

Natasha Korda. *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Pp 334.

In *Labors Lost*, Natasha Korda's bold thesis is that the early modern stage could not have existed without women's work. From moneylenders to tiring women and from oyster wives to the 'gathering' women who collected entrance fees, the theatre depended on and was shaped by women's efforts to survive and even prosper in the early modern economy. By 'economy' Korda means especially the informal, less regulated economy outside the structures of the livery companies: an economy in which women flourished but which has proved — until now — extremely difficult to track down. As a result of impressive archival work, readings of plays and ballads, and reinterpretations of familiar documents, Korda shows us that the theatre relied on the work of 'spanglers' to provide the necessary glitz for costumes as well as on the work with linen of the Huguenot family, the Mountjoys, with whom Shakespeare lodged and who may well have provided Globe actors with the requisite ruffs and fashionable head-attires that helped to draw their audience. Korda also highlights evidence of women who kept actors afloat with loans or readied their costumes, as well as women who owned or leased inns that served as playhouses.

As fascinating as these revelations are, here as in *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies* (Philadelphia, 2002) Korda goes beyond reconstructing women's economic lives in everyday London. She shows how the theatre reacted to working women's activities with representations of labouring women that featured versions of their vocabularies and voices as well as the material objects that they produced. In demonstrating the reciprocal relationship between women's work and performance, including theatrical genres beyond the urban comedy, Korda is arguing for the importance of women's labour to the theatre as a means to question the paradigm of the all-male stage.

Korda begins chapter one, 'Labors Lost', with an incisive analysis of the existing scholarship on women as entertainers, actors, playwrights, producers, and patrons outside commercial theatre, juxtaposed with a consideration of scholarly work on the absence of women from the stage. Her goal, which she attains in due course, is to steer somewhere between these two poles in order to show how women's economic activities and production appear on stage in the early modern period. Even if women were not allowed to be commercial actors, neither they nor audience members could have ignored the steady presence of women like Philip Henslowe's niece, Mary, who was

apprenticed to learn embroidery and lacemaking; or like 'Joyce ffrolick', who was well paid to paint scenery; or like Goody Watson, who was involved in the theatre's pawn business (itself a source for costumes through the trade in second hand clothing). Although women who loaned their financial assets were often figured as selling their physical assets, without these active women the show could not have gone on.

Chapter two, 'Dame Usury', traces the rise of the woman money-lender and account-keeper in the wake of the usury statute of 1571, which allowed English subjects to charge up to ten percent interest. Widows charged interest, as did women with marriage portions. They kept track of what was owed them with emergent skills in accounting and arithmetic. Korda uses this contextual information to examine how reading Portia as a money-lender/accountant diminishes the supposed distance in *The Merchant of Venice* between Belmont, land of pleasure and 'largesse' (71), and Venice, the supposed capitol of capital. The language of accounting with which Shakespeare infuses Portia relies on the vocabulary surrounding the figure of the woman money-lender, including that of the cipher, which in turn helps to explain why Portia is so fixated on precision in the trial scene. Using northern European images in the tradition of Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*, Korda demonstrates how judgment and the lending of capital combine in the iconographic tradition that includes Portia's characterization.

Chapter three, 'Foes and Rebato', focuses on how immigrants (called 'aliens') from the Netherlands in particular brought fashions to England that continue to define the age, including the linen ruff and the wired, circular collar trimmed with lace called a 'rebato'. In order to trace the connections between aliens and the theatre, Korda successfully undertakes what she calls a 'microanalysis of the networks of commerce that brought immigrant artisans into contact with theater people' (100). She uses this microanalysis, which includes a detailed database of women and their textile skills, in order to demonstrate ways in which these alien women shaped the theatre by participating in the development of the luxury fashions so central to its spectacle, its language, and its narratives. In this chapter Korda traces Shakespeare's relations with the Mountjoy family, whose expertise in linen is perhaps visible in the First Folio's portrait of the playwright, which includes a rebato. In making her argument about the centrality of women in staging the latest luxury fashions, Korda not only considers the evidence in conduct books and prose tracts but also in a variety of plays including Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* and *Epicoene*, George Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher*, and Richard

Brathwaite's *Whimzies; or, A New Cast of Characters* as well as Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

'Cries and Oysterwives', Korda's chapter four, extends Bruce Smith's groundbreaking discussion of orality in the theatre and Gina Bloom's discussion of the masculine voice to include a consideration of the cries of female vendors, who according to the excavated evidence sold not just pears, apples, and hazelnuts in Southwark's theatres but also more exotic foods (including shellfish — the oysters of the oysterwives' call — and almonds, cherries, and similar dainties). Korda considers how the inarticulate, noisy cries of such women, represented in both the print and antiquarian traditions, might have influenced the soundscape of Ophelia's madness or the Bedlam scene at the end of Dekker and Middleton's *The Honest Whore, Part One*. Playwrights used the contrast between female vendors' inarticulate cries and their own disciplined vocal registers as part of the commercial stage's gendered quest for legitimacy, as when Hamlet's advice to the players contrasts actors speaking lines with the town crier even as he approaches the town crier's exaggerated movements and articulation.

Korda's final chapter, 'False Wares', continues her discussion of the theatre's quest for legitimacy and masculine authority by considering the ritualized destruction of the wares that women produced for market outside of approved workshops. In her 'Epilogue', Korda reveals how she came to this topic and how she saw it through during years in the archives together with other research. She concludes with a possibility that she holds out with tongs: that during the Restoration professional actresses may in part have found their way onstage because of women's work in the vicinity of the theatres. After all, Nell Gwyn herself supposedly began working in the theatre as an orange vendor.

On the whole, *Labors Lost* is a highly successful book. It is an astonishing achievement in view of the difficulties involved in finding such a wealth of evidence of women's economic activities in London's and the Liberties' informal economies. It contains an unprecedented compendium of information about historical women and their economic roles, as well as in-depth studies of several occupations that women held in early modern England. Korda uses her numerous illustrations, most of which I've never seen, to great effect as textual evidence. I rather wish that in chapter two, which compares the images of cipher and accounting associated with Portia to similar language in the sonnets, Korda had provided the relevant sonnets in notes or

within the text itself and that the discussion had been less telescoped and easier to follow. Throughout the book there are a few 'blind quotes', quotations that appear in the text without immediate attribution, which force the reader to turn to the notes to find key sources informing Korda's argument. These are, however, the most minor of quibbles about a book of great importance to the economic history of women, to theatre history, and to early modern studies. Thanks to Natasha Korda's evocative picture of women's labour, we can now more fully imagine women's contributions to the theatre and to the economy at large.

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Robert Mullally. *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval Dance.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011. Pp xvi, 148.

In *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval Dance*, Robert Mullally brings together a wealth of fragmentary evidence about 'the earliest western European dance that can be performed with any degree of certainty' (91). The work is comprised of eleven short chapters on the history and etymology of the word 'carole' and related terms, on choreographic theories and descriptions, on lyrics and music, on iconography and images, and on the differences between these in French, Italian, and Middle English usage. Mullally supports his iconographic readings with several colour plates, and appendices provide musical examples, lyrics, and additional bibliographic information.

Mullally begins his study of the carole at the end, discussing the waning of the dance's popularity by the beginning of the fifteenth century as the *basse danse* gained dominance. He notes isolated references to the carole in fifteenth-century copies of the *Roman de la Rose* and in contemporary literary works, observing that the carole gained a second life in early modern dictionaries, in nineteenth-century lexicographical studies, and in etymological works up to the present day. He also gives a brief historiography of past work on the carole's choreographic, musical, and iconographic components. In the second and third chapters, he provides a detailed study of the term's origins and etymology.

The two chapters that focus on the carole's choreography and performance practices will be of particular interest to scholars of early theatre. Mullally