

Laurence Publicover. *Dramatic Geography: Romance, Intertextuality, and Cultural Encounter in Early Modern Mediterranean Drama.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp xiii, 204. Hardback £50.00. ISBN: 9780198806813.

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When Brabantio hears that ‘thieves’ have stolen his daughter in *Othello*, he grumbles to Iago and Roderigo: ‘What tell’st thou me of robbing? This is Venice: / My house is not a grange’ (1.1.103–4). Brabantio, however, is wrong, and such ‘theft’ is entirely to be expected, Laurence Publicover argues in *Dramatic Geography*, precisely because the house is in Venice. The dialogue at this fraught moment is an example of ‘intertheatrical geography’, in which ‘[o]ne Mediterranean scenario, it appears, is being read through another’ (15). That understanding illuminates the way in which Iago’s needling of Brabantio seems designed to remind audiences of Shakespeare’s previous Venetian father, Shylock. The lines ascribed to the actors echo Shylock’s instruction to Jessica to ‘Lock up my doors’, and evoke memories of his later distress, when he is reported running about the streets of Venice crying ‘O my ducats! O my daughter!’ (2.5.29, 2.8.15). Behind that image looms Marlowe’s Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*, another father whose daughter deserts him for an alien culture and faith. Collectively, they will resurface again subsequently in Tunis, with Robert Daborne’s Jewish Benwash and his wife in *A Christian Turn’d Turk*.

‘Intertextuality’, as Publicover explains, is a term his book borrows from Jacky Bratton, for whom it described ‘the whole web of mutual understanding’ that was shared by generations of audiences and players (89). Bratton distinguished her methodological approach from the more familiar concept of intertextuality. Insisting that intertheatrical readings ‘go beyond the written’, she made a case for considering not only performance factors such as scenery, lighting, and costume, but also ‘genres, conventions, and very importantly, memory’.¹ *Dramatic Geography* aims at exploring a productive middle-ground between the two strategies. While it utilizes Bratton’s term, it adapts her intertheatrical approach by consciously and deliberately returning the focus back onto the texts themselves. At the same time, the book is quick to point out that what emerges as a result is not an exercise in tracing exclusively intertextual connections among plays. While intertextuality tends to write out the author, Publicover is as interested in playwrights’ memorial responses — deliberate and otherwise — to previous theatrical

performances of geographical spaces, as he is in early modern playgoers' responses to such multi-layered dramatic locations.

His aim, therefore, is threefold: to show that 'the locations of early modern plays are haunted by other locations', particularly those explored in previous plays; to demonstrate that these locations were particularly attuned to specific modes and genres of writing; and to argue that early modern playgoers engaged actively with the locations of performance in order to 'create' the dramatic world inhabited by the plays in question (3). For Publicover, the space where this trifold thesis is particularly noticeable and open for inspection is the point of intersection between a specific place and a genre — the Mediterranean and romance. The Mediterranean 'is understood *as* a geographical location in its pooling of distinct yet overlapping cultures', he sums up in reviewing the argument put forward in the contextual part one of the book before proceeding to an illuminating second part that attends to individual plays. This predictable locus for romance 'is almost always concerned with movement between spaces, [and] therefore offered an appropriate generic frame through which to present it' (93).

Neither readers of romances nor of geographical and travel accounts would find either observation contentious, although Publicover's view of the Mediterranean as a site of cultural encounter and even 'universal brotherhood' is more benign than recent studies of the region generally argue (48). Throughout, he sees it as a space where religious, cultural, and political difference, rather than conflict, is visible. This enables him to illuminate the memorial echoes between Christian Brabantio and Jewish Shylock, for instance, but leaves the racial and cultural implications of that intertheatrical resonance open to conjecture. Some of the textual choices to illustrate the overarching thesis about the close relationship between romance and the Mediterranean in part one are also puzzling. The subsection titled 'Hellenistic romance', for instance, focuses on Boccaccio's 'Tale of Gostanza' and the Old French *Floire et Blancheflor* as examples of 'Hellenistic Mediterranean narrative', at the expense of the group of the five actual instances of Hellenistic prose romance that survive, the narratives by Chariton, Xenophon, Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus (48). The section on 'Chivalric romance' chooses to leave out the monumental Iberian chivalric romance cycles of *Amadis* and *Palmerin*, despite their focus on the Eastern Mediterranean, and the enormous cultural influence they wielded. Publicover briefly notes that scholarly attention connects these volumes to the New World rather than the Old, since their circulation among Spanish conquistadores has been well established; but that, of course, does not render them irrelevant (42). Similarly, the discussion of two plays from the 1580s, *Clyomon and Clamides* and *Guy of Warwick*, is

illuminating for its attention to early stagings of romance, but the principal focus of these plays is on Denmark and Swabia in the first instance, and England and Danish invaders in the second (complete with a Danish giant, Colbron). Collectively, these choices strike a curious note of disjunction between parts one and two of the study, leaving readers wondering about when, and why, the Mediterranean replaced Northern Europe and insular romance on stage.

That the Mediterranean does become a potent space of dramatic action on the early modern English stage is unquestionable, and Publicover is at his persuasive best in showing how the construction of that dramatic locus is frequently self-conscious and deliberately accretive. On this, there is a great deal in *Dramatic Geography* that is most welcome: the close attention it pays to the memorial, visual, and verbal links among its chosen plays; Publicover's keen eye for literary echoes; and the dexterity with which he moves from lesser-known plays such as Thomas Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda* to much-examined texts like Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. Admittedly, the latter comes via a segue which notes that given that Kyd shared living quarters with Marlowe in 1590/91, the latter's Mediterranean world 'was an ironic response to Kyd's dramatic geography: it can be read as something like the result of one roommate winding up another' (109). The slightly disconcerting image that this conjures up of Kyd and Marlowe as literary friends in an unlikely Tudor sitcom does not, however, detract from Publicover's convincing reading of the way Marlowe's play challenges the conflation of romance and commerce. As he notes, Marlowe's satirizing of Kyd's romance-infused Mediterranean is more than a roommate's joke; the conflation registered in the play would increasingly characterize its contemporary world, as in the contemporary publication of Richard Hakluyt's monumental *Principal Navigations* (1589).

Increasingly through the subsequent chapters, which discuss Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West, Part One*, the interaction between romance and commerce in the generic and geo-political crucible of the Mediterranean gains ground. In Shakespeare's play, the characters attempt to 'establish a relationship between romance and commerce' while Shakespeare 'is keen for us to recognize the gap between character perspective and dramatic perspective' (129). In Heywood's play, chivalry is treated with a 'subtle, class-based irony' through Bess's identity as a woman, and a low-born one at that, who defies the romance convention that the worthy protagonist of unknown parentage usually always turns out to be of noble birth after all (141). What Publicover is tracing here is an expression of the gradual conflation of two forms of 'adventure' — chivalric and mercantile — which Michael Nerlich's *Ideology of Adventure* (1977, trans. 1987) had identified in the early modern transformation

of chivalric romance errantry. It has been explored also, variously, by Joan Pong Linton (2007), Valerie Foreman (2008), and others, in studies ranging across the Old World and the New, and across romance and drama, and it seems a pity that Publicover's focus on the Mediterranean did not allow for some connections to be made with that long tradition of existing scholarship.

One reason for this may be his decision to focus not just on the Mediterranean, but specifically on dramatic representations of the region. In the conclusion, he asserts that while *Dramatic Geography* is not intended 'as a riposte to the numerous studies of the past decade or more that have stressed the connections between these plays and the historical Mediterranean', he wanted to 'flip the coin ... to demonstrate how plays' glances outward were conditioned by their glances inward' (172). Yet the productive insights that latter exercise produces in this study may make readers wish that Publicover had not treated the two approaches as mutually exclusive. Historical and geopolitical consciousness, on the one hand, and intertheatrical negotiations on the other, often functioned simultaneously, as in the play that provides the focus of the book's last chapter, the *Travels of the Three English Brothers*. The authors of *Travels* based their play on the real-life trio, Anthony, Thomas, and Robert Sherley, whose adventures in Europe and at the Persian court survive in multiple pamphlets, including the most likely source, Anthony Nixon's *Three English Brothers*. The focus on intertheatricality means that none of those receive attention as possible sources of memorial resonance (although Nixon gets a fleeting reference on 157). 'Travels' intertheatrical negotiations created something like a mix-tape of early modern plays', Publicover suggests (164). This valid and convincing assertion is within Publicover's large argument about the importance of intertheatricality in illuminating and shaping our understanding of how 'places' work in plays, and although it leaves out substantial elements of the mixture in question, it invites us to think about those early modern plays in new and productive ways.

Notes

1 Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge, 2003), 37–8.