

variations, however, might well have been possible. Merback's book implicitly invites scholars of early theatre to question the presumption evident in modern restagings of medieval English Passion plays, that the thieves were crucified in the same manner as Jesus, and to delve more deeply into the ways in which crucifixions were staged, as well as painted, in continental Europe.

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Diane Purkiss (ed). *Three Tragedies by Renaissance Women*. Renaissance Dramatists. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998. Pp xlvi, 199.

*Three Tragedies by Renaissance Women*, edited by Diane Purkiss for Penguin's Renaissance Dramatists series, is a timely addition to the available texts of early modern women's plays. Jane Lumley's *The Tragedie of Iphigeneia*, Mary Sidney's *The Tragedie of Antonie*, and Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam* are here presented, for the first time, in old spelling and with a minimum of editorial interference, in keeping with the practice of this series. The plays have been meticulously edited from the three base texts (an authorial manuscript in the case of Lumley, dated to c 1553, the 1595 quarto of Sidney's play, and Cary's 1613 quarto) and are supported by a lengthy critical introduction, detailed information on dates, sources, and biographies, judicious commentary notes, and a complete textual apparatus. This is a rigorous, yet affordable, edition equally suited for use by students and all but the most specialist of scholars.

Although Sidney's and Cary's plays have already appeared in excellent separate scholarly editions and are available in the theatre-oriented anthology *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents* (London, 1996), this volume is the first to treat them, together with Lumley's *Iphigeneia*, as plays belonging to literary and social traditions that are fundamentally unrelated to the early modern professional theatre. In so doing, Purkiss argues that certain working assumptions in recent criticism about these plays are inappropriate and even misleading: that authorship is a form of personal self-expression, that patriarchy prevented these women from writing great literature, that women playwrights avoided the public theatre for fear of being branded whores, and that these writers worked in isolation. Purkiss' quarrel with such assumptions is not that they have failed to generate interesting and provocative readings of the plays, but that they have foreclosed inquiries which might lead us better to understand what it meant *in the Renaissance* – as opposed to the nineteenth

century, to which these assumptions more properly apply – for a woman to write drama. Taking the position that ‘the Renaissance understood literature and identity as more collaborative familial and social projects’ (xv), Purkiss discusses the work of each playwright in the context of her family’s position in social and political networks. Lumley’s translation is seen as a scholarly performance displaying her father’s prestige and bolstering the family’s dynastic ambitions; Sidney’s tragedy is part of a larger family interest in the politics of reform; and Cary’s play demonstrates her suitability to the noble rank into which she had recently married. In all three plays, the representation of marriage is less a reflection of the author’s own domestic relations than a metaphor for the political contests in which the families were involved. In showing that Renaissance conceptions of family, marriage, and identity can radically alter the way we approach these plays, Purkiss succeeds in restoring something of the ‘pastness’ of Lumley’s, Sidney’s, and Cary’s work, while at the same time revealing that the authors’ access to the social and technical means of authorship endowed them with a significant measure of political agency. There is much here to both inform and challenge the contemporary reader.

Restoring the ‘pastness’ of the plays is also the major aim of Purkiss’ editorial procedure: close adherence to the base texts and a preference for commentary rather than emendation. The decision to adopt old spelling is cogent: this is the only way to preserve the character of writing and publishing practices whose relationship to gender is as yet little understood. Purkiss is equally guarded in her emendations, introducing changes only where there are obvious scribal or printing errors, or where the original reading is likely to cause confusion (eg, turned letters, mistaken speech prefixes, omissions); all emendations are meticulously recorded in the textual apparatus. The ‘rougher versions’ (xlvi) thus produced will certainly make for more difficult reading, but they will in turn be more effective than any other editions currently available in confronting students with the historicity of textual form.

The value of Purkiss’ edition for more advanced scholarly purposes will depend upon one’s interest in the details of textual history. Purkiss makes no attempt to collate early versions of the plays, choosing instead to record only ‘interesting and important’ (xlv) differences. This is perhaps the most limiting aspect of the edition: Purkiss creates an idiosyncratic record of variants (even though these are extremely few), thus making it impossible to trace anything like a textual history for these works. This is particularly unfortunate in the case of Lumley’s play, surviving as it does in a unique authorial manuscript that is unlikely to be consulted now that a reputable edition is available.

Lumley's manuscript shows clear signs of having been corrected and revised, almost certainly by the author. Most of these changes are very minor, but a few are substantial enough to warrant mention even in a selective list of variants, as for example her having written 'childe' over 'daughter' on fol 86v (Purkiss, line 633). Similarly, the decision to use the 1595 edition of Sidney's *The Tragedie of Antonie*, described as the 'revised form' (175) of the 1592 version, without providing a full collation obscures the differences between first and second printing. Again, the variants are for most purposes exceedingly minor, but as Purkiss herself points out, 'these texts are new, and it will take time for us to discover the value of every comma they contain – or omit' (xlv).

Finally, for scholars interested in studying and teaching the tradition of closet drama, to which all three plays belong and whose formal and cultural differences from the stage drama Purkiss rightly emphasizes, the decision to expand stage directions is debatable. Entries and exits have been added and regularized for all three plays as a means of helping the reader visualize stage action. This procedure is certainly appropriate for the majority of readers who will approach the plays with a conception of drama as a performance genre, but in accommodating this view Purkiss undermines her own attempt to establish the fact that part of the 'pastness' of these plays is their belonging less to the theatre than to the culture of reading. The absence of stage directions in closet drama is surely the most important sign of this difference, speech itself representing in most instances a character's entry or exit, or indeed carrying the action of a particular scene. Homogenizing the plays so as to provide the kind of consistent visual representation of stage movement one expects of theatrical drama turns the reader's attention away from the techniques of reader-oriented dramatic writing: the nature and placement of internal stage directions, the function of act and scene divisions, or even the sporadic attention given to moving characters in and out of a visual field. In addition, imposing the same sense of theatrical realism onto all three plays makes it difficult to discern any differences among them in the representation of spatial and temporal movement. For instance, the regularized entries and exits in *Mariam*, even though they are marked as editorial interventions, conceal the shift into a distinctly theatrical mode of representation partway through the play: we have elaborated entries, designated mid-scene exits, and an unprecedented indicative direction in 'They fight' at D3v. Minor as they are, these elements of visual design agree with the general sense among critics that Cary's play is more stage-conscious than other closet dramas, certainly more so than Mary Sidney's *Antonie*, which employs classical conventions with perfect

consistency. In short, the particular qualities of closet drama or, equally, an author's sense of theatricalism – a major interest of current scholarship on these plays – emerge more clearly if the original stage directions are retained.

The concerns raised here about incomplete collations and regularized stage directions are meant to inform specialists in search of something like a definitive edition. Purkiss makes no claim to providing such texts, nor can she, considering the aims and format of the present series. While scholars of closet drama and textual history will want to continue consulting the original versions, all other readers will find this a reliable and sophisticated edition.

MARTA STRAZNICKY

John Southworth. *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998. Pp viii, 216. Illus.

John Southworth's study attempts to correct distorted popular images of the English court fool deriving 'from folklore, emblematic art ... and more recent stage traditions' (vii). Instead of gathering evidence about fools from fictional sources such as jestbooks, Southworth compiles 'facts' about actual, 'professional fools' who 'practised their particular skills at the English court', operating from the assumption that 'the smallest facts are inherently more interesting than large but unsupported generalities' (vii). Southworth's book is indeed filled with fascinating information about medieval and early modern court fools, and its copious illustrations provide a rich and useful visual sense of the fool's evolution throughout this period. Academics should be aware that the book is designed for a general readership; there is little archival work, some of the evidence is anecdotal, and interpretation of that evidence is sometimes lacking altogether. With this intended audience in mind, the book can be enjoyed by scholars seeking an introduction to the topic, by readers interested in the history of material culture, and perhaps particularly by theatrical professionals concerned with the tradition of the fool.

Given Southworth's own background as an actor, director, and historian of early entertainments, the book's strength on theatrical matters is perhaps no surprise. The arguments made about costuming in the penultimate chapter are among the most compelling. There, Southworth shows how English court fools have been incoherently costumed in modern productions, owing partly to confusion about the meaning of the word 'motley'. Common cultural assumptions about fools' costumes have failed to consider sartorial distinctions