

Catherine A. Henze. *Robert Armin and Shakespeare's Performed Songs*. New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. xi, 204. Hardback \$155.00. ISBN: 9781472458322. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315608785>

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Catherine Henze's *Robert Armin and Shakespeare's Performed Songs* is one of two recent monographs on Renaissance clowning not initially intended to be about clowns.¹ In the criticism as in the plays, clowns have thrust themselves in 'by head & shoulders to play a part',² taking their place at the centre of collaborative playhouse practice as authors and — as Henze describes — as musicians. Henze's work thus joins a small but growing body of criticism that argues for clowns as central figures for understanding theatrical production, from musical settings to scripting to the notions of authorship that clowns produce. The central contribution of the book is to highlight professional stage clown Armin's skills as a musician that reshape not only the Shakespearean soundscape but also the nature of clownish improvisation. Two chapters introduce Armin and early modern musical contexts before Henze surveys Armin's best known clowns (chapter 3), possible early clowns (chapter 4), possible apprenticed singers (chapter 5), and possible late clowns. Working back and forth between Armin's known performance history and astute readings of the musical shift his appearance enacts, Henze expands the list of theatrical roles traditionally attributed to Armin, enlarging our sense of his role in producing plays at the Globe and lasting transitions in theatre conventions more broadly. In doing so, Henze elevates both Armin's and Shakespeare's performed songs to their rightful place in theatre history.

The impetus for Henze's study is noting that a dramatic musical shift in Shakespeare's plays coincides with Armin's arrival in the Chamberlain's Men. As her core statistic makes clear, when Armin joined the company, 'singing in Shakespeare's dramas catapulted from 1.25 songs and 9.95 lines of singing per play to 3.44 songs and 29.75 lines of singing' (1). Committed first and foremost to the music, the book features new performance editions of seventeen songs by early music editor, performer, and teacher Lawrence Lipnik. These are one of the book's biggest assets. The songs, placed throughout in modernized musical notation and elaborated in appendices, act as both the culmination of Henze's interpretive project and accessible points of entry for anyone interested in the music of Shakespeare. Henze's musicological analysis of this material fulfills its aim of being eminently readable for non-specialists, attentive to compositional details without

presuming specialist knowledge. By including detailed discussion of the new editions, song appendices, alternate versions for some songs, and lengthy excerpts from related contemporary songs, the book also acts as a reference volume and a primer for theatre practitioners. Of these musical elements, the most compelling are the popular songs hovering in the audience's memory, the original versions unrevised for the stage whose resonances for familiar listeners Henze uncovers. Her reading of 'Come O'er the Bourn, Bessy' in *King Lear* suggests that even a short song sung by Edgar and the Fool suggestively implies much about Lear's depravity through an earlier version's allegorizing of England as 'Bessy' (72–7). The difference between implied original and sung revision offers repeated sites for making meaning. Henze's close examination of the overlap between different song versions suggests that while popular music does clearly influence Armin, his version also belongs in a history of popular music.

Some of the most exciting offerings arise from using the music to understand Armin rather than taking him as the starting point of inquiry. Though emerging from an analysis of his singing, many of Henze's conclusions extend beyond the music into Armin's broader performance style. What defines Armin's style as a musician, she argues in the introduction, are frequent interruptions and alterations from the original song that offer an extemporized flavour while such revisions produce thematic and linguistic resonances with earlier dialogue (in addition to earlier versions of the songs) that underscore these songs as deeply and thoughtfully embedded in the script. This coordination between song and dialogue marks a new kind of musical writing and a break from earlier musical and clownish interludes often seen as improvised additions to the script. In a broader actorly sense, then, Armin helps navigate early modern drama's shift away from itinerant, improvisatory troupes toward script-centred drama (a shift visible in Hamlet's complaint about overstepping clowns) by *seeming* to extemporize. By scripting his own forms of improvisation — like singing — into the plays, he enables a form of clowning fully embedded in the play that also feels like the familiar extemporization of older clowns. Armin develops a new kind of improv comedy. Henze's useful term for these styles, 'scripted improvisation', succinctly captures the relationship between autonomous clownish improvisation and controlled playwright authorship as not an opposition but a collaboration perfected by Armin (4).

After chapters on Armin's biography and early modern music contexts, the book considers Armin's most well-known and typical singing clowns (Feste, Lear's fool, and Autolycus) and two points of comparison with Armin: two plays before Armin's official arrival as Shakespeare's co-sharer that illustrate his influence

(*Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*) and songs by Shakespeare's lutenist Robert Johnson that Armin may have performed. The differences between pre-Armin and Johnson's music and that of Armin casts his style in relief as coherent and distinctive (and thus a solid basis for the arguments that rely on attributing songs to Armin). The most provocative chapter, 'Armin's Possible Apprentices: Ophelia and Desdemona', offers a new glimpse into company playhouse practice by using links between Armin's musical style and the songs of these two female characters to suggest he played an active mentorship role for singing boy actors. This chapter also does the best job of integrating cultural expectations of music with readings of the individual songs, taking on questions of singing women's (dis)empowerment with close attention to how an early modern audience could have understood the valences of the music's aural and textual qualities. At every turn, Henze extends Armin's influence, assigning him roles before 1599 and at the end of his career (including possibly Caliban), proposing him as a performance mentor, and attributing to him a key role in the changing style of early modern performance. Ultimately, she claims Armin as one of Shakespeare's collaborators, and not just for writing songs. In chapter 1, moreover, Henze tracks similarities between Armin's own printed play and pamphlets, and Shakespeare's plays, a project that could be productively expanded in future work. These similarities combined with the close integration of song and dialogue in the Armin-era plays suggest he was an invaluable contributor to the texts of Shakespeare's plays.

Robert Armin and Shakespeare's Performed Songs serves as an important reminder of how much is missing from the printed dramatic text. Lost or excluded music and the lacunae left by improvisational and gestural clowning falsely minimize two major draws for audience members that illustrate the richly collaborative mode of playing companies. By uniting the two, Henze fills in a vital gap where performance cannot be assimilated to text. For those new to either topic, the book's first two introductory chapters and organization of songs into subsections studied in the order they appear in each play ensure each song receives sustained attention and its context can be easily located by readers of individual scenes or plays. For those familiar with clowning or performed songs, this format limits each chapter's ability to build a sustained argumentative arc, but the fresh combination of topics offers many new insights and raises questions about how else close musical analysis might be leveraged to understand theatre history. In upending assumptions about dramatic music, playing companies, authorship, and actorly practice, Henze manifests the challenges and rewards of recovering elements of performance that exceed the printed drama so central to critical histories of early modern theatre.

Notes

- 1 Henze, *Robert Armin*, refers to her own work in this way (ix). See also Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge, 2014), 1.
- 2 Phillip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie* (London, 1595; STC: 22535), K2r.