

Claire M.L. Bourne. *Typographies of Performance in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp 328. Hardback \$90. ISBN: 9780198848790. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198848790.001.0001>.

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In her book that carefully traces a new history of the use of typography in printed early modern English drama, Claire M.L. Bourne makes a bold, revolutionary claim: that members of the book trade — including printers, publishers, and dramatists — employed typography to convey ‘extra-lexical effects of performance’ more closely to adhere to the experience of reading plays than to that of watching them in the theatre (2). Her erudite work breaks with a long tradition in book history (and scholarship at large) that has positioned these printed playbooks as flawed historical sources that imperfectly represent a playwright’s holographic manuscript, or as material that barely captures the ephemeral nature of performance. Instead, Bourne regards printed early modern English plays in their own right as technologies that printers and publishers purposefully developed to allow readers their own experience within a constructed and yet creative space at the intersections of the stage and page. With this thoughtful and unorthodox stance, she ably demonstrates the ways that members of the book trade worked for the benefit of their readers. Through her meticulous research, she convincingly articulates how printers, publishers, and playwrights experimented with and applied early modern English typography in order to translate significant theatrical meaning to their readers. Her book models a sharp, clearly articulated methodological approach to expressing typography’s effects on the cycles of an early modern English playbook’s life as well as the possible responses to playbooks from a range of readers.

Presenting ways that typography ‘operated in the fraught yet fruitful space between limitation and possibility’, Bourne traces the evolution of particular elements of typography to provide visual cues for readers to understand characters’ dialogue and speaking order, to interpret their motions and pauses, and to conceptualize the force and momentum of action (27). This work also includes the logic and logistics of scene division and the powerful effects that illustrations could have in the creation of playbooks. Bourne identifies typographic elements that were developed to enrich readers’ experiences by using insights gained from examining approximately 1900 printed editions. While recognizing the importance of the historical work completed on compositors — or the men who

physically set the type — Bourne extends her examination of typography in a broader sense, as she navigates the ways that type conveys more than a transcription from manuscript to print. It can frame reading experiences, translate the landscape of theatre, mitigate confusion, and encapsulate action and sound.

She begins this work with an especially strong chapter on the pilcrow (¶) in early vernacular playbooks by noting that this glyph, used as a formal unit of print in early texts, is also the genesis of the page space that playreaders expect to appear before speech prefixes. She explains that rather than examining the pilcrow as an indication of a printer's sloppiness, we must understand that to readers the marks indicated discrete units of text and provided a rubric to understand dialogue. The pilcrows used, for example, in *Fulgens and Lucre*s (Henry Medwall, 1512-16?) serve as a telling instance of how readers could employ the glyph (along with speech prefixes) to train themselves to read fast dialogue — including stichomythia. Rather than viewing this technology as a vestigial part of the history of reading, Bourne considers the longer history of the mark and how it prepared early modern English readers for the development of playbooks. In a very useful examination of marginalia, she also notes how an early reader, Miles Blomefylde, used the pilcrow to mark how he personally understood dialogue to function when the glyph was absent from the text. In her reading of other early plays, including the first edition of Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc*, Bourne notes how the pilcrow evolved further to mark other elements in plays, such as descriptions of action and the formal structures of acts, before it eventually stopped being used. Through this detailed study, readers learn that their well-developed habit of expecting plays — whether early modern or contemporary — to exist in a certain format had its genesis in something previous scholars of early modern English drama chose to overlook. This attention to detail combined with an impressive command of printing and book history, portends the excellence of the rest of the book as it addresses other elements of typography that encouraged early modern English readers to read early plays deeply and carefully.

Bourne addresses typographical developments including dashes, brackets, parentheses, and asterisks to account for action, the movement of actors' bodies, and the 'business' of theatre. She explains how the use of a single parentheses to indicate direction and movement allowed a reader to seamlessly encounter dialogue while noting the actions or reactions of characters (which were placed marginally). Rather than provide any kind of insight to the performance, she writes, 'what emerged as a set of localized printed-house responses to the constraints of the quarto page eventually become a norm of dramatic mis-en-page' (87). Her ability to dissect the printed page allows her own readers to question their assumptions

about the ways early modern English readers may have reacted initially to these clever page elements. As she reads Ben Jonson quartos — along with Thomas Middleton's, and John Marston's — Bourne reveals her depth of knowledge about all of the plays, but especially Jonson's and his (as well as his printers') particular uses of dashes (which he called 'breaches') that often seemed to express various actions, sounds, and thoughts. Always cognizant of readers, she highlights the ways that Jonson's breaches allowed readers to have a distinct participatory experience as they deciphered meanings for themselves, which underscores the performative moments of reading that are separate from spectatorship. In addition to breaches, she examines marks of irony in the 1633 quarto of Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, as well the marks of deixis that appear in the 1623 folio of Shakespeare's works.

In later chapters, her expansive scholarship includes the use of typography in the creation and divisions of scenes in early printed texts for readers, the use of illustrations as visual cues for plots and other details of drama, as well as markers of scene changes and place. Included here is a masterful explanation of the ways that Richard Jones prepared and tailored the octavo of Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine the Great* for early readers. Bourne traces Jones's experimentation with the text and type to create and enumerate scenes to model the division of performance space from behind the tiring wall. She notes the ways that Jones read and organized Marlowe's work for an audience ready to encounter battle scenes in history plays in a way 'to make legible the iterative, disjunctive, and tumultuous passage of historical events as they played out on London stages' (140). The 'battle scenes' in *Tamburlaine* and history plays similar to it came to represent scene divisions that stretched for longer periods of action; she then finds this same division in the 1623 folio of Shakespeare plays, counter to persistent claims that these parts of the folio were 'corruptions of authorial practice and intention' (175). Further consideration of scenes and the naming of geographical places in later playbooks printed in the mid- to late-seventeenth century are the subject of the last chapter of the book. Here, Bourne addresses the changes from texts that allowed for a fluidity of place and time for the sake of action until theatrical unities become more significant later in the period.

The penultimate chapter enthusiastically provides readers with an important framework to discuss illustrated title pages and frontispieces of plays including three from the Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher canon — *The Maid's Tragedy*, *A King and No King*, and *Philaster* — and their complicated relationship to the plays' convoluted plots, for which the authors were well-recognized. Bourne lays out the relationship governing the printed quartos commissioned woodcuts

and how they could be read in concert with a play that was equally complicated. Much like the text itself, the woodcuts could hold readers in a state of suspense similar to the plays' theatrical audiences. Before carefully mapping the illustrations and providing an extended and detailed reading of them in conjunction with the complex plots of the Beaumont and Fletcher plays, she also recounts the complicated history of the appearance of illustrations in early English playbooks. She notes their uneven evolution but importance to altering the ways that readers could interact with these texts, including the 1615 quarto of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

This capacious, thoughtful work allows readers to conceive of the possibilities of new scholarship in the history of early modern English playbooks. Because Bourne regards the members of the early English book trade with grace, she releases them from the burden of habitual faultiness. She initiates a truly fantastic way of approaching playbooks that prioritizes 'readerly access to these forms of theatricality rather than foreclosing the chance to experience their effects' (4). She gives her readers the ability to think beyond the punitive language of the New Bibliographers, who were aggressively searching for ur-texts that may never be uncovered. By reorienting the way that scholars can examine and read them, Bourne provides an opportunity for other scholars to understand early modern English playbooks as she does — as artifacts of many wonderfully complex typographical and social histories.