

Notes

- 1 'Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama', *Ashgate*. https://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=5097&series_id=264&calcTitle=1

Sarah E. Johnson. *Staging Women and the Soul-Body Dynamic in Early Modern England*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. Pp 185.

KRISTEN POOLE
University of Delaware

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Sarah Johnson's *Staging Women and the Soul-Body Dynamic*, as its title suggests, is predicated on a binary that was fundamental to early modern epistemologies: that of the soul and body. As Johnson discusses, this binary was an inheritance of classical sources. As she explains, 'the Platonic view in the Renaissance saw the soul as the rightful moral governor of a body that was an encumbrance to it, a prison, clog, or dunghill that the soul longed to escape' (9). Aristotle's position, that 'the body [w]as necessary and good for the soul' (9), would seem to provide a counter position of soul-body integration, but his division of the soul (into the irrational and rational soul, the latter of which is further divided into active and passive intellect) ends up re-inscribing a hierarchical dualism. Aristotle's notion that the soul generates from male semen (an idea that would wend its way through Augustine), moreover, contributed not only to a soul-body dualism, but to a gendering of that binary: in Western theology and philosophy, when the soul and body were paired together, the soul was gendered masculine and the body was gendered feminine.

This binary (of masculine soul and feminine body) lies at the heart of early modern ideas of gender, argues Johnson: 'Men, who were supposedly not as prone to bodily influence, were considered more able to exercise reason, a faculty of the soul, and theological ideas that God ordained the soul to govern the body, and man to govern woman, were naturalized through cross-reference or analogy' (33). While it would be easy to consider this hierarchy of (masculine) soul and (feminine) body as just another form of patriarchal dominance, Johnson demonstrates ways in which the binary was

compromised and complicated. She does so by working through four relationships that she considers analogous to that of soul and body: the puppeteer and the puppet, the tamer and the tamed, the ghost and the haunted, and the observer and the spectacle.

For the first of these relationships, that of puppeteer and puppet, Johnson maintains that '[a]s a hollow material body animated from within by the puppeteer, the hand puppet is most obviously analogous with a dualistic model of the self as consisting of two distinct components, a purely physical form animated by a separate, internal intelligence' (32). She also establishes 'early modern habits of thought that view puppets as feminine', habits that are 'inescapably misogynistic' (31). Yet her explorations of Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* reveal how the dynamics of performance complicate the presumed dominance of the puppeteer (ie the soul, in Johnson's analogy). In a fascinating reading of Vindice's use of his dead beloved's skull (and perhaps skeleton) as a form of puppet, Johnson shows how the physical dynamics of puppeteering undermine his attempt at dominating Gloriana's body. 'There is strong potential', she writes,

for the grim, unchanging skeleton face to subtly undermine Vindice's exuberant glee ... Although Gloriana is so blatantly, exaggeratedly material, then, she is not unambiguously material as it is understood in opposition to the spiritual. In this ambiguity she poses a challenge to Vindice's flippant use of her physical remains and to his contempt for women based on scorn for the material as inferior to the spiritual. (48)

If the male character (Vindice) has tried to be the animating soul of the female body (Gloriana), the qualities of her body refute this control. The analogy thus works in both directions, Johnson implies: failure of the male puppeteer over the female puppet compromises the dominance of the masculine soul over the feminized body.

Johnson's discussion of *Bartholomew Fair* is more refracted, even though this play has a more explicit puppet show. For this play, she argues that both body and soul, and both men and women, are revealed as corrupt, and therefore the entire notion of an exalted masculine soul dominating a corrupted feminine body is undermined. Both the binary and its hierarchy collapse. This comes to a head at the fair's puppet show:

Puppet Dionysius's garment-lifting compounds this point about the inextricability of spirit and material. In literally exposing its 'inspiration' and animating force, and in thus providing an image of the soul as implicated in the physical and beyond gender, Puppet Dionysius confirms the view, pervasive in the play, of the body and soul as mutually 'adulterated' for men and women alike. (68)

In this reading, Johnson is able to demonstrate the profundity, both in theological and gendered terms, of one of the most hilarious puppet shows on the early modern stage.

The next relationship, that of the tamer and the tamed (chapter 2), demonstrates how the binary is reversed. Exploring John Fletcher's *The Tamer Tamed or, The Woman's Prize*, Johnson contends that the character of Maria 'inverts the associations of men with spirituality and rationality and of women with the body — a reversal that supports her claim to an intelligent will that merits recognition' (71–2). Even more subtly, the very basis of the binary is called into question through this reversal. In this chapter, Johnson takes up the issue of women's relationship to rhetoric. She argues that the strategy of turning an opponent's argument against him, although a familiar one, has particular consequences when it involves a female persona. The double reversal — of argument and of gender — lays bare the patriarchal, misogynistic claims of women's subordination as mere verbal constructs. Once the soul-body binary is revealed as purely rhetorical, this relationship becomes malleable rather than intrinsic. And as a malleable construct, the soul-body relationship becomes deeply unstable, since the referents become changeable. This not only compromises the connection between soul and body, but renders the entire discourse labile and even potentially meaningless. Or as Johnson writes,

Fletcher's play imagines, then, or perhaps bears witness to, a versatile subject position for women that does not invest a sense of self in a positive valuation of the body, or in a construction of body and soul as inseparably merged, but rather in changing forms of opposition to the changing mobilizations of conventional patriarchal structurings of the soul-body hierarchy, which sometimes demarcate and sometimes collapse body and soul in ways oppressive to women. (104)

In identifying the rhetorical underpinnings of one of the most essential relationships in Christian theology (soul-body), Johnson taps into an anxiety

that threads through early modern theology more broadly: what if religion is just rhetoric? This is a point that Johnson could have perhaps pushed further.

If chapter 2 began with a binary reversal and ended with a much more complex position of changing relations, this flexibility is carried forward in the next chapter on 'Ghost and Haunted'. The chapter focuses on *The Lady's Tragedy*, a play normally attributed to Middleton. This play might seem to offer the starkest example of a body-soul dualism, since the Lady appears as both body (corpse) and spirit. But Johnson explores both the ways that this dualism collapses, and the way that the gendered division is reversed. Johnson sees an analogous relationship between the soul-body hierarchy and the play's political hierarchies, and thus the flexibility of soul-body relations implicitly influences the political realm as well.

The final relationship (and final chapter) of 'Observer and Spectacle' turns to the genre of the court masque, specifically Jonson's. Joining Sophie Tomlinson in arguing that the critical focus on the material aspects of the masque has occluded the poetics of the masque, and especially their portrayal of femininity, Johnson contends that 'Jonson's text draws attention to the potential for the composite structure of the masque's tangible and intangible elements to engage cultural notions of the body-soul relationship' (132). Johnson asks a series of trenchant questions about how the soul-body dichotomy, and its alignment with masculine-feminine, manifests itself in the court masque. '[M]asque performance', she writes, 'evokes ideas of the soul-body dynamic as they intersect with representations of women, and it does so in a way that pushes against the conventional hierarchy of soul over body that is readily available to Jonson as a means of privileging the component of the masque for which he was responsible — its poetry' (136). The performance of the dance does not so much reverse the binary of male and female, soul and body, as it collapses them. 'The visual invocation of the soul through the female body collapses the soul-body hierarchy in a way that helps to prevent such contributions from being dismissed as either entirely bodily and so not intellectual, or as entirely spiritual or immaterial in the more negative sense of unsubstantial or inconsequential' (161).

Overall, then, Johnson makes a case for the binary of the masculine soul and the feminine body as being both central and brittle. Despite structuring a series of interconnected cultural, theological, and intellectual relationships, the soul-body binary proves to be unstable. This instability in turn complicates gender dynamics, and paradoxically could allow for female superiority in gendered hierarchies. In bringing the prominence of the soul-body

relationship to the fore, as well as in showing up its many complications, *Staging Women and the Soul-Body Dynamic* makes an important contribution to both religious and feminist studies.

Eva Griffith. *A Jacobean Company and Its Playhouse: The Queen's Servants at the Red Bull Theatre (c. 1605–1619)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp 305.

ELEANOR COLLINS

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Eva Griffith's new repertory study presents a painstakingly detailed and illuminating account of the Queen's Servants and their operations at the Red Bull Theatre, an account that is engaging throughout while deeply grounded in rigorous scholarship and archival research. This hitherto-neglected company operated under the patronage of Queen Anna of Denmark and performed primarily in its Clerkenwell playhouse between 1605 and 1619, a date span which incorporates the vibrant period of Jacobean drama usually dominated by discussion of the King's Men. Here, Griffith makes a decisive and welcome attempt to redress the balance and correct the 'lopsided' picture of early modern drama that we have inherited from accounts that privilege Shakespeare's company and (implicitly) the genius of his authorship (26). The move away from Shakespeare-centric narratives has carried influence for some time now, but Griffith's study demonstrates the specific rewards of attention to lesser-studied companies and foregrounds the importance of such attention. In many ways, the Queen's Servants at the Red Bull provide a fascinating counterpoint to the King's Men, not least because critical accounts consistently invoke the former in opposition to the latter in a dichotomy which has affirmed and legitimized the importance of the dominant company. As Griffith articulates, it 'has, perhaps, been an important part of the development of Shakespeare studies to ensure that more marginal companies to that of Shakespeare were perceived as worse in order to privilege the material conditions of that centrally important author' (26).

This binary, and the extant narratives already attached to the Queen's Servants and the Red Bull, has traditionally made it hard for critics to talk about