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Roger D. Sell, Anthony W. Johnson, and Helen Wilcox (eds). *Community-Making in Early Stuart Theatres: Stage and Audience*. London: Routledge, 2017. Pp. xviii, 431. Hardback USD $149.95. ISBN: 9781409427018.

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Three decades ago, I doubt a collection like this would have been written. At that time, the scholarly consensus was that English theatres of the early modern period were inimical to community formation and the inculcation of the shared values necessary to sustain them. Steven Mullaney's *The Place of the Stage* (Chicago, 1988) is the most well-known, but hardly the only, work to argue that theatres, actors, audiences, plays, and even the neighbourhoods where playhouses were located were staunchly opposed to the norms that civic leaders were so eager to promote within London and its environs. In an effort to make the theatre subversive, this generation of scholars tended to denigrate the drama's important contributions to community formation in all its varied forms. This scholarship produced extraordinarily sensitive readings of early modern plays in their historical context and fruitfully alerted us to the drama's rich interactions with the political, religious, and social institutions from which it emerged; but it probably magnified the negative entailments of the theatre's interactions with its constituent communities.

More recent scholarship has begun to question this view, noting the important complementary relationships that developed between the theatres and the overlapping communities that surrounded them and allowed them to flourish. More recent studies stress how theatres could benefit local commerce and charitable endeavors, provide a convivial gathering place where current social and political issues could be sifted, help to define and articulate the shared values of its audiences, and generally enhance the cohesiveness of English (and particularly, London) communities.[1] *Community-Making in Early Stuart Theatres* contributes to this vein of scholarship in two ways. First, it offers a compendium of fascinating essays by leading theatre historians and literary critics who turn their attention in remarkably diverse ways to the issue of community. Second, it enlarges our understanding of what constitutes a community, and thus how the theatre could interact within them. A community need not be a physical location or a set of shared values, but might consist of networks between playwrights, government officials, audiences, schools, or churches, or even a linguistic web interlinking hundreds of plays.

This collection, therefore, casts its net broadly. The editors are interested in 'the relationship of early modern plays and performances to the multiple communities on which they have some kind of bearing' (1). They understand that community making is a complex subject, and it is clear that the contributors are not focused on a cohesive set of issues, but are instead often working with different definitions of this key term. Not surprisingly, these essays traverse a rich ensemble of the multiple interactions between the theatre and its various communities. The multiple interpretations of what might constitute a community are matched by the methodological diversity of its contributions — from mining the archives in village libraries to complex digital analyses.

The first half of the book examines various institutions in and around the theatres to show how they could assist community building among players, playwrights, and audiences. Richard Dutton, for instance, notes how the regime of censorship designed to prevent the performance of scurrilous plays, rather than constraining playwrights, actually enlisted the drama in a wide-scale project of community making. Because *all* plays were subject to licensing by the Master of the Revels, it was in the interest of all parties to ensure that this relationship remained more cooperative than confrontational. In a similar vein, Stephen Orgel and Andrew Gurr re-examine audiences and notice some important collaborations between theatrical companies and their constituent communities. To achieve success, dramatic troupes in essence recruited audiences, developing distinct repertories that appealed to different playgoers. Different audiences did not attend plays randomly, but frequented the playhouses that catered to their specific interests and tastes — a fact underscored by some spectacular onstage failures.

If the commercial playhouses helped to galvanize more parochial communities within London and its environs, court masques and plays staged in great houses throughout England were involved in the larger project of forming a nation state. Alison Findlay explores how this non-commercial drama circulated forms of cultural capital that helped elevate Britain on an international stage. Ros King explores another type of community theatre by focusing not on an abstract Stuart ideological agenda, but by focusing on how two plays, William Hawkins's *Apollo Shroving* and Middleton and Dekker's *Roaring Girl,* might have served to build community in much more local contexts — the first at a school performance in post-Reformation Hadleigh in Suffolk and the second at London's Fortune playhouse. Sometimes overlooked in plays of the period, David Lindley argues that the music that punctuates productions can build community in two ways, both among the characters within the play and among its audiences.

Two additional essays in this section consider collaboration among dramatists, but do so in markedly different ways. Suzanne Gossett moves beyond the many well-known cases where multiple dramatists co-authored a single play to examine the relations of 'professional friendship and assistance' between playwrights, ultimately suggesting that London's theatrical marketplace might not have been as competitive as modern scholarship often assumes (95). In the most speculative of this volume's contributions, Anupam Basu, Jonathan Hope, and Michael Witmore use digital visualization to map relational networks among playwrights and the companies they worked for. While the authors note that the conclusions they draw are highly tentative, their research highlights how 'big data' might eventually modify some of our longstanding assumptions about almost every aspect of early modern drama.

The remainder of the contributions — essays by Roger D. Sell, Ann Thompson and John O. Thompson, Tom Rutter, Richard Harp, Lucy Munro, Ramona Wray, Helen Wilcox, Andrew Hiscock, Martin Butler, Martin Wiggins, and Anthony W. Johnson — isolate individual plays and dramatists to assess their contributions to community making in its various forms. This section, in my opinion, is the most uneven, exposing the lack of cohesion inevitable when the various chapters deploy so many different understandings of community. Rutter, for instance, picks up on previous threads in this volume in his discussion of George Chapman's *All Fools* and the ways that this play might have been modified by different acting companies to please different audiences at vastly different venues — indoors by the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars, and outdoors by the Admiral's Men at the Rose and the Fortune. In so doing, he raises the issues of a whole genre of similar 'crossover plays' and how and why so many were successful indoors and outdoors during a period when audiences were becoming increasingly stratified. While most of the essays in this collection treat community in largely positive ways, Wilcox reminds us that the opposite is also true. In attending to performances of John Webster's *The White Devil* and *Duchess of Malfi* at Blackfriars and the Red Bull respectively, she shows how plays sometimes fail to communicate effectively with particular audiences or promote the kinds of affirmative communities that the theatre was capable of.

Finally, other essays in this section tend to stretch the limits of multiple definitions of community and community formation, running the risk of evacuating the utility from these valuable concepts. Sell treats the important topic of how certain plays threaded the needle between the multiple, and frequently opposed, political factions represented in the audience. He suggests that Philip Massinger and other Stuart dramatists practiced what John Keats would much later label

'negative capability', or the ability to harness an enormously potent representational capacity while suspending any particular intellectual or ideological commitment. One might wonder, however, if Keatsian negatively capable aesthetics is the best way to approach what is essentially a historical and economic question concerning playwrights' strategic business acumen in appealing to multiple constituencies simultaneously. And while Harp offers some compelling readings of Jonson's plays, I wonder if the collection of characters in a given play constitutes the kinds of meaningful community making that this volume envisions.

While its editors' claim — that 'no previous book has brought [questions of theatre and community] together for such comprehensive study as that on offer here' — is probably exaggerated (2), the essays in *Community-Making in the Stuart Theatres* offer an important addition to an ongoing reassessment of the theatre's place among the disparate communities in which it was immersed.

Notes

1 See, for instance, Nina Levine, *Practicing the City* (New York, 2016); Thomas Postlewait, 'Theatricality and Antitheatricality in Renaissance London', Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (eds), *Theatricality* (Cambridge, 2003), 90–126; Christopher Highley (ed.), 'Issues in Review: Theatre and Neighbourhood in Early Modern London', *Early Theatre* 19.2 (2016), 157–208, http://doi.org/10.12745/et.19.2.2858; Mark Bayer, *Theatre, Community, and Civic Engagement in Jacobean London* (Iowa City, 2011).