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Editorial

As the year 2020 draws to a close, many of us are pondering our own historical moment, which, among other things, has seen performance venues shuttered, arts professionals put out of work, and habitual audience members facing financial and personal hardship. More than one journalistic outlet has predicted that theatre might not survive this pandemic. If theatre as we know it is in peril, what might we learn by paying attention to early theatre?

The articles and notes in this issue, we believe, are a reminder of how the kinds of plays and performances on which *Early Theatre* focuses can still speak to anyone who longs to once again sit in a crowded theatre. Mark James Richard Scott writes about Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* not only as a play about whether an individual magician is damned but also as a collaboration between players and playgoers. Andrew Loeb argues that critics have too long overlooked the musical performances in Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* because we fail to understand how early modern audiences would experience music as connected to notions of social harmony. Richard Dutton discusses connections between John Marston and a number of other playwrights and preachers, links that make London seem a very small world. Similarly, the portrayal of Richard Brome that Bradley D. Ryner constructs from careful analysis of playhouse contracts suggests that the creation of plays relied upon assumptions about what a company and its playwrights owed one another (assumptions that could be grossly mistaken). Scandals and controversies — such as the 1626 attempt to close the Blackfriars described by Matteo Pangallo and the 1635 gossip about John Suckling's cowardice being associated with stage characters identified by James Doelman — reveal how regularly theatrical and social worlds intersected. All these articles and notes make explicit that theatre not only brings people together but also emerges out of complex dynamics within communities.

The Issues in Review section edited by Emily Mayne emphasizes this point by presenting a series of short essays that interrogate the kinds of archival evidence compiled by the *Records of Early English Drama (REED)* project to consider expansively the implications of what might be considered performance in the early modern period. As Mark Chambers ponders players, Matthew Woodcock considers perambulations, Clare Egan analyzes libels, and Mayne turns her attention

to a coronation procession, all of these scholars situate performance within communities. John McGavin's thoughtful afterword to this section reflects on how surviving records help us not only to see traces of performance but also to understand that there have always been complex interrelationships between those performing (even when those performers might not have thought of themselves as players) and those watching (even when those watchers might not have perceived themselves as an audience).

Because performances, and even the special types of performances we call plays, are so prominent among what we think of as the normal features of our social lives — so many of which have been obscured by the necessity of social distancing — it is no wonder that we feel a sense of deprivation. Yet theatre companies and audiences have in the past few months found new ways to create and receive performances by taking advantage of innovations, such as Zoom and video feeds, as well as strategies familiar to those interested in early theatre, such as outdoor playing spaces in courtyards and on wagons. News about vaccines is emerging as this issue is being readied for production, and a successful, widely distributed vaccine could allow for the revival of indoor, professional theatre. But theatre and performance of the sorts discussed in this journal have not disappeared; as long as communities exist, they both create and come to understand themselves through performance. We remain grateful for all of the scholars and practitioners, past and present, involved with early theatre (and especially *Early Theatre*) who have found ways to sustain our community.

The Editors