

**Theodore K. Lerud.** *Memory, Images, and the English Corpus Christi Drama*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Pp xvi, 181.

Theodore K. Lerud bases his argument in *Memory, Images, and the English Corpus Christi Drama* on the claim that among four key constituents of Corpus Christi drama — images, violence, comedy, and place — scholars have overlooked ‘place’ within the cycle plays as an important dramatic implement for domesticizing spiritual teaching and political ideology. Lerud contextualizes his study of place and its specificity within the theoretical framework of medieval memory theory. He examines Latin philosophical works, surviving playtexts, and civil records in order to address such questions as: what was the medieval understanding of image production? What was the role of the fixed backdrop, or *locus*, in the staging of plays? And how did shifting political concerns during the Reformation affect the spatiality of cycle drama?

To answer these questions, Lerud reminds us that in the middle ages drama was considered a ‘quick’ image (4) and that ‘images form[ed] the basis of all judgment or understanding’ (37). The era considered these images pedagogically effective when rendered colorful and striking and set against an envisioned arrangement of fixed and ordered locales. Cycle drama, Lerud argues, enacted both of these criteria for mnemonically sound images by emphasizing the violence of the passion and, crucially, by integrating the town’s physical landmarks, such as entrances or squares, into the plays themselves (139). More than simply making advantageous use of space, the appropriation of town objects as props allowed the plays’ events to be ‘reseen’ by medieval audiences within a proximate, familiar setting (71), dramatically collapsing the biblical past with the medieval present. Because the cycle play was thus inherently yoked to civic identity and religious instruction, sixteenth-century Reformists adopted it as an important tool for religious restructuring, which explains the survival of cycle drama into the Reformation. Reformists made further use of the spaces within the town to realign the biblical past with a *new* biblical present, a point Lerud explores via three compelling examples from the Chester play at the end of the book.

Lerud organizes his book into a short introduction followed by ten chapters; he provides no definite conclusion. After arguing in chapter one that the medieval understanding of artificial memory was predicated on both ordered objects and violent images (as evinced by the works of Cicero’s *De Oratore*, Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, the anonymous *Rhetoric ad Herennium*, and Thomas Bradwardine’s fourteenth-century treatise ‘De Memoria Artificiale’),

Lerud assesses views of the image and the theatre held by St Augustine, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas in chapters two to four. His discussion of Aquinas in particular bolsters his argument that human cognition and understanding of God in the middle ages was predicated on images and memory. Chapter five also proves the importance of imagery to medieval learning by outlining Wycliffite objections to dramatic images during the tumultuous climate of the Reformation.

Chapters six through ten segue from assessing medieval memory theory in relation to images into providing a more specific historio-cultural context for the medieval Corpus Christi plays. In chapter six Lerud draws parallels between manuscript illuminations and dramatic productions before persuasively highlighting the primacy of the backdrop in medieval manuscript illuminations. He proposes that 'just as a consistent window or archway could set off the miniatures in a Book of Hours ..., contributing to the reader's memory, so a prominent door, archway, or the abbey or minster gates could frame a set of consistently performed pageants' (72). Chapter six thus provides the crux of Lerud's argument: that locale and pageant were intrinsically connected through the use of fixed landmarks as stage-props which domesticated the biblical message to citizens of medieval towns. In chapter seven, Lerud presents convincing examples from the York play of the so-called 'locational symbolism' (139) of the pageants. He proposes, for example, that the 'York Entry [*Into Jerusalem*]' takes on more significance to viewers if it is performed in the actual entry into town' (102). As he explains in this chapter, Lerud defies the common scholarly position that full cycles were staged at each station within a town; rather, his position implies that particular pageants were adapted to specific stations in the cycle plays.

After establishing his claim that civic landmarks played an important role in the mnemonic functioning of medieval drama, in chapter eight Lerud moves from York into sixteenth-century, Reformation-plagued Chester. By examining various political movements during this time as well as the Chester Banns and Newhall's Proclamation, Lerud contends that Corpus Christi drama was purposefully incorporated into, rather than divided from, the protestant climate. While chapters eight and nine contain a useful discussion of Reformist alterations to both the political landscape and the pageants themselves, it is chapter ten which best reinforces Lerud's main argument by examining the performance conditions for the Chester cycle, focusing on exemplary site-specific references within three pageants (*Christ at the House of Simon Leper*, *The Trial and Flagellation of Christ*, and the *Harrowing of Hell*).

He makes the compelling argument that the see of the new bishop in York, which replaced the old cathedral of St Werburgh, supplied the locale for the Chester *Harrowing*, as the pageant apparently refers to the expulsion of the abbot of St Werburgh: “no longer in this see / here shall thou not sit” ([*Harrowing*] 171–2)’ (145).

Though the logic of Lerud’s main argument flows very well, his book contains a few structural deficiencies that distract the reader from its content. Examples of such formal problems include the nearly word-for-word repetition of the first paragraph of chapter five from page four of the introduction, the use of the numerical character for three in place of yogh, and the inconsistent translation to English of Latin source texts (see, for instance, 66–7). Though Lerud displays an impressive understanding of the works of St Augustine and Aristotle, sections on these authors leave one waiting for a return to the more tangible discussion on backdrop and locale, and the author might have referred back to these sections at a later point in order more effectively to integrate his argument. This lack of structural unity forces the reader to work too hard at forging connections, a problem which might have been solved with a strong conclusion.

In terms of content, even though Lerud wishes primarily to examine the significance of stable props in town spaces he dismisses too entirely the cultural significance of the *platea*. While other scholars argue that the *platea* was a distinctive, dynamic feature of cycle plays that could encourage personalized audience response, Lerud tersely states that ‘it may simply be that the term, like *locus*, is a technical term, used to designate the frame or background of the image’ (68). By deemphasizing the *platea* in order to highlight the object of his study, Lerud sidesteps an important avenue: one that might in fact have advanced his thesis. By contrasting the inclusive domain of the *platea* against the steady backdrop of the *locus*, Lerud could have reconstructed possible audience response to the plays, thereby gaining a better sense of the effect of fixed backdrops upon cultural and civic memory.

A more direct, albeit speculative, treatment of audience response could also have strengthened the final section of the book, which deals with the Chester play. Lerud commends the cycle play for its ability to ‘successfully negotiate and accommodate prevailing ideological shifts’ (132) but also mentions that viewers were instructed to refrain from vocal objections to the Reformist alterations. This evidence suggests that the audience might have proved resistant to dramatic changes: an issue Lerud leaves unaddressed. Did protestant innovations to the landmarks employed by the plays successfully

garner Reformist sympathies or did the audience continue to harbor bitterness against the remodeling of a civil tradition? Both of these options could be used to support Lerud's argument in favor of the intrinsic value of the cycle plays to civic identity.

Despite these minor reservations regarding the structure and breadth of this work, I maintain that Lerud's book represents a valuable contribution to a growing theoretical concern with the role of place in socio-cultural identity. Like those of all scholars of the performance conditions of medieval drama, his conclusions tend toward the conjectural. Still, he presents a fresh, lively approach to the York and Chester cycles, encouraging us to creatively re-visit medieval staging by linking seemingly inconsequential textual references with particular civil locales — and consequently with political and religious ideologies. The issues that could have benefited from further expansion here, such as the role of the *platea* and viewer receptions of Reformist alterations in the Chester cycle, will provide useful avenues of research for future scholars of medieval drama.

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**Thomas Rist. *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate. 2008. Pp ix, 165.**

Thomas Rist's first book, *Shakespeare's Romances and the Politics of Counter-Reformation* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), was an incisive contribution to what was then the relatively new fashion for reading Shakespeare in the light of the echoes and traces of post-Reformation Catholicism in England. His new study of revenge tragedy intensifies that interest. It brings both the considerable strengths and the weaknesses of the first book into play to produce a provocative study with a sharply defined thesis that should interest any scholar of the period's dramatic and theological currents.

Rist's book focuses mainly on *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Atheist's Tragedy*, *The White Devil*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*. His central argument is that Jacobean revenge tragedy is not the anti-Catholic genre he tells us (not entirely convincingly) most previous critics have claimed. In fact, he argues, its persis-