

Kirk Melnikoff (ed). *Edward II: A Critical Reader*. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017. Pp xxi, 295. Paperback USD \$23.99. ISBN: 9781472584052.

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The Arden Early Modern Drama Guides aim to bring established critical trends together with performance history and to build upon them by exposing readers to new critical directions. Those intended readers form a wide-ranging audience, encompassing students, instructors, and scholars. The series aims to be useful to secondary, undergraduate, and graduate courses while also informing scholars undertaking their own research. In the latest of the series, editor Kirk Melnikoff tackles Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* and achieves these expansive goals. The book contains features that serve all target constituencies, offering a grounding in critical and performance trends while also staking out new territory. The chapters function as standalone resources but also engage with each other. These connections are established by Melnikoff's introduction, which adeptly brings together an array of print and performance elements and prominent interpretive issues relevant to the volume as a whole, thus paving the way for subsequent chapters.

In 'The Critical Backstory: *Edward II*'s Critics in History to 1990', Darlene Farabee concisely covers a great swathe of time and range of critical responses. She focuses first on the play's early print history and then, proceeding through the centuries, highlights persistent critical trends. Farabee notes the importance early critics placed on the position of *Edward II* within Marlowe's canon. The question of whether it is his greatest play arose in the earliest eighteenth-century responses and influenced criticism up to and throughout the twentieth century. Another prominent angle in her survey is her critical attention to the play's genre and its representations of and engagement with history. Farabee also tracks increasing critical interest in issues of sexuality, from Bertolt Brecht's 1924 adaptation to their growing prominence in scholarship of the later twentieth century.

Next, Andrea Stevens surveys *Edward II*'s performance history. Her consideration of early performances exemplifies the volume's sensitivity to varied reader requirements. She includes foundational detail appropriate for high school students and undergraduates, such as description of Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses and performance conditions. More useful for graduate students and scholars are the links she draws with Roslyn Knutson's later chapter on *Edward II* in repertory. Stevens covers *Edward II*'s return to the stage in the early 1900s

and Brecht's adaptation, proceeds to the rise of productions addressing Edward's homosexuality, from the 1950s to the 1990s, and gives Derek Jarman's 1991 film its own section. Stevens also provides an overview of notable twenty-first-century stagings up to 2015. Throughout the chapter she tracks the staging of Edward's murder and its relation to productions' increasing exploration of the play's homoerotic content.

Questions of sexuality and history raised by Farabee and Stevens continue in Judith Haber's 'The State of the Art: Desire, History, and the Theatre', which surveys criticism from the 1990s onwards. She highlights the 1990s as the most productive and innovative period for work on *Edward II*, particularly in terms of arguments focused on sexuality and gender. Haber first offers an overview of those innovations and then addresses what she sees as the refining of those established arguments in the twenty-first century. Throughout, she traces prominent critical approaches, including homoeroticism and definitions of sodomy, feminist perspectives, early modern politics, psychoanalysis, theatre history, and genre. Haber argues that sexuality and its construction once formed the most innovative area of *Edward II* scholarship, but that it is now the least inventive. She suggests revitalizing this area by using *Edward II* to engage in the ongoing debate about history and historicism among early modern queer theorists, referencing Madhavi Menon and Jonathan Goldberg's advocacy for 'homohistory'. I agree that the play's intertwining of history and sexuality makes this a fruitful avenue for exploration.

The first of the volume's contributions of new scholarly work is Alan Stewart's 'Edoüard et Gaverston: New Ways of Looking at an English History Play'. Stewart argues for the relevance of the French Wars of Religion to Marlowe's play and focuses on the 1588 pamphlet *Histoire tragique et memorable de Pierre de Gaverston*. This often revised and reprinted libel compares the duc d'Épernon, favorite of Henri III, to 'Gaverston'. Stewart does not argue that the libel is a source for *Edward II*, but rather asserts that the pamphlet's analogy between the pairs of monarchs and their favourites enables scholars to recognize that Marlowe's play deals directly with, and is influenced by, contemporary French politics. Stewart also turns to *The Massacre at Paris* to further underscore the connections between the four figures.

In the following chapter, 'Edward II in Repertory', Roslyn Knutson thoroughly explores the stage life of Marlowe's play from its first performance through its 1622 association with Queen Anne's Men. Although Pembroke's Men is the first company known to have staged *Edward II*, she proposes performances preceding their ownership of the play, perhaps by the Admiral's Men with Edward Alleyn

in the title role. Knutson argues that those earliest performances were followed by a successful tour with Pembroke's Men, after which she suggests a run with either the Chamberlain's Men or Worcester's Men. She also identifies long-standing assumptions maintained by theatre historians, such as viewing the tour by Pembroke's Men as a commercial failure, a perspective which in turn diminishes *Edward II's* worth to the playing companies who owned it. Knutson asserts the play's commercial value in repertory and supports her claim through examination of the theatrical marketplace during *Edward II's* proposed tenure with each company.

In "Overpeered" and Understated: Conforming Transgressions and *Edward II*, James Siemon considers the play's treatment of degree. He uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'conforming transgression' to highlight how the play's emphasis on familiar norms of status often destabilizes the very assumptions such norms invoke. Siemon highlights the unique abundance of collective categories that Marlowe applies to the hereditary nobility — earls, lords, barons, kings — and the ways these terms stay within the bounds of what is culturally articulable while also injecting irony into the text. The characters regularly use correct forms of address for those they despise and simultaneously insult their interlocutors. In his conclusion, Siemon applies his assertions about the ironies of collective categories in *Edward II* to the social environment surrounding Marlowe and his father. Siemon highlights John Marlowe's role as churchwarden and his responsibility for policing intricacies of status among parishioners and relates this to Marlowe's exploration of the tensions within status designations in *Edward II*. While interesting, I found this ending digressive; it slows the momentum of the argument. As Haber's critical overview indicates, this is a play whose criticism often centres on transgression. Siemon demonstrates that Marlowe uses terms of social conformity to unsettling effect.

In the final critical chapter, "My Life, My Company": Amity, Enmity and Vitality in *Edward II*, Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr draws on his interest in vitality in the early modern period. The play's apparent dynastic logic, progressing through the deaths and accessions of multiple kings bearing the same name, might seem to align with a sense of vitality dependent on reproduction and teleological progression from past to future. Edward and Gaveston, together with Spencer and Baldock, however, build what Sullivan terms 'a corporate model of vitality' (177) that entails sharing the kingdom and living in the present. They live and die in and for each other's company literally, figuratively, and sexually. Sullivan stresses that this version of vitality demands *amity* and *enmity*: the mutuality of love and friendship in opposition to the political status quo. This sodomitical model of pointless

vitality also destabilizes the continuum of the king's two bodies. Sullivan argues that Edward caves to dynastic impetus when he agrees to give up the crown to his son, but that corporate vitality remains 'conceptually legitimate' (192) even if superseded. Here Sullivan touches on arguments that associate Edward III with his father's mode of life and interpret the prince as something other than a dynastic instrument, but deems them unnecessary to his claims. This dismissal was disappointing for me, as I was interested to see how Sullivan's model of vitality might make use of these interpretations of Edward III and the play's ending.

Edward Gieskes concludes the volume with a survey of pedagogical resources, and he takes the opportunity to evangelize on behalf of *Edward II*. In my case Gieskes is preaching to the choir, and I suspect this may be true for many readers who have also found that *Edward II* works brilliantly in the classroom. His proposed teaching approaches suggest possibilities for academic levels ranging from upper secondary to graduate, and the bibliography includes similarly useful annotations. For example, the annotations of individual editions and anthologies highlight features that would make them suitable for particular kinds of courses. The annotations on selected criticism also often note complexity and thus appropriateness for academic level and draw links between some critical pieces, which are useful features for course design. This chapter will be a valuable resource for instructors with a range of pedagogical goals, including teaching *Edward II* for the first time, transferring the play from a graduate to an undergraduate context, and revitalizing existing lesson plans.