

Editorial

This issue of *Early Theatre* presents three unusual pairings of overlapping ideas in articles we hope are of interest to our readers. All six articles deal with different ways of looking at place and authority, gender and age.

Brandon Alakas discusses the Coventry plays in the context of age as vital to an individual's social advancement. He draws on records in Coventry's two principal religious guilds – the Corpus Christi and Trinity guilds – to illustrate the point, particularly visible in the preferential treatment of elders in *The Weavers' Pageant* (1534), that any ambitious citizen's necessary progression through the guild hierarchy to attain the highest levels of political status within the city confirms the profound interconnectedness between these guilds and the civic government. Alakas asks how this basic age categorisation arouses disruptions to the authority of the city's aged elite, and how the elders deal with such challenges to their administrative control. Matt Kozusko looks at the place of the theatre in early modern London, shaking up accepted views of local and critical authority. He argues that modern critics, despite the availability of REED volumes, are often not engaged in re-examining available data, preferring instead to rest on a conjectural paradigm or heuristic that has hardened, over the past couple of decades, into a new historicist version of 'fact'. Critics have collapsed boundaries and important distinctions in London jurisdiction and geography in the interest of a unified critical narrative that characterizes the theatre as a culturally marginal phenomenon. Kozusko's article questions the 'marginal' model of popular theatre by revising the current critical notion of the term 'liberties' and by re-examining jurisdiction and city authority in early modern London.

Kristen McDermott and Brandon Centerwall also look at place, age, and authority, but from the point of view of the specialized performances at court and in children's theatres. McDermott explores the figure of the gossip in Jonson's two major works of 1608–9, *The Masque of Queens* and *Epicoene*. The masque seems to participate in James's paternal metaphors of statecraft and personal rule, asserting that the king's benevolent gaze lawfully penetrates even the traditionally privileged female space of the birthing-chamber. In *Epicoene*, the figure of the gossip comments more pointedly on the disruptive nature of

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female social discourse unmediated by the moralizing context of the paternal gaze. The play, performed by a children's company, both implicitly and explicitly debates the authority of age over youth, and how that authority might be reversed. Brandon Centerwall enlarges on the problem of youth and age in a children's company. He argues that, far from breaking, the highly successful Children of Paul's remade themselves into the highly successful adult acting company the Duke of York's Men, for the simple reason that their players had grown too old to be acceptable to audiences as 'children'. The new adult company featured the extraordinary Joseph Taylor – later to succeed Richard Burbage as the greatest player in England – and the multi-talented William Rowley, who acted as manager, playwright and comedian for the ensemble.

Rowley brings us to the last two articles in this issue, two notes on Rowley's *The Birth of Merlin*, an extraordinary play about which little has been written and which delves into similar questions of place, gender, age, and authority. Megan Isaac demonstrates how the play deconstructs 'good' and 'evil' within a plot that interweaves four representations of female sexual behavior, four kings, four sorcerers or magicians, and four magical contests. With this rich set of characters and opportunities, Rowley creates situations in which stereotypically virtuous choices (especially sexual and marital choices) have unexpectedly corrupt or disappointing consequences, in order to suggest antithetically that stereotypically wicked choices may similarly have surprising, which is to say rewarding, results. Monika Karpinska expands on Isaac to explore how female characters act out their sexuality within the confines of patriarchal expectation. By the end of the play all of the females are sequestered into confines of one type or another – whether they are enclosed by choice or by force depends on how they use, or refuse to use, their bodies. The mapping of these representations reveals the power of the female body both as a potential threat and as a potentially recuperative mode for an ailing patriarchy fixed on traditional displays of age and authority in medieval Albion.

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