

# Editorial

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The essays in this issue focus on plays scattered chronologically from the medieval origins of the Chester cycle to the commercial dynamics of Tudor London playing in the 1590s.

Three essays focus on drama associated with the fifteenth century. Lisa J. Kiser's article shows how the conspicuous listing of beasts and birds in Chester's *Noah's Flood*, a catalogue unique to this cycle's telling of the biblical story, clarifies larger concerns of the play and of the cycle more broadly. Kiser particularly emphasizes how thematic considerations of idleness, labour, and utility intersect with social class and gender; for example, the play underscores its characterization of Noah's wife as disorderly and disobedient through the kinds of animals with which the catalogue associates her. Although anthropocentric in these specific ways, *Noah's Flood* also includes several animal-centric moments that promote human stewardship of and kindness toward animals, notions that, according to Kiser, may reflect the influence of early protestant ideas. Alexis Butzner's essay, by thoughtfully working with a manuscript fragment from the late fifteenth century, offers readers a new edition of the short drama known to most scholars as *Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham*. In an effort to reconcile inconsistencies between reconstructions published to date, Butzner argues for reading this manuscript source as a complete and single play-text. Although the extant manuscript neither identifies speakers nor provides scene divisions and stage directions, Butzner asserts that a full reconstruction based on this source alone is not only possible but also logical given the period's necessary interplay between improvisation and text. In his essay on Medwell's *Fulgens and Lucrez*, Rick Bowers similarly attends to improvisation, paying particular attention to self-conscious playfulness and metatheatricality. Although the interlude's title highlights the ancient Roman setting and an indebtedness to the humanist debate form, the real interest of *Fulgens and Lucrez* lies elsewhere. Bowers credits Medwell with inventing the English comic duo: two

masterless men whose ineffectual yet witty interventions make them the real masters of the play's action. Nameless in the text, 'A' and 'B' lend the play its ludic power. In the process, they help this early Tudor interlude unsettle clear boundaries between performer and audience as well as clear hierarchies of social class and political authority.

A more conservative approach to authority — in this case that of the monarch — informs two sets of courtly spectacles from the later sixteenth century discussed by C. Edward McGee and Francis Wardell. Drawing extensively on a previously unstudied manuscript letter written by William Honing to Sir John Thynne at Longeat, McGee's article makes available detailed information regarding the entertainments that Elizabeth I's court designed and performed in 1564 in honour of the French ambassadors present in England to mark the Treaty of Troyes's conclusion. These shows, we learn, included a variety of courtly entertainments in the tradition of chivalric romance, including ritualized hunting, running at the ring, fighting at the barriers, pageants, and masquing. Such martial entertainments proclaimed and celebrated new relations of peace between France and England; they also enabled Sir Robert Dudley to solidify his favour with Queen Elizabeth while simultaneously seeking to impress the visiting French entourage. As Wardell's essay outlines, ten years later, in 1574, England was negotiating peace with Spain. Drawing on records of expenses found in the mayor's audit books from Bristol that year, Wardell constructs a complex picture of the entertainments put on by the Bristol corporation during Elizabeth I's visit to the city that year. These include an impressive and costly three-day mock battle that ended with Elizabeth herself as adjudicator in negotiations for a peaceful treaty. Wardell argues that rather than petitioning the queen, as was typical of shows presented to Elizabeth I while on progress, these entertainments functioned primarily as vehicles for displaying gratitude for a recent trade agreement with Spain that would bring significant economic benefits to the members of Bristol's corporation.

David Kathman's article extends scholarly debates, including those previously published in *Early Theatre*, regarding the manuscript 'plot' for *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins*, in the process outlining key evidence regarding theatrical apprenticeship systems in early modern London. Reasserting his 2004 claim that this manuscript originates with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1597–8, rather than Strange's Men in the early 1590s as Andrew Gurr has argued, Kathman draws on extensive documentation about boy players apprenticed to professional actors in London, particularly

those who were freemen in the livery companies. Kathman finds no evidence to support assertions of unofficial apprenticeship systems, pace Gurr. Rather, the boys known to have played specific female roles on the London adult professional stage were typically bound to professional actors at thirteen or fourteen years of age for a minimum term of seven years, typically playing minor women's parts relatively early and graduating to male roles in their late teens or early twenties.

With this issue we are delighted to welcome Erin E. Kelly as Associate Editor and Sarah E. Johnson as Assistant Editor. We are also pleased to announce our 2011 prize winners for volumes twelve and thirteen in the categories of best article on a theatre history topic relying on REED-style records; best article on the interpretation of a topic in early drama; and best note. We thank members of the editorial board for giving their time to evaluate and award prizes in the three categories. We announce a special issue coming next in 14.2: 'Coterie Drama and Stuart Politics in the Midlands', guest-edited by Mary Polito and Amy Scott. Finally, we include a call for papers for another special issue (15.1) on 'Women and Performance', guest-edited by Peter Parolin and James Stokes.

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