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Bayer, Mark. Theatre, Community, and Civic Engagement in Jacobean London

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Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Bayer, Mark.

Theatre, Community, and Civic Engagement in Jacobean London.

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011. Pp. xii, 258. ISBN 978-1-60938-039-7 (paperback) \$39.95.

Mark Bayer's new book, *Theatre, Community and Civic Engagement in Jacobean London*, is a significant contribution to current re-examination of long-established narratives of theatre history that have focused on Shakespeare and plays performed by his company at the Globe and Blackfriars theatres. Admittedly, some recent publications have directed our interest to individual acting companies other than the Chamberlain's/King's Men, but extensive attention has not been paid to early theatres away from Bankside and north of the City walls. An essential aspect of Bayer's case study of two Middlesex theatres—the Fortune and the Red Bull—is his use of the theoretical concept of “social capital” which he uses to construct a sociology of these theatres from below in the context of their local communities.

Bayer's approach is a fruitful and persuasive one. Central to his thesis is the argument that Londoners in the period circulated very locally, their personal concerns met by their parish, their trade guild, their inn or tavern, and their neighbourhood theatre. William Turner's 1612 jingle suggests that individual theatres may have catered to particular local tastes:

The players of the Bank side
The round Globe and the Swan
Will teach you idle tricks of love,
But the Bull will play the man. (68)

Before focusing his lens on the Red Bull and the Fortune, Bayer uses his opening chapters to explore the multiple communities of Elizabethan and Jacobean London, their overlapping networks, and the theatres that gradually became longer-term bases for individual companies with “specific identities

and strong reciprocal bonds with their audiences” (25). The following chapters then zoom in on his two chosen theatres—their audiences, some of the lesser-known plays that indicate their engagement with local residents’ issues, and their contribution to neighbourhood well-being such as donations for poor relief and highway maintenance.

Bayer has read widely and well in period print sources as well as recent interdisciplinary scholarship (as his useful bibliography attests). Less apparent is a nuanced understanding of documentary evidence. In his effort to argue for the passionate engagement of the local community with their neighbourhood theatre, the Red Bull, and its rambunctious heroic spectacles, he over-emphasizes and consequently misrepresents the infamous 1617 Clerkenwell riot and its aftermath, a topic covered in Chapter 5. A closer look at the documentary evidence for the riot would reveal that the cause cannot be attributed simply to the anger of local apprentices directed towards Christopher Beeston after he relocated the company of Queen Anne’s Men from their favoured public theatre at the Red Bull to the upmarket Cockpit at some distance in Drury Lane. If the Cockpit and its contents were trashed during the Shrovetide riot of 1617, the theatre was not the only target. Correspondents like John Chamberlain and Edward Sherburne reported more widespread destruction by diverse crowds as far east as Wapping and to the south in Lincoln’s Inn Fields on that traditional day of high-spirited public disturbances. Not only the new Cockpit theatre, but also many houses were damaged across the city and prisoners released at Finsbury prison by apprentices with more (or maybe less) on their minds than favourite performances becoming less accessible. Eleanor Collins’s recent article on “Repertory and Riot” (*Early Theatre* 13.2 [2010], 132–49) provides a more comprehensive analysis of the riot and problems of interpretation shared by previous theatre historians as well as Bayer.

I will only briefly note a few more imprecisions in detail that may alert the reader to the limited reliability of Bayer’s analysis of Southwark and its Bankside theatres. He elides, for example, Henslowe’s Diary evidence that Lord Strange’s Men, not Admiral’s, established residence at the Rose as early as 1592 with a repertory that some would argue has a definable character (25, 82–84). The lord mayor did not have effective jurisdiction over the Liberty of the Clink where the Rose and Globe were located or the Manor of Paris Garden where the Swan stood, unlike the rest of the Borough of Southwark (61–62), hence the Privy Council’s orders of control directed to the Surrey JPs during times

of plague and social unrest. The statement that the brothels of Southwark were “owned” by a former lord mayor in the fourteenth century and under government regulation until 1506 (32) seems a casual distortion of a more complex situation (the prostitutes of Bankside were not called the “bishop of Winchester’s geese” for no reason).

Yet, despite some imprecision and flaws in interpretation, Bayer’s goal to redress the balance in perception of suburban theatres is welcome. Not only the stimulus for disorder and subversion as represented by E.K. Chambers, Stephen Mullaney and others—though sometimes they undoubtedly were—the early modern theatres of London also became important social institutions contributing to local economy, popular education, welfare, and community cohesion as well as entertainment in a period of religious turmoil, recurring plague, and dramatic population growth.

It is a compliment to Bayer’s work that the reader emerges with a clear sense that more work with a similar focus on social networks in a geographic context would be welcome for other early theatres in Middlesex and Southwark. His book is therefore the first, but not the last word on the theatres, communities, and civic engagement in early modern London and its suburbs.

SALLY-BETH MACLEAN, *Records of Early English Drama*

Bayle, Ariane.

Romans à l’encan. De l’art du boniment dans la littérature au XVI^e siècle.
Genève: Droz, 2009. 465 p. ISBN 978-2-600-01266-9 (relié) 149 \$

Ariane Bayle s’attache, dans une perspective comparatiste, à une réalité attachante du XVI^e siècle pour le lecteur moderne qui chérit Panurge — le rusé, « un homme qui se mesle de tout faire, un factotum, un homme qui a esté de tous mestiers » pour reprendre la définition du dictionnaire de Robert Estienne (1549). Il s’agit de l’art du boniment, l’art de la « charlatterie », si l’on voulait donner un synonyme du temps à ce terme anachronique de « boniment » qu’emploie la critique rabelaisienne moderne et que reprend, avec discernement toutefois, Ariane Bayle ; mais « boniment » a l’avantage de ne pas offrir qu’une connotation négative et de rendre compte, à côté de la tromperie, du plaisir de