

M.A. Katritzky. *Women, Medicine and Theatre, 1500–1750: Literary Mountebanks and Performing Quacks. Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama.* Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007. Pp. xvi, 367 + 59 illus.

Early modern European scholars are privileged to have this very rich archive charting the relatively unknown medical and theatrical activities of female mountebanks and actresses across major European cities and countries (most notably England, Italy, the Low Countries, and Germany). Bringing together important primary written and pictorial materials, the enormous scope of Katritzky's study complements and intersects with her recent publication, *The Art of Commedia: A Study in the Commedia dell'Arte 1560–1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records* (Rodopi, 2006). *Women, Medicine and Theatre* focuses on documenting the extensive public presence of anonymous quack and mountebank wives and connecting them, however peripherally, to the appearance of actresses on the Italian and later German stages. Katritzky organizes her very diverse materials around readings of copious historical documents and literary and pictorial examples. While her comparative methodology risks making too many generalizations about the position of women in European society over more than two centuries, it provides a wealth of evidence that throws light on the presence of working women in the marketplace and as such belies the familiar theory of the increased exclusion of women from public spaces during this time.¹ My summary aims to give a sense of the synchronic arrangement of most of the information covered in the different sections. It will also point to ways in which the book's parts can be read diachronically to answer the larger questions about the progressive professionalization of female mountebank activities and their links to female theatrical representation around which Katritzky's study is organized.

Part one provides evidence of the importance of quack performers on the religious stage. The presence of female performers in religious theatre festivals and convent theatre, to which Raber's use of female performers in the 1514 Bozen Passion attests, builds the precedent for the later appearance of the professional actress. Katritzky makes an impressive case from the evidence of temple paintings for the use of scenic cluster staging in Passion plays as well as for the appearance of actresses in the prototypical 'merchant scene' featuring the quack doctor, wife, and servant.

Part two considers comparative mountebank activities interpreted through extensive visual and written source materials. This archive paints a fascinating picture of 'a dazzling variety of spectacle' (115) engaged in by moun-

tebanks who linked their medical, dental and pharmaceutical services with the marketing of all manner of theatrical and bizarre side-show practices. Such evidence advances Katritzky's important thesis of the vital role taken by women performers on the mountebank stage as commercial attractions and as female members of the 'classic stage trio of master, servant, and innamorata' (84) which became central to the commedia dell'arte scenario.

Part three looks at the commercial activities of travelling mountebanks with an emphasis on their medical rather than theatrical services, showing that their folk remedies and miraculous cures ran into increasing opposition from the medical profession. While Katritzky concedes the much lower profile accorded to women as the lesser members of quack healer couples, she searches out several important historical and literary examples to prove their existence and specializations in treating women's health issues.

Part four provides evidence of the presence of itinerant female tooth-drawers and cites the realistic overtones of Johann Kuhnau's unique literary depiction of a female quack's sales pitch as indicative of real marketplace activity. A woodcut depicting a unique dramatic scene between a female tooth-drawer and famous actor Agnan Sarat also raises questions about the relationship between stage representations and offstage life.

Part five documents the important names and events marking the historic rise of the early innamoratas as they become central players in the commedia dell'arte. Katritzky's strong case for their mountebank connections cites Thomas II Platter's valuable description of Zan Bragetta's mixed-gender troupe (1598) with helpful pictorial documentation. I am somewhat puzzled by her comment that successful actresses' attempts to distance themselves from their mountebank competitors paradoxically ensured their entry into the acting profession (219), since it strikes me as presuming too much on some kind of elusive female solidarity. It also works against her thesis about the increasing professionalization of acting in this period. On the other hand, vital information about the overlap between the commedia dell'arte and charlatan activity is provided by Katritzky's citation of Hippolytus Guarinonius's 1610 medical treatise, which contains important textual descriptions of *lazzi*. Finally, noting that the practice of cross-dressing both liberated female performers and brought on severe anti-theatrical debates, Katritzky comments on Henrietta Maria's importing of these European practices into England after 1626 as significant factors in the closing of the theatres there in 1642.

Part six cites the evidence surrounding the 1660 introduction of actresses onto the English stage but focuses mainly on documenting the lesser-known

phenomenon of English actresses performing in English professional troupes on the continent from the 1650s. In order to establish a continuous, pre-1650 presence of women in the English touring companies, moreover, Katritzky explores documents establishing their offstage support of their actor husbands. Claiming that secular German theatre owed its existence to touring English comedians (264), she establishes this legacy by referencing a 1683 account by Johann Beer of a slapstick performance featuring the stock English fool, Pickelhering, his wife, and her lover.

For its sheer wealth of information, often presented in exuberant anecdotal form, this study deserves to be well received. For its contribution to our knowledge of early actresses and their medical mountebank counterparts it is indispensable and should encourage many other scholars to pursue the questions it raises.

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Notes

- 1 Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago, 1984), 47, 10–12. Kelly's theories have undergone considerable revision as explorations of the early modern period's understandings of public and private space have revealed that definitions of such spaces were in flux. An interesting article by Diane Willen, 'Women in the Public Space in Early Modern England: The Case of the Urban Working Poor', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19.4 (1988), 559–575, argues that the evidence that women from the working poor were employed in the public sphere suggests that a strict dichotomy between domestic and public did not apply in the era modern era. Concepts of the official public sphere are generally associated with the rise of bourgeois ideology towards the end of this period. The question of the trend to professionalization that Katritzky raises could usefully be explored with relation to the rise of the bourgeoisie.