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Low, Jennifer A. and Nova Myhill (eds.). Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558–1642

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bon correctif aux abstractions de la philosophie politique, et le temps long, qui prend en considération la période de la Renaissance, une bonne manière de comprendre la modernité.

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Low, Jennifer A. and Nova Myhill (eds.).
Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558–1642.
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Pp. ix, 218. ISBN 978-0-230-11064-9 (hardcover) $85.

Low and Myhill's collection is eminently useful not just because it makes an important methodological contribution to early modern English theatre studies, but also because its organizational scheme makes a survey of scholarly opinion on its subject so easily accessible. Consequently, the book will be helpful to specialists in their teaching as well as in their research.

The volume's title, *Imagining the Audience*, names both the central methodological problem it addresses and the solution its editors and authors propose. Since there is so little surviving evidence of the interactions between audiences and performances in the early modern English theatre, scholars must work imaginatively with evidence of how the early modern theatre imagined audiences and audience members. This is a deft and satisfying move for two reasons. First, without ever shirking its responsibility to acknowledge external documentary evidence (which is amply provided in the volume), it releases theatre historians from some of the positivist anxiety that has plagued the field since the documentary turn championed by the Records of Early English Drama project: namely, the fear that in the absence of a demonstrably reliable and complete empirical record, we cannot say anything at all. Second, in relieving anxiety about the completeness of the historical record, it refocuses our attention on its meaning, which is, after all, why evidence matters in the first place. The reasons why interactions between early modern audiences and performances matter are multiple and varied, and Low and Myhill organize their collection to emphasize that complexity. After an introduction that frames their subject helpfully in the context of Keir Elam's theoretical work

on the agency of live audiences, the editors present pairs of essays examining topics related to that theme from different perspectives. Individual sections of the book are successful to greater and lesser degrees.

In the first pair of essays, Paul Menzer contributes a characteristically concrete and accessible account of the ways in which the systemic structures of the Elizabethan theatre industry reflect an attempt to control audience attendance patterns. Nova Myhill's somewhat less focused essay explores internal evidence from plays performed in private Caroline theatres; she demonstrates that playwrights intended to reflect rather than control audiences' various interpretive responses to performances. In the second pair of essays, Mark Bayer weaves internal and external evidence together in a convincing argument that Dekker's *Match Me in London* could be understood in two very different ways by the very different audiences at the Red Bull and Cockpit theatres. The symbiosis of audience and venue is further explored in Jennifer A. Low's analysis of the semiotics of stage space implied by the apparent need for three doors in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors.* Her discussion might have been more usefully contextualized by a comparison with other early modern, rather than ancient Roman, stage spaces, but it is insightful nonetheless. The third pair of essays focuses on embodied interactions between audiences and performers, beginning with Meg F. Pearson's demonstration (after a brief detour into spectatorship in visual art, which does not seem essential) of how early modern dramaturgy depended upon and harnessed the immediate responses of live audience members to generate meaning during performances. Marlowe's *Edward II* is her well-chosen example. Erika T. Lin's essay on embodied representation in *King John* is a rich and carefully-argued exploration of the ways in which the medium of the theatre conditions audience experience, both during performances of this play in particular, and as a means of articulating and reflecting upon early modern impressions of human experience in general.

Lin's essay is particularly important because of the depth of its engagement with the parameters of the theatre as an art form; David M. Bergeron's essay, the first of a strong pair that focuses on particular theatrical events, is similarly important for its sophisticated consideration of theatricality and performativity outside the theatre industry *per se.* Bergeron's discussion of Elizabeth I's 1559 royal entry pageant (recorded by Richard Mulcaster) offers a detailed analysis of the shifting roles of Elizabeth herself, the pageant's performers, and the citizens of London — as actors, collective audience, and

individual audience members — and the resulting "charismatic" impact of their shared experience. Emma K. Rhatigan explores the equally intricate and unstable roles of the participants in the 1594 Gray's Inn revels, and argues that the plot of *The Comedy of Errors*, which was performed on the evening in question, operated as a meta-theatrical expression of the flexible "social subjectivity" that ultimately defined the success of both the revellers and the characters in the play. Lin's, Bergeron's, and Rhatigan's essays alone provide enough complex and well-supported insight into early modern constructions of audience to fully justify the volume's methodology.

The collection concludes with a pair of essays connected by their commentaries on audience experiences of the endings of plays. James Wells argues that the notoriously problematic conclusion of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* is a representation of the universal experience of a theatre audience, which is always simultaneously conscious of both the fictional world represented on the stage and the fact that it is just an enacted fiction. The final essay by Jeremy Lopez, whose 2003 monograph *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern England* was an important precursor to this volume, contrasts Middleton's endings with Shakespeare's, but does so primarily as a means of exposing the role of the imagination in scholarly criticism. If there is one thing to be wished of this volume, it is that Lopez had taken on that subject more explicitly and extensively, since his observations imply but do not quite articulate a balancing critique of the goals and methodologies pursued throughout the volume.

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