

be argued to have had an important influence on the King's Men without directly being involved with productions onstage.

Astington presents an artistic community active within London's trade guilds and using their systems of apprenticeship. The book offers a complex, lively, absorbing sense of the acting profession, its 'art' and social networks. At the end, perhaps in case we get too caught up in the romance of the early modern acting troupe, Astington reminds us 'that what they did was work, and exacting, difficult, and not entirely predictable work' (186). To emphasize the actor's work and its product, Astington quotes from Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*: 'Think ye see / The very persons of our noble story / As they were living' (187). In this vein, Astington provides a helpful 'Appendix of Principal Actors 1558–1660' that offers an excellent resource for those seeking deeper, detailed information. His work is suitable for advanced undergraduates and graduate students upwards, since the writing assumes core knowledge of early modern drama and theatre practice.

Janette Dillon. *Shakespeare and the Staging of English History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp 160.

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Shakespeare and the Staging of English History is the latest volume from the innovative 'Oxford Shakespeare Topics' published by the Oxford University Press, a series which brings together some of the most perspicacious voices in contemporary Shakespearean scholarship. In this slim though detailed analysis, Janette Dillon 'encourage[s] sustained attention to stage directions and stage pictures' (1), approaching the very practical topic of how Shakespeare staged his history plays. In doing so, she reiterates an easily forgotten though vital point regarding Shakespeare's theatrical canon: that it is first and foremost dramaturgical and written for the popular stage. While many readers are understandably drawn to the early modern playwright's superlative skill in poetry and rhetoric, Dillon shows that Shakespeare also cultivated a supreme sensitivity to the dynamics of performativity and staging from very early on in his career as a playwright (all

of the texts examined here, with the notable exception of *Henry VIII*, were composed before 1600).

An ostensible hurdle for analyses of the conventions and practicalities of Shakespeare's theatrical staging, especially in its own time, is the seeming lack of stage directions. *Shakespeare and the Staging of History* acknowledges this quandary (such as it is) and its implications for 'accurate' analysis from the outset: 'This is a book which will encourage sustained attention to stage directions and stage pictures, which means that words like "probably" will figure frequently, since we have limited evidence of the detail of early modern productions' (1). As Dillon's study amply shows, however, stage direction is not limited to the playwright's own 'lines' but can be expressed through the words of the characters themselves.

Following a brief introduction, Dillon opens her study with an analysis of the type of vista that opens the Shakespearean canon – the pageant or procession, as famously delineated in the first scene of *1 Henry VI*. The author shows how the spatial configurations of such staged events were imbued with especial significance in the context of the rigid hierarchy of the monarchical court or royal entourage that frequently featured in the history plays. Acknowledging Bruce Smith's observation that 'to introduce a pageant into the middle of a play is to confront actors and audience alike with an aesthetic challenge' (15), Dillon emphasizes the alienating devices Shakespeare the dramatist utilizes in many such settings. In *Henry VIII*, for example, Shakespeare and his collaborator John Fletcher employ third-person reportage and dumb shows to 'distance' the audience from the event itself. Thus distanced, the audience is able, or even challenged, to observe the event and its conventions, pomp, ceremony, and participants 'critically' (23).

Chapters two and three explore spatial configuration and orientation along different lines, examining what the author calls the Shakespearean 'stage picture'. That picture is divided into two subcategories: the horizontal axis and the vertical axis. Foregrounding the 'extent to which Elizabethan actors and audiences expected the stage routinely to communicate through fairly emphatic visual signs' (30), Dillon explores the construction of the 'whole picture' of the scene and its intended function. The horizontal ordering of the actors onstage finds its basis, according to the author, in Tudor humanist theories of equilibrium and balance, as well as in the ancient notion that right had an inherent superiority over left (a belief that stretched back to Biblical scripture). While the speechifying of Henry VI in act three, scene one of *3 Henry VI* demonstrates the impact on gendered spatial relations of the

right/left hierarchy, Dillon finds a key example representing the importance of balance in Shakespeare's histories put forward in *Richard III*.

As in the first chapter, Dillon's thesis here is buttressed by a close study of a pageant or procession. In this case, however, the procession is of ghosts, as the eponymous villain encounters in a dream the apparitions of the victims of his Machiavellian schemes. The balance of the stage set-up in this scene – 'two factions', notes Dillon, 'occupy separate sides of the stage' (34) – further reinforces the oppositional character of good and evil that will collide in the forthcoming Battle of Bosworth. She argues that 'the positioning of Richard and Richmond on the two sides of the stage confirms the imagined distance between the two camps and the oppositional placing of the two figures, who have by now become respectively demonized and idealized as villain and hero' (34). This staging not only foregrounds the moral binary of the two protagonists, but also foreshadows the eventual outcome of the battle. Insightfully, Dillon parallels *Richard III's* dream sequence with traditional morality plays, and indeed with Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, stressing the fact that although it is in essence a basic composition the oppositional binary remains a powerful dramaturgical device in theatrical staging. Revealing Shakespeare's awareness of theatrical convention and his theatrical predecessors, such paralleling again reiterates the playwright's craft as a dramatist and his sensitivity not just to the words spoken but also to the movements, composition, and coordination of the objects (sentient or otherwise) onstage.

A striking feature of Dillon's study is her innovative application of seemingly incongruous terms and nomenclature to early modern theatrical production. A hazardous approach, this innovation nonetheless yields some profound insights into the practicalities of drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and serves to emphasize Dillon's sensitivity to theatrical staging. One instance of this is chapter seven, which is entitled 'Close-ups'. As the author rightly notes, "Close-up" is a term from film, describing the work of a camera in focusing in at close range, often on a face, so that the bigger picture is removed' (82), and this term is potentially anachronistic in the context of theatre. 'In theatre', Dillon observes 'very importantly, the bigger picture never disappears. It is always present on stage, and an audience never loses the option to look at the whole stage' (83). Thus, the dramatist in one sense lacks the capabilities of the filmmaker and has to concede some representational agency to the whims of the audience. Nevertheless, the playwright does have one technique approximating the close-up:

the soliloquy. Shakespeare uses this technique most powerfully in perhaps his greatest history play, *Richard III*. Here, Dillon argues, the drama's narrative and Richard's characterization are both shaped by such 'close-ups'. While 'the soliloquy can change in status and effect very considerably over the course of a play' (87), the rhetorical event of a direct address to the audience represents Richard's 'most characteristic mode of acting' (86). Like the distanced pageantry of *Henry VIII*, moreover, such directness and intimacy provoke the audience to interrogate the actions on stage. The soliloquy 'close-up' 'point[s] up a personal dimension in the lives of those who make history, which in turn helps to problematize the perception of history that the audience forms from the plays' (96).

Another key facet of Shakespeare's skill in dramatic staging highlighted by this study is his adroit use of props, exemplified in his last history play *Henry VIII*. The introductory stage direction '*A cloth throughout the play*', as Dillon notes, 'implies that the chair of state, with its canopy, is on stage for every scene' (111). Thus Shakespeare is able to imbue the prop with a certain kingly significance (the play opens with the monarch seated on his 'throne'), establishing in the minds of the audience an aura of puissance around the object. Consequently, the dramatist undercuts this aura by seating the 'butcher's cur', Cardinal Wolsey, in the very same chair later on in the first act. Ironizing the symbolism surrounding royal objects, such an example also highlights Shakespeare's ability to utilize theatrical objects as well as rhetoric in the composition and staging of his history plays.

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This new book represents the first comprehensive anthology of its kind since Greg Walker's *Medieval Drama* (Oxford, 2000). More importantly, it is the first such anthology in nearly forty years, since David Bevington's classic *Medieval Drama* (Boston, 1975), to rethink how to present these texts