

Gabriel Heaton. *Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments From George Gascoigne to Ben Jonson*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Pp 305.

In *Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments*, Gabriel Heaton investigates more thoroughly than any previous author how and why royal entertainment texts were produced and read. The book offers a wealth of research on the surviving material texts of a wide range of Elizabethan and Jacobean forms: country-house entertainments, tilts, royal entries, court masques, and entertainments by livery companies. Although Heaton begins to draw interesting conclusions about authorship and the book trade, his book's most valuable contribution is its careful description of what survives in the archives. This immensely well-researched study, which provides a good deal of new material, is a must-read for anyone interested in early modern court festival.

Heaton's introduction clearly states his methodology: he will examine the surviving entertainment texts, especially manuscripts, and consider how they circulated so he can draw conclusions about the entertainments and their culture. Following the examples of such scholars as David Bergeron and Curtis Bright, Heaton insists that entertainment texts, like the performances they record, did not serve simply as royal propaganda. The crown hardly ever disseminated these texts; instead, publishers, authors, and hosts circulated them in pursuit of various agendas. He proposes that the texts served both as historical records and as literary works. Because they were produced collaboratively they reveal traces of the relationships between writers and the hosts who commissioned them.

Heaton divides the book into two parts, Elizabethan and Jacobean, and a helpful three-page bridge between them offers succinct arguments about continuity and change between the reigns. The first three chapters focus on Elizabethan pageantry. The first case study, Sir Henry Lee's 1575 entertainment at Woodstock, introduces readers to the interpersonal politics such pageants enact. Heaton summarizes recent criticism on the entertainment and reconstructs the order of events during its performance, yet his own take on the entertainment's specific politics could be clearer. He then turns to the presentation manuscript George Gascoigne prepared for Elizabeth and argues that this text radically reorients the entertainment to advertise Gascoigne as suitable for government service. Chapter two offers a fine introduction to the Elizabethan tilt and to surviving records of tournaments. Heaton persuasively claims that tiltyard speeches were less likely to be printed than other entertainments because they were designed for a select few insiders. His discussion

of the limited success of Sir Henry Lee's tilting leads to a provocative argument that entertainments may have helped individuals such as Gascoigne seek increased favor but were 'not an effective means of intervening in the political process' (65). When he analyzes printed pamphlets and manuscript separates of Elizabethan entertainments more broadly in chapter three, Heaton finds a shift from print publication to manuscript circulation in the last decade of the reign. His excellent analysis of the many texts of and correspondence about the Harefield entertainment (1602) reconstructs its performance, political purposes, and reception. This discussion shows Heaton at his best.

Chapters four, five, and six turn to the Jacobean period and focus especially on Ben Jonson's contributions to Stuart pageantry. Chapter four pieces together evidence of a neglected pageant: the 1607 Merchant Taylors' entertainment, which the London livery company of Merchant Taylors hired Jonson to write for King James. Heaton carefully examines the existing evidence from state papers, correspondence, account books, court records, and manuscripts of song lyrics for the entertainment. The chapter ends with a fascinating consideration of the reasons why this particular entertainment did not circulate widely, in contrast to the Elizabethan pamphlets and manuscripts in the previous chapter. The fifth chapter analyzes the 1607 entertainment at Theobalds, with some discussion of the Elizabethan entertainments performed there as well. In the surviving texts of the 1607 entertainment Heaton finds evidence of tension between Jonson and his commissioning host, Robert Cecil. To explain the variants in print and manuscript he argues that the printed text represents Jonson's authorial version while the manuscripts show Cecil's revisions for performance. In chapter six Heaton argues that Jonson gave the court masque significance not only as a type of court performance but also as a literary genre. The book ends with an excellent conclusion, entitled 'Selling Entertainments', that traces the provenance of Elizabethan entertainment pamphlets. Heaton argues that although early collectors seem to have identified them as historical records these books eventually became valuable more for their literary associations than for their use as documentary sources.

In each of these chapters Heaton explains what survives in the archives and meticulously examines the materiality of each text to draw meaning from it. He finds an incredible amount of evidence in every one of the material texts and is able to synthesize an enormous quantity of archival evidence into clear descriptions and narratives. Despite massive research, the book is rarely tedious. For these reasons, *Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments* offers an exemplary method for others venturing into the archives. It has especially

helpful footnotes that direct readers to primary and secondary sources, though it could function even more effectively as a resource for other scholars if it provided an appendix or list of the texts it examines. Heaton makes several references to a set number of entertainment texts from which he works, and although he finally lists Elizabethan pamphlets in a footnote in the conclusion he never specifies the full group of pageantry texts from which he draws conclusions. When he says there are sixty surviving pamphlet copies and sixteen manuscript separates (90), I want to know: What are they? What counts as an entertainment?

In testament to the book's overall success, my minor criticisms simply ask for more. Although Heaton's love of detail is contagious, readers might occasionally get bogged down in the details and hope, as I sometimes did, for more of the cultural analysis the book promises at the beginning. The book's conclusions sometimes seem less groundbreaking than its research, and it spends so much time on individual examples that there is little room to draw larger conclusions. Heaton's choice to survey a variety of forms and two time periods gives his readers a useful overview of entertainment texts in the period and certainly shows his range and skill, but it also limits the detailed analysis he can offer. Although he emphasizes that entertainments were collaborative enterprises he focuses on a select few men: Gascoigne, Lee, and Jonson. Of course, one book cannot do it all, and Heaton acknowledges that much work remains to be done as he invites future scholarship.

This ambitious and well-executed study represents the cutting-edge of entertainment research. It testifies to Heaton's expertise in the field and works as a teaser for the forthcoming Nichols project, for which Heaton edited several entertainment texts. It also serves as a nice companion piece to the recent essay collection *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Elizabeth I* (Oxford University Press, 2007). In footnotes Heaton often references personal communication with scholars whose work has not yet been published. Although scholarly interest in court festival is certainly not novel, this recent and forthcoming work represents a new wave in entertainment scholarship: a reexamination of the texts and performance history of pageantry. These projects are just a start — a promising start — to uncovering the rich possibilities of this type of drama. As *Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments* reveals, the present is an exciting time indeed for the study of early modern pageantry.

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