

able resource — and an engaging read — for students and scholars of early modern women's drama. It covers a wealth of material and provides intriguing and informed discussions of the interconnections between dramatic entertainments and the space they inhabit. Nonetheless, the very attraction of this book is also its weakness. It simply covers too much, too fast. In doing so, it fails adequately to distinguish between the various dramatic genres and the individual factors that influence their relationship to space. It also uses a broad definition of women's drama without distinguishing between the types of contributions made by women, treating a male-authored play performed for a queen in the same way as it considers a female-authored household entertainment.

REINA GREEN

Christina M. Fitzgerald. *The Drama of Masculinity and Medieval English Guild Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Pp 228.

Christina Fitzgerald's engaged study is a provocative, sometimes polemical assertion of a new optic for considering the origins, motives, and meanings of English craft plays. Though the title announces a wider reach, the author wisely concentrates on the cycles from York and Chester. These two (especially Chester) create their own problems for the author thanks to the lateness of their records and manuscripts, but Fitzgerald's decision to limit her argument to them helps her achieve more traction in demonstrating their pervasive concern with questions of masculinity.

Even given its limited objects of study, this book is a hugely ambitious effort. It breaks new ground in its discussions of male homosocial communities and of the public character of masculinity's performance. A lingering question troubles: is masculinity, or work, the primary concern of the cycles? Which subject, more importantly, conditions the plays' decisions about characterization, their selection of episodes and of extra-biblical figures, their language and imagery? In Fitzgerald's determination to demonstrate the *maleness* of guild structures, life, and drama, it sometimes becomes unclear *which* men she is speaking about: ordinary artisans or the civic authorities, members themselves of wealthy merchant guilds? In the end, one can't always know

which social group determined and drove particular crucial aspects of guild activity, among them the drafting and policing of episodes for the annual performances. Yet the question matters because Fitzgerald's argument insists that the plays are both constituted by and constitutive of civic ideologies concerning identity (construed here always as masculine identity). Her version of guild history relies very heavily on the work of the admirable Heather Swanson, but Swanson's warnings about ambiguity in the meaning of documents and particularly about the 'illusion of structure' created in guild records may be her most important lesson. We need to proceed cautiously in these questions (as Fitzgerald herself cautions us at times but forgets at others) and to remember that most aspects of guild and play history are over-determined, adaptable over time, inconsistent in their logic. This scholar might be more persuasive if she were less categorical.

A discussion of masculinity begs the question of female participation in guild and play. The author sharply refuses any possibility of female involvement in play or indeed in guild. She insists, for example, that the 'world of work' was 'limited to men'. But she acknowledges well-documented examples of women deriving guild membership (rarely) and guild connection (rather more often, through their husbands); these instances give good reason to contemplate some female participation in both guild and play. Major scholars through the years (Bevington, Davidson, and Orgel, to name three) have argued for women's participation as actors. At the least, one would welcome the author's rebuttal of their claims. What of Chester's extrabiblical Tapster, in no way traditional to the Harrowing of Hell episode? What of the two *mulier* figures in Chester's *Slaughter of the Innocents*? What of Marian episodes throughout the cycles? Our dependence on extant guild documents, often recorded late in or after the era of the plays' performance history, may significantly skew our impression of women's participation. The Europe-wide economic depression of the last thirty-plus years of the fifteenth century caused significant contraction in guild membership and functions and redistributions of dramatic responsibilities. Women, whose connections to guild were always secondary, saw their participation in guild efforts of all kinds reduced by the crisis. Hence, relying on late evidence will inevitably create the impression that women had very little to do with guild life, but it seems that such was not always the case. The plays continued to change throughout their long histories. In looking for what she calls 'consistency' across time, Fitzgerald may elide change and circumstance.

This is a brave work, nonetheless. Fitzgerald tackles not only the two-century history of two complicated cycles but that of English guilds and town life. She takes on big issues chapter after chapter, and always obliges the reader to reconsider and reconfigure old notions as she works through new readings. In a matter of a few paragraphs she addresses and rightly dismisses from her argument Caroline Bynum's assertion of the femininity of Christ, persuasively finding him instead the figure of an ideal, stoical, and laconic model of self-sacrifice in these plays. Fitzgerald finds solid and convincing ground when she reads closely, as she does in her final chapter on 'The Solitary Christ and Masculinity'. In fact, one might encourage her to provide more close readings and less ambitious situating, since it is almost impossible to distill so much history without seeming a little tendentious. When she announces in the introduction that her approach is 'perhaps as much ethnographic as it is literary and historical' and declares a goal of creating a 'thick description' of the plays and their circumstances, it's hard not to feel that she has taken on too much. But the energy and seriousness of her effort matter, as often do their results.

What this good work provides in part is an overview of a vast field: the whole question of guild organization and life seen through the lens of masculinity. From an uneven beginning Fitzgerald moves strongly to the heart of her effort, offering fresh and vibrant readings of particular issues in the York and Chester constructions of masculinity. At her best — comparing the step-fatherhood of York's Joseph to the duties a master owed an apprentice, for example — she accomplishes what the best criticism does: she sends us back in our minds and books to the actual literature, to the specificities of the text, to the words themselves. Her bold and provocative work takes on more than any single study could ever fully manage. But it has the great virtue of always asking us to work harder to understand the complicated relation of a vanished world to its dramatic cycles, the products of its crafts. She persuades us that the discussion of masculinity is one of the main preoccupations of the civic drama of York and Chester and that it shapes civic life in important ways. Her work promises to keep this issue before scholars and to inform their readings of English civic cycles for years to come. Quite a debut.

ANNE HIGGINS