

failures, such as Mary Stuart's rule over Scotland in the mid-sixteenth century, used water festivals as 'an important vehicle for communicating royal power' (199). Evocations of the Thames in the masques of Ben Jonson and the poetry of John Taylor similarly emphasize the political entanglement of city and water. The collective argument of these very distinct case studies implies that Renaissance political power relied upon its imaginary conquest of watery space.

Readers seeking information about waterborne pageantry in any of these regions will find a wealth of information and rich occasions for further study here. For scholars less focused on precisely this area of study, however, the book's relatively thin structure and apparatus may prove frustrating. Shewring's introduction is helpful but very short at only seven pages; readers who want to use this material for, say, studies of early modern theatre, relations between East and West in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean, environmental history, or other literary or cultural matters will need to wade through the material with little guidance beyond the thorough index. Overall, this detailed collection will primarily serve scholars already invested in the scholarship surrounding Renaissance festivals, but its contents also hint at suggestive possibilities for connecting this work to broader scholarly conversations.

Susan Bennett and Mary Polito (eds). *Performing Environments: Site-Specificity in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp xii, 271.

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Performing Environments: Site-Specificity in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama is a richly diverse and innovative volume of essays that makes rewarding connections between theatre and site, memory and history, through chapters that are characterized by the wide-ranging and original methodologies employed by their authors. The volume is divided into four parts. The chapters of the first section, 'Building Frameworks', suggest that 'materiality and space — objects, rooms, buildings — provide defining

contexts for both the production of performance and their multi-perspectival reception across site' (6) while those in 'Travel and Topography' ask how 'does a performance confirm, adjust or challenge what one already knows about the place in which it literally and figuratively appears?' (7). Despite the somewhat arbitrary grouping of the chapters in the second half of the book there is a shared concern in the third and fourth sections with individual and collective spatial identities. 'Psychic Spaces' aims to 'provide different approaches to how performances instate taskscape' while 'Crossing Boundaries' is concerned with 'liminality, mobility, and the policing of borders [that] all contribute to conditions of place-based identity' (9).¹ The contributors to *Performing Environments* utilize a variety of critical approaches such as thing theory, archival research, spatial analysis, practice-based research, and cultural geography, as well as theories drawn from material culture, neuroscience, phenomenology, and embodiment. One of the great strengths of *Performing Environments* is its ability to distil such a broad range of approaches, a project that the editors' arrangement of the material is crucial in enabling.

There is also much to commend in the overall design of the book which brings together medieval and early modern scholarship and, in so doing, contests the unhelpful distinction often made between the theatrical cultures of the two periods. Susan Bennett and Mary Polito have chosen to assemble studies of performances from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries in order to focus on the 'when, where and what of early English drama' (2). Readers are encouraged to focus on place, rather than the play, and to think about performance itself as a form of space, rather than a set of texts, through understanding 'the importance of long-standing performance traditions as archaeological sites' (2). The volume is therefore not only a salutary challenge to the primacy of literary text over performance context in many critical accounts, but also stands as a useful corrective to the idea of spontaneous theatrical invention which often accompanies narratives of theatre history from the late sixteenth century onwards. Again, the thematic ordering of the material reinforces this sense of diachronicity. Its editors rightly acknowledge their debt in this mission to *REED*, Janette Dillon, Susan Bennett, and Julie Sanders (and we might add to this list David Bevington, Peter Happé, and Greg Walker), who have all in different ways called attention to the imperatives of local performance, cultural geography, theatre practices, and periodization when conducting research into early theatre history.²

There are a number of outstanding contributions including Elisabeth Dutton's illuminating account of the limitations and opportunities of performance-as-research in historic sites, in which she argues that while 'a performance may be imagined ... when imagined stagings are tested through experimental performance, practical difficulties may challenge or enrich the hypotheses built on textual or historical research' (52). Her suggested restagings of elements of the production of *The Play of the Weather* performed at Hampton Court as part of the 'Staging the Henrician Court' project in 2009 also serve as ample evidence of the critical afterlife of such research. Julie Sanders conducts a fascinating investigation into the politics and geographies of household dramas in relation to entertainments at Welbeck and Bolsover, fundamentally reversing assumptions about the centre and the periphery in metropolitan and provincial theatre through her analysis of the geographical networks and manuscript transmission potentially at play in the Caroline drama. The close attention paid by Clare Wright to the interrelation of site, space, and action in an East Anglian audience's experience of *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament* results in an engrossing study which enlightens the role that religious drama plays in affective piety. Wright synthesizes a wide range of contemporary research on cognitive and corporeal effects to present a fresh way of thinking about a drama which has left so little in terms of material traces. Her approach aligns well with Sarah Crover's astute statement later in the anthology that 'we need to explore site-specificity in terms of cognitive and affective spaces as well as physical, topographical ones' (195).

Wright's work also points to a form of early drama scholarship which is in close dialogue with contemporary performance theory. Her use of the word 'participants' for the medieval audience, for instance, allies her work with that of Josephine Machon on the audiences of immersive theatre.³ The first two chapters of the final section 'Crossing Boundaries' are, along with earlier contributions from Jim Ellis and Helen Ostovich, particularly alert to the sensuous, lived, and imaginative worlds created by early performance, all ideas which correlate strongly with immersive theatre as defined by Machon. Joseph Rodriguez's section on the appearance of a giant at Henry VI's 1432 entry into London strongly evokes the visual aesthetic of such ceremonies, for instance when he compares the giants that greeted the victorious Henry V on his return from Agincourt with the 'spectacle and drama of a 14-foot tall giant looming over a young boy' (209) at a time of dynastic uncertainty in France. His account is thus informed as much by an understanding of embodiment as it is by the immediate political context. Amy Scott then

persuasively argues for the affectivity of verse on the bodies of an audience to produce them as co-creators of meaning when watching *Cymbeline*. She suggests that the rhythms of storytelling in the play are an invitation to the listeners in the audience, as well as the characters in the play, to resituate themselves imaginatively in places other than the theatre, writing that ‘flying out in thoughts, seeing a place by feeling it, engages the body’ (235). The focus of both historians on the mobile, mutable, and experienced aspects of performance, in conjunction with their detailed analyses of literary texts and contexts, mean that their essays are as useful to scholars from the field of performance studies as they are to those from early theatre history.

The fact that the relatively newly coined performance term ‘site-specificity’ fuses together the various contributions may be seen as provocative because of its anachronism, but the provocation invites welcome connections between theatre historians and contemporary theorists and practitioners of performance throughout the volume — notably Mike Pearson and Fiona Wilkie — that suggest new directions for the field of early drama studies as a whole. The dialogues with such theorists could have ranged even further afield, I think, to include Machon on immersive practice and (syn)aesthetics, Richard Schechner on environmental theatre, and Laura Cull on immanence.⁴ Early English theatre history and contemporary performance studies still have much to glean from each other and *Performing Environments* gestures towards how the vocabulary of contemporary performance theory could be a major method for the reconceptualization of medieval and early modern theatre in future scholarship.

While the introduction states explicitly that *Performing Environments* aims to provide ‘entry points’ into the field of site-specific performance in early English drama, its own brevity encapsulates the ‘taster’ nature of some of the ideas the book will go on to explore (10). The critically productive approach of exploring early performance in light of the multidisciplinary spatial turn in the humanities, as well as the long historic span of the book, means that the wide-ranging chapters are necessarily, but sometimes frustratingly, condensed. Also, while it is extremely refreshing to see material from the medieval and early modern period side-by-side, in practice the chronological distinctions remain largely intact because the succinctness of each chapter does not enable a sustained consideration of how spatial and performance practices relate between the two eras. The collection might benefit, for instance, from a greater appreciation of how the Henrician court masque feeds into the Elizabethan pageant, or an understanding that some medieval

spaces were as capable of rearticulation as those from the early modern period. This is a result, of course, of the format rather than the material, which is undeniably both rigorous and stimulating, and the editors are very clear in their introduction that the volume is 'a pilot study' (10). The inspiring scholarship it contains is of such a high calibre that it will doubtless fulfil the editors' aspiration to spur other scholars into more detailed and extensive investigations of their own.

Notes

- 1 The term 'taskscape' is appropriated from the work of Mike Pearson to articulate how a landscape is both changed by human actors in the present whilst remaining permanently inscribed by the past.
- 2 Julie Sanders and Jacqueline Jenkins have edited a partner volume to *Performing Environments* of similarly *longue durée*: *Editing, Performance, Texts: New Practices in Medieval and Early Modern Drama* (Basingstoke, 2014).
- 3 Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Basingstoke, 2013).
- 4 Josephine Machon, *(Syn)Aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (Basingstoke, 2009); Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theatre* (New York, 1994); Laura Cull, *Theatres of Immanence: Deleuze and the Ethics of Performance* (Basingstoke, 2012).

Vernon Guy Dickson. *Emulation on the Shakespearean Stage*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. Pp 216.

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Vernon Guy Dickson's monograph is a densely packed guide to rhetorical emulation in Renaissance tragedies. His bardocentric title is not so much misleading as a disservice to his topic, which investigates emulative theory from ancient Roman rhetoricians through to drama written a decade after Shakespeare's death. This is such a massive undertaking that Dickson's extensive knowledge sometimes inhibits his ability to sustain in-depth analysis. At