." Phillip then goes on to lament that his inability to see undermines his plan to arrange the marriage of Mall and Francis: "I did appoint my sister / To meet me at the coney berry [*sic*] below, / and Francis, too; but

neither can I see. / Belike my mother happened on that place / And frayed them from it, and they both are now / Wandering about these fields. How shall I find them? / It is so dark I scarce can see my hand" (10.8–14). Without vision, Phillip cannot oversee and bring to fruition his master plan.

To be sure, Phillip presents himself elsewhere as capable of functioning without vision. When the characters finally reconvene at the end of the play, Phillip taunts Francis for failing to hunt down his "coney": "Shall it be said thou missed so plain a way / Whenas so fair a wench did for thee stay? / . . . / 'Sounds, man, and if thou hadst been blind / The coney borough thou needst must find. / I tell thee, Francis, had it been my case, / And I had been a wooer in thy place, / I would have laid my head unto the ground / And scented out my wench's way like a hound" (11.347–54). The bravado rings hollow, however, given Phillip's failures throughout the play to engage his nonvisual senses effectively to find the others. Phillip never himself engages smell in the way he maintains Francis should have, and when he reluctantly employs other senses, they tend to fail him. For instance, at the end of his soliloquy, Phillip calls out, "So ho, so ho!" (10.21) in hopes of locating his friends. His calls are answered by someone he believes to be Francis but who is, in fact, Will, the servant of Sir Raphe Smith, who has been hunting. Phillip, so dependent on a visual realm, is ill-equipped to function on an aural level. And though he, unlike many of the other confused characters, eventually discovers his various mistakes in hearing, he does so too late and is, in the end, not much better off than they are. At one point Sir Raphe, mistaking Phillip for his servant, asks, "Art thou Will, my man?" (10.109), infuriating the proud Phillip who responds, "your man! / My back, sir, scorns to wear your livery" (10.111). Phillip realizes too late that his interlocutor is his social superior and feels shamed by his "rude anger" (10.118). As this example illustrates, the darkness troubles not simply spatial but social relations, leading to significant embarrassment for the characters most invested in scopic dominance of space and social climbing. Coomes suffers this embarrassment, too, when Hodge, pretending to be Mistress Goursey, tricks Coomes into thinking he is successfully seducing his employer. "Mistress Goursey" concedes that she would kiss her servant "if I thought nobody would see" (11.64–65), and the promise of a kiss enables Hodge to lead the excited Coomes around the stage and right into a pond.

Like *Arden*, *Two Angry Women* explores the risks for social climbers who in their pursuit of patriarchal masculinity invest in a logic of scopic dominance; but it also goes further than *Arden* to dramatize the benefits to those who criticize and find alternatives to these pursuits, using their full senses

to navigate the social games around them. Whereas the characters who aspire to patriarchal masculinity—Phillip, Coomes, and Mistresses Goursey and Barnes—stumble in the dark, Mall and Hodge, who do not directly challenge gender and status hierarchies, discover a certain freedom and pleasure in darkness. They feel their way through spaces they cannot see, engaging their other senses to compensate for lack of vision.

What accounts for this difference? The answer comes by way of a question raised by the Boy, who asks, "what difference is there between a blind man and he that cannot see?" (10.86–87). Blindness offers a useful theatrical trope through which this play, like Shakespeare's *King Lear*, reflects on the interdependent, yet at this historical moment, still distinct realms of space and place.[71] The Boy's question about the difference between a blind man and someone who cannot see highlights a tension in the play between characters paralyzed and those enabled by their lack of vision. In the case of a "blind man," "blind" is an adjective, qualifying identity; the blind man's visual impairment is permanent, and he does not presume he will be able see in the near future. Alternatively, for "he that cannot see," the absence of vision is a verb, not a qualifier of identity; this man experiences blindness only temporarily. Whereas the blind man, whose visual impairment is part of his identity, accepts his blindness as a state of being and thus finds other ways to perceive the world, "he that cannot see" approaches blindness as an obstacle, a negative—seeing is something he "cannot" now do. Consider Phillip's description of the darkness as a mask that could simply be lifted off to expose what he describes as the beautiful, lighter sky. Instead of being compelled to engage his other senses more acutely, Phillip bemoans his temporary state and become paralyzed, as he anxiously waits for it to change: "shall I stand gaping here all night till day" (10.20). Like Phillip, Coomes and most of the other characters of the play cannot see what they are accustomed to seeing. Yet rather than compensate with their other senses or cognitive capacities, Phillip and these others simply wander around in the dark calling, "So ho, so ho!" in hopes of being located by others.

By contrast, Mall and Hodge maneuver through the darkness like blind men, accepting their inability to see and, with less of the tragic horror of *Lear*'s blinded Gloucester, discovering the surprising pleasures and powers of being unlocatable figures who can perceive and navigate space through nonvisual means. Mall's relative comfort with movement in the dark might be read as a reaction to her having experienced a defeat earlier in the play when attempting to claim scopic dominance. When Francis, with Phillip, comes to woo her, Mall receives the suit from atop her balcony—the only character of the play to experience that presumably most privileged of per-

spectives, the bird's-eye view. The apparent superiority of her spatial position certainly coincides with social power at that particular moment; Francis and Phillip have to work hard to combat Mall's superior wit and convince her to agree to the marriage. But ultimately Mall agrees to accept Francis, signaling physically her drop in power when she agrees to descend from the balcony to the ground where the male characters stand. Phillip translates this physical and social descent into a sporting analogy: he says that his sister's maidenhead "must needs fall, /And, like a well-lured hawk, she knows her call" (8.141–42).

Perhaps it is because Mall has been the object of men's games and therein witnessed the false security of the bird's-eye view—which only turns her into a hawk that must obey her male trainer—that she looks for other ways to play. Indeed, Mall goes on to show how abandoning the fantasy of scopic dominance and instead becoming one of de Certeau's blind walkers offers unexpected forms of power. When, after being directed by Phillip to meet Francis in the coney green, she finds herself alone and submerged in darkness, she expresses affinity with the animals around her. She wonders why the rabbits "run more in the night than day," concluding that it is because the darkness helps to hide them from hunters who "many a hay [trap] do set / And laugh to see them tumble in the net" (9.11–15). This condemnation of men's hunting recurs in the play, with Raphe's lady similarly condemning the sport for its cruelty. Mall's condemnation is far more trenchant, though. When she describes hunting as structured by a patriarchal scopic regime, she not only bemoans her plight, but demonstrates a strategy for escaping it: those subjected to the dominating gaze of others may undermine their spectators by remaining in the dark.

To be sure, such darkness renders Mall and the coneys blind, but that blindness is less troubling to them than to those who wish to locate and place them. And Mall recognizes that it would be better to stay in the dark herself than be preyed upon by either the warrener who controls this space or even by a predatory Francis: "How if the warrener should spy me here? / He would take me for a coney, I dare swear. / But when that Francis comes, what will he say? / 'Look, boy, there lies a coney in my way'" (9.22–25). Indeed, Francis envisions his pursuit of Mall as a coney hunt. Later, as he and his boy vainly search for Mall, the boy declares, "I have not seen a coney since I came" (9.70), and Francis later complains, "I have run through the briers for a wench, / And yet I have her not" (10.52–53). Francis is not the only character hunting Mall. Mall is prey for her mother, too, who is just as invested in controlling Mall's sexuality as are Mall's father, brother, and Francis. "I have searched in many a bush," Mistress Barnes complains,

while her daughter Mall mocks, "Belike my mother took me for a thrush" (9.30–31). Unlike the characters so invested in scopic dominance and emplacement, Mall finds comfort and even pleasure in the dark. Like a coney, she seeks out a hiding place to "scape her [mother's] light" (9.43). Rather than being terrified by the darkness, Mall refigures the hunt as a children's game. As her mother tries desperately to find her, Mall begins to "play bopeep with her behind this tree" (9.28), then switching from peekaboo to a game of chase. Mistress Barnes tells Mall to stand still, but Mall replies, "No, you would catch me, mother" (9.52) and so "I'll try how you can run" (9.56). Unconcerned that she has become the game to be hunted, Mall imagines herself as taking part in a hunting game where darkness is the prey's best defense.

Like Mall, Hodge conceives of the darkness as a space of risky and pleasurable play. Whereas Phillip complains that the ordinarily serious game of wooing has been turned into this game of blindman's bluff—"Call ye this wooing? No, 'tis Christmas sport / Of Hobman-blind. All blind, all seek to catch, / All miss" (11.323–5)—Hodge purposefully requests to play this very game, asking Master Goursey to "give me leave to play at blindman-buff with my mistress" (8.446) so that he may confound her pursuit of Francis. In the traditional game of blindman's bluff (or buff) or "Hobman-blind," usually played by children, one participant wears a hood over his or her face and is unable to see; the others scatter about, call out, and in some cases buffet the blinded player, who attempts to catch them. It is a version of this game that Hodge reenacts when he discovers Mistress Barnes. Pretending to be Coomes, he "led [Mistress Barnes] such a dance in the dark as it passes. 'Here she is,' quoth I. 'Where?' quoth she. 'Here,' quoth I" (11.24–25). Hodge is not in any way troubled by the darkness that is such a problem for the others, in part because he pursues the possibilities of play in every social interaction and is flexible about ludic rules and form: though he has planned to play blindman's bluff with Mistress Goursey, when he comes upon Mistress Barnes, he quickly recognizes how her blindness can be reframed as part of his game as well.

Like famous chess players and some videogamers who up the ante by playing blindfolded, Hodge doesn't rely on his eyes but uses all his senses and cognitive capabilities to play.[72] Indeed, he has uncanny aural and tactile perception, knowing through hearing just whose voice belongs to whom and using touch to navigate the dark with seeming ease. Unlike Coomes, who falls into a ditch because he cannot see, Hodge relishes his blind state and relies on touch to pursue Coomes so that he can "play the knave with him": "I will grope in the dark for him, or I'll poke with my staff

like a blind man, to prevent a ditch" (11.31–33). Hodge treats his environment less like an obstacle than an intimate partner in the game: "O, what a soft-natured thing the dirt is. How it would endure my hard treading and kiss my feet for acquaintance, and how courteous and mannerly were the clods, to make me stumble only of purpose to entreat me lie down and rest me" (11.26–30). Hodge further commissions the darkness for his pranks when he devises the "fine sport" of taking away the torches of Coomes and another servant, Nicholas, so as to "leave them to fight darkling" (11.196; 198). Like Puck's games in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hodge's tricks are on one level simply mischief, but they also work to undermine Coomes's hypermasculine posturing and its link to scopic dominance. Having boasted of the damage he will do to the Barnes's servant, Nicholas, Coomes declares, "thou are not so good a man as I" and challenges Nicholas, "I hope thou wilt say I am a man?" (11.223; 226). Yet when Hodge steals his torch, Coomes proves to be the most pathetic of cowards. He not only gives up the fight, but lies down on the ground for fear that "the rogue might hurt me; for I cannot see to save it, and I'll hold my peace, lest my voice should bring him where I am" (11.232–34). Coomes has all the more reason to worry since Nicholas, like Hodge, imagines himself as a blind man aligned with the darkness; in response to Coomes's bragging, Nicholas warns, "What, man, ne'er crow so fast, for a blind man may kill a hare" (11.169–70).

In keeping with its comedic form, *Two Angry Women* ultimately returns Hodge to his place in the social order. So it follows for Mall, who in the end is married off to Francis. Indeed, the play repeatedly represents wooing as a game that women ultimately must lose. Phillip uses gaming imagery to describe Mall's marriage as a fait accompli: "my sister's maidenhead / Stands like a game at tennis: if the ball / Hit into the hole or hazard, fare well all" (3.327–29).[73] Yet although Mall participates formally in the comedic closure of the play, she also surreptitiously disrupts it through ludic practice. After all the characters have sutured their broken social bonds and Phillip has bestowed upon the young couple the patriarch's wish that "the next thing now you do is for a son" (13.296), the highest-ranking patriarch onstage, Sir Raphe, invites the reconciled parties to his home for a great banquet. Just as Sir Raphe begins to unveil his generosity, Mall interrupts.

PHILLIP: I pray, Sir Raphe, what cheer shall we have?
SIR RAPHE: I'faith, country fare, mutton and veal,
Perchance a duck or goose.
MALL: O, I am sick!

ALL: How now, Mall, what's the matter?
MALL: Father and Mother, if you needs would know,
He named a goose, which is my stomach's foe. (13.319–21)

The dish of roasted goose quickly transforms in Mall's subsequent witty speech, the last of the play, into a metaphor for playgoers' displeasure, for the goose's characteristic hiss reminds Mall of the hiss playgoers give when critical of a theatrical production. Mall's speech functions like an epilogue. She directs her comments to theater spectators, particularly "gentlemen," asking for their applause instead of their criticism, which she equates to the aggressive hiss of the goose:

The *Rosa solis* [a liquor] yet that makes me live
Is favor that these gentlemen may give;
But if they be displeased, then pleased am I
To yield myself, a hissing death to die.
Yet I hope here's none consents to kill,
But kindly take the favor of good will. (13.348–53)

That Mall should speak the play's quasi-epilogue is a further indication of her agency in *Two Angry Women*, especially when we consider that Shakespeare's self-assured and cross-dressed heroine Rosalind from *As You Like It* is often believed to be the sole female character in early modern drama to be given this privileged theatrical role. Mall shares Rosalind's erotic expressiveness throughout the play, including in her quasi-epilogue, which is targeted to the gentlemen playgoers who here have the power to "kill" her with a hiss if she and her betrothed "should kiss" (13.337).

Given that there are plenty of animals known to produce a hiss, the association of critical theatergoers with the goose—an association that persists at least into the nineteenth century—is worth further thought.[74] What cultural and literary meaning did geese have in the early modern period? One of the earliest literary references to the goose appears in John Lydgate's "The Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep," where the three animals compete for superiority. The poem argues, as is conventional for this genre of poetry, that although the horse would seem to be obviously superior to the other more common, less noble creatures, all three have their places and unique attributes. None is innately better than the others—just different. The antihierarchical message of the poem is elaborated in the author's choric explication of the moral, that "No man shuld of hih nor lowe degre / For no perogatiff his neihbore despise."[75] The goose remains a symbol of

social equality in the early modern period as evinced by John Taylor's paean to the bird, *Taylor's Goose* (1621). Taylor repeats all of Lydgate's points of praise for the goose: its usefulness for food, medicine, bedding, war (arrows made with feathers), and writing (goose quills). And like Lydgate, Taylor cites the famous episode from Roman history where a goose saved Rome when its gaggle woke the soldiers in time to defend their city from a Gallic attack.[76] For early modern audiences, then, geese were surprising resources, underscoring the degree to which the common and unremarkable have their place in what both authors call a "profitable" society. Indeed, in Taylor's poem, the good fortune associated with geese allows for social and economic mobility. Taylor describes a town in Lincolnshire that is turned over entirely to the raising geese. "Dignity" in this town is correlated with a man's capacity to "encrease and multiply" his geese and as they "breed, / From Office unto office they [the men] proceed" from Tythingman to Headborough to Constable.[77]

The goose's association with social mobility and financial profit can perhaps best be appreciated by the bird's starring role in one of history's most popular board games, "The Royal Game of the Goose," first registered in England just a year before *Two Angry Women* was first performed and becoming so popular across Europe that the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has more than six hundred and fifty versions of the game.[78] The game's affinities with backgammon make it a particularly interesting place to end my reading of *Two Angry Women*. Like backgammon, Game of the Goose challenges players to move their men across space in the face of chance and aggressive opponents. The board almost always depicts a spiral with sixty-three marked spaces (Figure 19). After putting a monetary stake in the pot, players take turns casting the dice, moving their men the number of spaces cast and performing penalties (e.g., adding stakes; being sent back to an earlier space) or receiving rewards (e.g., winning stakes; advancing forward) indicated on the space on which they land. Similar to backgammon, if another player's man lands on one's spot, one has to remove one's man, placing it in this case in the space from whence one's opponent came. The goose represents prosperity in this game, for players who land on a spot marked with a goose are able to travel further on the board the number of spaces they came when they arrived there. Since the aim of the game is to get one's man to the final space called, as in backgammon, "home," the goose represents the advancement equally available to anyone who plays.

Game of the Goose is significant in gaming history because it appears to have inaugurated a tradition of themed board games, many of which invite

players to imagine movement on the board as analogous to movement through real-world places. Thus, the game was an important marker in the development of narrative in gaming, the most well-known of examples today being *Monopoly* but the culmination being videogames, where part of the pleasure of play, many would argue, comes from the players' engagement in a fictional world.[79] Initial versions of Game of the Goose conjure mundane narratives, inviting players to do things they would do in their own lives: go to the alehouse for a drink, travel across a bridge, visit a well. Later versions of the game dramatize more elaborate scenarios. *Filosofia cortesana de Alonso de Barros* (Italian, 1588) depicts a shipping scene, with sea monsters, fisherman, and boats in the central home space (Figure 20). Later in the seventeenth century, the connection between these sorts of themed board games and mapping becomes more explicit. In *Le Jeu des nations principales* (Paris, 1662), each of the spaces that form the spiral of the board is a chorographic account of a nation in one part of the world; the player is a traveler who casts the dice to move progressively from the Americas to Africa to Asia and finally to Europe, landing at last in, of course, France.[80] But Game of the Goose, like its avian namesake, ultimately levels sociogeographic distinctions. Although the board's grid imposes a geographical hierarchy, with the natives of the Americas inferior to the Europeans, and the English inferior to the French, gameplay would have undermined this sequence; for like the traditional Game of the Goose, movement was not guaranteed to be linear, thereby troubling in practice any sense of progress. Game of the Goose and its descendants thus underscore what I have argued to be the case in other board games such as backgammon: the rules and game board discipline space, but the practice of gameplay necessarily creates new spatial and even social relationships.

Regardless of whether playgoers would have heard resonances of Game of the Goose in Mall's epilogue, it is significant that a character who, like Hodge, has engaged in witty gameplay throughout the drama turns to an elaborate goose metaphor when she plays what becomes a final game with the audience. Like other epilogue speakers, Mall anticipates criticism of the play in order to combat it. More specifically, she underscores in order to redirect the audience's responses to the play: she grants the audience the surprising power associated with the goose while asking them to refrain from characteristic hissing, which she translates into a misuse of their theatrical power. Perhaps most notably for my purposes, Mall's association of the audience with the socially leveling figure of the goose underscores the play's larger critique of scopic dominance, extending that critique to the theater's socially and economically privileged male patrons, "these

gentlemen"—many of whom, as I have argued, were encouraged by the amphitheater architecture and pricing structure to choose viewing positions that announced their superiority.

Two Angry Women questions such assumptions, dramatizing the instability and lack of dependability of the visual regime, a problem for characters that rely on vision to shore up or pursue patriarchal masculinity. The drama also demonstrates the advantages to those like Mall and Hodge for whom blind navigations of space are a site of play, an exercise of "*Spielraum*" on de Certeau's checkerboard. Mall's epilogue extends these ideas to playgoers, offering "these gentlemen" especially a chance to reconsider the nature of their relationship to the stage and its actors. Will they engage all their sensory faculties and let themselves be lost in (the) play? Or will they retreat to their abstracted positions of supposed scopic dominance and simply hiss at what they don't like or understand? To do the latter, according to *Two Angry Women*, as well as *Arden*, renders audiences incapable of effectively playing the play.

THEATERGOERS ON THE BOARDS AND VICARIOUS PLAY

If, as I have suggested, the experience of gameplay is something like the experience of theatergoing, then what are the implications for our understanding of the relationship between playgoers and actors/action on the boards? To answer this question, it is useful to invoke the work of contemporary theorists and designers of games because some studies of interactivity in video gaming account for the multisensory and embodied aspects of gameplay. In theorizing the relationship between a gamer and the game being played, Alexander R. Galloway argues that games are not texts to be read but actions: "they exist when enacted" by players. The concept of interaction is, for Galloway, even insufficient for theorizing this relationship, for players do not simply bring an interpretation to a game; their engagement with the game brings interpretations into being, and the game "restructures itself" in response to the player's participation.[81] Digital artists and theorists Simon Penny and Diana Gromala emphasize the central role of the player's body in the enactment of a game. Penny writes, "the persuasiveness of interactivity is not in the images per se, but in the fact that bodily behavior is intertwined with the formation of representations."[82] And Gromala treats gameplay as an experience of "sensory immersion."[83] Colin Milburn has gone on to demonstrate the ways that players not only

produce the game but are produced by it, their physical bodies and real worlds transformed by the virtual worlds in which they play.[84]

These ideas lead directly to an understanding of theater as playable media, though game and theater scholars have not considered theater to be so aligned with games. In fact, many game scholars and designers maintain that embodied interaction is precisely what *distinguishes* videogames from theatrical plays, particularly the plays performed in premodern theaters.[85] A key reason they discount theater is because their conception of it has been shaped by the seminal work of Brenda Laurel, who uses Aristotle's *Poetics* to support her contention that in theater, as in human–computer interfaces, a barrier exists between player and game. Subsequent game scholars and designers have been right to question Laurel, but in discounting theater as a model for the more interactive form of gameplay they describe, these theorists throw out the baby with the bathwater. Laurel's conception of the game–theater link is limited only by her presumption that theater is always illusionist. She writes, "the magic is created by both people and machines, but who, what, and where they are *do not matter* to the audience. . . . [W]hen a play is 'working,' audience members are simply not aware of the technical aspects at all." What is true for theatergoers is true for computer users, she maintains. If either group is brought into the action of the game/play, there can be only chaos.[86]

However, the kind of embodied interactivity many videogame theorists attempt to define is very much part of live theatrical performance, even the theater of Shakespeare and contemporaneous dramatists. To recognize theater as playable media, we need to extend our definition of embodiment and of embodied interactivity. Research in cognitive science suggests such an expansive definition, and some have begun to examine the significance of that research for theater spectatorship.[87] Literary scholar Bruce R. Smith contends that staged physical aggression may be viscerally *felt* by playgoers because of a phenomenon that modern cognitive scientists call "proprioceptive drift"—a phenomenon, I would add, that has been vital to the development of videogame peripherals. In laboratory experiments subjects invited to identify with a projection of their bodies could feel sensations in their own bodies when their virtual selves were stimulated. While the dominance of vision is primarily responsible for cuing this phenomenon, these experiments demonstrate the ways vision and touch are deeply integrated. Well before modern science claimed to have proven the existence and means for this sensory integration, early modern writers described it in their concept of the "common sense," a synesthetic merging of multiple

senses.[88] Because of the ways early moderns thought about the senses, their theater was especially well positioned to show how playgoers' bodies could participate vicariously in the action on the "boards." Hundreds of years before videogames appeared, theater demonstrated that vision works in partnership with the other senses during the act playgoing, which, I have suggested, is an act of play.

I have shown in this chapter that one of the ways the theater subordinates vision to a partnership instead of a dominating role in playgoers' experience is by denying it, not just to characters, but to playgoers, who are thereby encouraged to engage their "common sense," much as they would in gameplay. Staged backgammon scenes are useful sites for investigating this dynamic, because, unlike dark scenes that call upon the audience to *imagine* their blindness, staged backgammon scenes make it possible for interested playgoers to undergo something that resembles proprioceptive drift. To experience viscerally the dramatic tension of a staged game, playgoers must, like spectators of an actual game of backgammon, project themselves onto the bodies and minds of the game's players, imagining and reenacting cognitively what it is like to navigate space in the face of aggressive opponents and unpredictable chance. Vision cues that projection but does not work alone, for playing backgammon—in actuality or vicariously—involves many other senses: e.g., listening to table talk, touching or imagining the texture of the board's men and the dice. The backgammon scenes in *Arden* and *Two Angry Women* underscore the significance of these other senses by denying playgoers—as well as onstage spectators like Black Will and Masters Goursey and Barnes—visual access to the game board.

What was at stake in this denial for playgoers who had chosen and paid significantly more for seats with a bird's-eye view of the stage? If the design of amphitheaters enabled patrons in the upper galleries to avoid the spatial frustrations of interactive theatergoing (the smells, sounds, and touch of groundlings, for instance), they did so at an aesthetic cost, for spectators who chose the two-penny galleries in order to abstract themselves from the ludic action below were, in effect, prioritizing their desire for scopic dominance over the opportunity to play along. *Arden* and *Two Angry Women*, through their narratives and particularly through their staging of gameplay, question that choice, as they celebrate the disorienting experience of becoming lost in and part of (the) play.

But might this message about the pleasures of playing the play have fallen on deaf ears or, as it were, blind eyes? Some may argue that those who chose to sit in the galleries didn't need to derive pleasure from the play since they came to the theater to partake in other delights, like ogling

other playgoers. The two-penny galleries were far better spots for this pastime. However, if the history of professional theater is any indication, patrons of means ultimately became convinced of flaws in the economic logic of the two-penny galleries. When the Blackfriars theater and other indoor venues began to be used for professional plays in the early seventeenth century, they abandoned the amphitheater's valuation of space. Seats with the bird's-eye view came to be used for the lowest-paying patrons; the most expensive seats were those closest to the stage. Indeed, the priciest placement for spectators was in the boxes that flanked or (more likely) were behind the stage[89] and on stools located on the stage itself.

Theater historians generally assume that men—and, apparently, it was only men, not women—who chose to sit right on the boards had little interest in the play, sacrificing good viewing positions in order to become spectacles themselves.[90] But if, as I've suggested, there is a certain pleasure and even power in de Certeau's "free play (*Spielraum*)" on the board, in becoming lost in a landscape, jostling sometimes blindly and aggressively with others as one navigates space, then patrons sitting on stools and in boxes had unparalleled opportunities to play the play. Becoming almost indistinguishable from actors, spectators could feel like part of (the) play, able, almost like board gamers, to manipulate the men on the board and influence the play's rules and form.

One story of theatergoer interaction in the indoor theaters helps illustrate the benefits and the risks of allowing spectators to inhabit the boards in this way. Records from a legal case describe an altercation on the Blackfriars theater stage between two patrons, Captain Essex, who was seated in a box behind the stage, and a nobleman, Lord Thurles, who had taken a seat on the stage itself:

> This Captaine attending and accompanying my Lady of Essex in a boxe in the playhouse at the blackfryers, the said lord [Thurles] coming upon the stage, stood before them and hindred their sight. Captain Essex told his lordship they had payd for their places as well as hee, and therefore intreated him not to deprive them of the benefitt of it. Whereupon the lord [Thurles] stood up yet higher and hindred more their sight. Then Capt. Essex with his hand putt him [Thurles] a little by. The lord [Thurles] then drewe his sword and ran full butt at him [Essex], though hee missed him.[91]

The story interests me for several reasons. One, it dramatizes spatial mastery as a competency of both theatergoing and patriarchal masculinity; like

Arden and *Two Angry Women*, the story uses the problematic of vision (in this case blocked sightlines) to render in material terms the scopic drive that de Certeau describes in his work on space and social relations. Lord Thurles was a newcomer to London, eager to establish his superiority to other men.[92] Like the social climbers in *Arden* and *Two Angry Women,* he does so by attempting to dominate the space around him, which we may notice not simply because of his choice to sit on the stage with the other upstarts but also because of his choice to stand up. Perhaps Thurles stood because there were no more stools available and he was waiting for one to be free.[93] Perhaps he intentionally tried to block the view of the patrons behind him, thereby asserting his social parity with or superiority to them. Equally possible, however, is that Thurles stood to get a better view of what was happening onstage. After all, seated on a stool, a playgoer would be positioned at or below the level of the actors on the stage, and his view could easily have been blocked by them or by stage furniture.

This leads to a second interesting aspect of this story: it demonstrates the degree to which onstage seating, despite its higher price tag, did not ensure patrons a better view of the action on the boards; Thurles might have had to *stand* to see better. Field of vision would have been slightly improved for those seated in boxes behind the stage, for these would have supplied a small degree of elevation. But these sightlines were easily blocked as well. Thomas Goffe in *The Careless Shepherdess* (c. 1618–29) describes a country gentleman following a courtier and a gallant whom he expects will ultimately move to a box to hide from creditors, even if this mars their view of the stage action:

> I'le follow them, though't be into a Box.
> Though they did sit thus open on the Stage
> To shew their Cloak and Sute, yet I did think
> At last they would take sanctuary 'mongst
> The Ladies, lest some Creditor should spy them.
> 'Tis better looking o're a Ladies head
> Or through a Lettice-window, then a grate.[94]

The boxes are described here as less preferable than sitting on the stage in part because one has to look "o're [over] a Ladies head," a viewing position that bears comparison with looking through a prison grate. As Captain Essex discovered, too, if just one stool patron stood up, the view of those in the boxes could be significantly hindered. Even seats close to the stage could not guarantee an unobstructed view and full visual access to the

stage. Narrowly interpreted, de Certeau's conceptualization of the scopic drive of viewers atop a tall city building seems to have little in common with the unobstructed view sought here, but I am suggesting that Captain Essex and other playgoers' desires to see all stem from a similar fantasy that it is possible to dominate a space—and the people and things in it—by having unhindered visual access to that space. Like *Arden*'s murderers, Captain Essex learned the hard way that such fantasies are impossible to maintain. Instead of fighting for visual access, the captain, like Arden's murderers, might have been better served by trying, like de Certeau's urban walkers, to "see" with his feet.

Indeed, contrary to Captain Essex's implied presumption that his seats were worth the higher cost because they offered a better view, I would suggest that part of the value of seats on or almost on the stage was that they offered patrons a chance to "see" more with their feet than their eyes. From a position close to the stage action, playgoers could feel, and perhaps even be, part of the action on the "boards." Whereas the amphitheater's two-penny galleries made it possible for more economically privileged playgoers to avoid the aggression and chance that marked the navigation of space in the theater, seats on the stage or in the boxes at Blackfriars put playgoers more directly and intimately in contact with each other and with the stage action. The indoor theaters invited patrons to descend from their positions of abstract safety in the two-penny galleries and to take up more precarious spaces on or almost on the boards. To be sure, patrons on stools or in boxes were still consumers of the play; decorum and convention moderated the extent to which they interacted with the actors and objects on the stage. That said, their positions close to the ludic action could make them feel even more like players, with all the physical risks associated with that level of interaction.

To what extent and in what ways might these playgoers have been able to shape the action on the boards they came to occupy? This would have depended in part on how actors and other theatergoers responded to onstage patrons. In the case of the altercation between Lord Thurles and Captain Essex, there is no reason to assume that the actors onstage stopped the play. Captain Essex reportedly had time to lodge a series of complaints and even to "with his hand putt [Thurles] a little by" before swords started to fly, suggesting that the play continued unabated for at least part of the time the men were verbally and physically interacting. Perhaps other theatergoers even believed the incident to be part of the play, an alternative plotline in which actors pretended to be playgoers.

This incident also demonstrates that turning spectators into players was

risky business. It was one thing to invite spectators to play along from a distance, but when paying audiences could directly participate in the action on the boards, they could hamper the success of the production. As remains true today, direct participation can work in community-based theater, where audiences and actors share the same goals and know each other; but in commercial theater, where actors essentially work for spectators, the arrangement causes all sorts of problems. Francis Beaumont's play *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, performed by a company of child actors in the Blackfriars theater c. 1607, hilariously dramatizes these problems. As the Prologue begins the play, he is interrupted by two spectators (played by actors), a grocer and his wife, who complain that the comedy the company plans to stage isn't to their liking. Repeatedly reminding the actors that the paying customer is always right, they not only demand a different play but insist that their apprentice be given the main role in it. After apologizing profusely to the other spectators, the actors comply, and the new play, with the grocer's apprentice in the starring role, gets performed, alternating scenes with the originally planned comedy. The company is shown as complying partly out of fear of the grocer, who threatens repeatedly to beat the young actors, and partly because the actors discover how lucrative the arrangement can be. The grocer offers to pay for the changes he makes to the production, and the theater company milks the situation as thoroughly as they can, extracting more and more money from the pretend spectator as the play goes on. The resulting play is a fascinating theatrical and dramatic experiment, but utter chaos. What *Knight of the Burning Pestle* shows is that when paying audience members are allowed onto the stage to become players, they may put their own needs and interests ahead of the production. They create a play that pleases them. And even if their pleasure can be monetized to the benefit of the company, the resulting play may not please other consumers who have different needs and interests. Indeed, as much as scholars love *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the play is rarely taught and has not been performed much since the early seventeenth century, when it is reported to have been a flop.

Knight of the Burning Pestle mocks the grocer and his wife for being unable to play vicariously and for insisting on the sort of direct participation that was impractical in a commercial context. The drama underscores the important difference between spectators *feeling* like players and actually becoming them. It also suggests that the new spatial arrangement of the indoor theaters failed to fix the problems with spectatorship that the amphitheaters faced. Bringing audience members closer and even onto the stage involved them more deeply in the production, allowing them to feel

like players, but the risks were not necessarily worth the benefits. Rather than allowing theatergoers to play directly, the commercial theater needed to teach them how to play vicariously, how to appreciate the boards as a game board that others manipulated, while audiences played along from a distance. It is not surprising that later commercial theaters shortened the stage's apron and set the ludic action behind a proscenium arch, ultimately banishing spectators from the stage and reasserting the lines between audience and actor. By the time this happens, though, audiences, I'd argue, are ready for it, having learned how to *feel* like players without actually becoming them. The first amphitheaters were a working experiment in how to commercialize theater as playable media, and the dramas performed in these theaters reflected elegantly on the results.