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*Book Review*

Low, Jennifer A., and Nova Myhill, eds. *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558–1642*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 218 pp. $85.

Anyone seeking a tidy description for the subject of *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558–1642* might consider this: the *other* play in the theater. The most obvious drama proceeds up front, as the cast members interact with one another, but for editors Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill, the "play" in which the audience interacts with the drama is the thing: "The idea of what can be gained from studying theatrical audiences expands considerably when we recognize performance as a dialectical activity, acknowledging the role of the audience in all stages of the life of the drama . . ." (1). Low and Myhill argue that it is helpful to distinguish between "an audience" and "audiences," the former being the group that playwrights and their colleagues "might know and appeal to (and even create)," an idea associated in criticism with "the performative authority of the play"; and the latter being . . . well, basically the people who show up when a given curtain rises, an idea linked to "the interpretive authority of the playgoer" (2). The purpose of *Imagining the Audience,* say the editors, is to foster communication between the adherents of these two views (2). The collection consists of ten paired essays that examine the theater's ability to fashion and sway audiences; how a given performance space can alter a play; performer-audience relations; the interactions of actors, producers, and audiences in non-theater dramatic productions; and the development of mimetic effects as well as playwrights' intentions onstage.

Given Paul Menzer's engaging style, it is unsurprising that Myhill and Low opted to open the collection with his essay "Crowd Control." Yes, Menzer acknowledges, we probably would like to see a 1594 performance of *The Jew of Malta* by the Lord Admiral's Servants (with Edward Alleyn playing Barabas) . . . but the weather! "Marlowe, schmarlowe—have you *been* to London in January?" (19) Empty seating (i.e., financial failure) was all too common for an early modern theater, and Menzer argues that the industry worked to avoid this fate "through the spectacularization of space and the habituation of playgoing," changing "the

occasional crowd" into "an everyday audience" (21). Large groups of people can be worrisome things, but the dramatic action onstage works to pull all that potentially dangerous energy into a safe space; and the establishment of permanent venues with recognized forms of entertainment at identifiable times allowed the theatrical industry to make itself a habitual indulgence. In another essay that hinges in part on the question of remaining in the black, Mark Bayer's "The Curious Case of the Two Audiences" asks how—given stratification of taste—Thomas Dekker's *Match Me in London* could have been successful at a large public venue (the Red Bull) as well as a more hoity-toity private theater (the Cockpit). Bayer argues that what we see is a multifaceted play rather than an adaptable audience: the lower classes at the Red Bull focused on the drama's "expression of the grievances of tradesmen and apprentices" (64), and the elites at the Cockpit enjoyed its coded toying with law and politics (62–3).

Meanwhile, essays by David M. Bergeron and Emma K. Rhatigan abandon the stereotypical playgoers to investigate other kinds of spectators. Bergeron's "Charismatic Audience: A 1559 Pageant" studies the idea of charisma as an interactive quality (an individual and a group responding to one another) rather than one of "personal magnetism" by tracking Queen Elizabeth's pre-coronation pageant through London (137). During the entertainments and ceremonies offered up along the way, one can "posit a movement that flows from the dramatic representation itself to the queen, the honored guest, to her response, to the audience's response both to her and to her reaction, and back finally to the queen, who occasionally reacted to the audience's response" (140). The bond between the main figure "onstage" and her audience is one that dramatists such as Ben Jonson—whose play *Bartholomew Fair* opens with an attempted contract with spectators—might have envied (147). Rhatigan's "Audience, Actors, and 'Taking Part' in the Revels" deals with audience participation in a different venue: the Gray's Inn Christmas revels on Jan. 28, 1594, which temporarily descended into anarchy because the seating arrangements were overwhelmed by the number of revelers and outside guests. Rhatigan sees the evening's staging of *The Comedy of Errors*, with its "exploration of identity formation," as peculiarly appropriate to this event because it spotlights the question of how the different Gray's Inn audiences took part in the revels' events (152). In a sense, the evening's "cast" was fluid: "The very act of entering the Great Hall and acknowledging the [fictional] prince of Purpoole necessitated engaging with and taking part in the make-believe. . . . Indeed, the only way a member of the society could not take part in the events was not to enter the inn" (157). Further, *The Comedy of Errors*, with its mistaken-identity narrative about two sets of male twins, "privileges a particularly social subjectivity" (163) and mounts a "celebration of fraternity [that] would have been nowhere more appropriate than the Inns of Court" (164). (For those particularly interested in this Shakespeare play, Low's essay "Door Number Three" analyzes its use of space in comparison to that in Plautus's *The Menaechmi*.)

Other works examined in this volume include Jonson's *The Magnetic Lady* and *The Staple of News*, Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, Thomas Middleton's *Your Five Gallants*, Thomas

Goffe's *The Careless Shepherdess*, and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *King John*. *Imagining the Audience* offers some new thought on the performer-spectator relationship and raises the question of who's really "onstage" at a given moment.

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