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Peter Kanelos and Matt Kozusko (eds), *Thunder at a Playhouse: Essaying Shakespeare and the Early Modern Stage* (Cranbury NJ: Rosemount Publishing, 2010)

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Peter Kanelos and Matt Kozusko (eds). *Thunder at a Playhouse: Essaying Shakespeare and the Early Modern Stage*. Cranbury NJ: Rosemount Publishing, 2010. Pp 269.

This collection of essays derives from the fourth Blackfriars Conference, 2007. The two editors begin the volume by reminding readers of the history of 'original practices' (OP) performance research, which they date from approximately 1895 with William Poel's reconstructions of early modern stages and the impact of his work on later theatre historians and drama specialists. Now, as the editors see it, in an age of 'epistemological skepticism' (13) and the recession of theory, this focus on the material conditions of playing in the early modern playhouse may help scholars find a new way to understand the theatre of the period.

David Bevington's essay, 'Caviar to the General', is a good start to this volume, alphabetically (by editorial choice) and conceptually, in introducing early modern (meta)theatrical culture as allowing Hamlet to learn something new about himself and about an actor's public performance of an apparently private injunction to revenge, in conflict with his own sense of decorum. Bevington contrasts Hamlet's desire for actors to focus on the script and play only what is expected with Hamlet's discovery that such ideal performance conditions rarely occur. Hamlet misses the perfect opportunity to kill Claudius because he mistakenly thinks Claudius is praying; and he acts on the apparently foolproof opportunity to kill Claudius in the closet scene, rashly murdering Polonius instead and setting off a spiral of events will come back to destroy him physically and spiritually with the vengeful return of Laertes and the suicide of Ophelia. Even the accidental (was it?) death of Gertrude from Claudius's poisoned pearl, or the accidental visit of Fortinbras, falls into these intrusively almost ad-libbed actions that heap themselves against and misconstrue Hamlet's attempts at revenge.

The kind of theatrical mutuality Bevington discusses differs from Lars Engle's analysis of a one-sided reciprocity of stage management from Marlowe to Shakespeare in 'Watching Shakespeare Learn from Marlowe'. Essentially, the argument here is that Shakespeare observed how Marlowe integrated moments of interiority with significant moments in the plot in order to create dramaturgical 'opportunities to rework' a performance tactic 'without undoing' or merely aping it, as Shakespeare uses Marlovian 'stage effects, poetic effects, and representations of interior mental life' to enhance his own stagecraft. Another kind of theatrical surprise appears in Donald Hedrick's

comments on 'Real Entertainment' — speculating on the impact of having, say, a real pickpocket pilloried onstage with the other actors, especially those who are playing the roles of criminals: Autolycus discussing his own criminal process while perhaps giving the nod to a failed practitioner exhibited onstage. In an example not given, we might imagine collapsing the central pickpocketing moment in act three of *Bartholomew Fair*, when the audience can observe how one criminal (the ballad-singer) can distract one victim (Cokes) from awareness of theft while placing blame on another victim (Justice Overdo), with the subsequent scene placing Overdo and Wasp in the onstage stocks — perhaps alongside a real pickpocket captured while pilfering in the audience. The idea of trying to calculate the 'bonus' entertainment value of a theatrical performance by theatricalizing a real and immediate event suggests some of the instant 'in the moment' comedy or shock of seeing members of the audience get onto the stage and seem to participate in the action, as in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. As Hedrick suggests, modern critics have not taken up or theorized this performative challenge to the same extent as early theatre enjoyed the blurring of boundaries between 'real' and 'staged'. The only instance much discussed in that vein is the appearance of Mary Frith on stage during a performance of *The Roaring Girl*.

Several essays deal imaginatively with the idea, not explored often enough, that physical stagecraft — props, costume, bodily postures and movements, even sounds — support the text in equally important ways. Robert Hornbeck gives a very detailed explanation in 'Holy Crap!' of how scatological props become the graphic signs of anti-Catholic comedy especially in *Gammer Gurton's Needle.* A similar prop focus governs Genevieve Love's discussion of flexibility, in terms of basket-weaving, babies, and cradle-construction, in *Patient Grissel*, a play whose chief theatrical problem is Grissel's own performance of patience in the face of intolerable cruelty/misogyny. Love argues that willow branches weave their way through various meanings and stage properties to arrive finally at a definition of Grissel as emblematically transformative. Lois Potter argues for a double-edged representation of quick-changes, especially in *The Alchemist*, as being less than quick and more than simply changing identities, but rather as a complex show of double-motive and double-meaning in characters doubling themselves as well as other roles with actorly virtuosity assisted by beards or beardlessness. Andrea Stevens explores the impossibility of 'historical recuperation' of early modern performance in her discussion of the bizarre roles in *The Fatal Contract* in which stage-race and stage-femininity conflate in an act of violence: a boy

playing a raped white woman playing a Moorish male revenger pulls the hair and burns the breasts of a boy playing a woman, in multiple wrenchings of the performing body to bring out multiple levels of political and spiritual adulteration. In another view of the grotesque body, Jacqueline Vanhoutte chooses to focus on two depictions of the rotting body in the Chester cycle: the shrivelling of the midwife's hand in *The Nativity* as a sign of her disbelief in virgin birth, followed by its restoration when she converts; and the death of Herod, who decomposes before our eyes in *The Massacre of the Innocents*, a clear sign of his sinful corruption. Peter Hyland argues that the striking clock in Olivia's house (*Twelfth Night* 3.1.128sd) is actually the play's defining moment, marking the change from pastoral timelessness to the 'urgency' of Olivia's wooing of Caesario. Directors often abbreviate or mute the clock's sound in performance (as in several filmed versions of the moment). But Hyland suggests that the noise in itself 'redirects both the movement and the momentum of the play' and he calls for emphatic staging of the eleven chimes calling the hour as being part of the same logic that understands the 'whirligig of time' as both punitive and providential, a complex aural sign of the seriousness of comedy. Mark Albert Johnston comments in 'Early Modern English Barbers as Panders' on the number of plays that include barbers as sexual referents, such as *Epicoene*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, *King Lear*, *The Honest Whore*, *Midas*, *Match Me in London*, and *The Feigned Courtesans* (he doesn't mention *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*'s barber scene), as well as ballads that sing the same song about barbers who may also be sexual providers. Although all the articles in this eccentric grouping are valuable reads, Johnston's essay especially struck me as an exciting advance in understanding early modern cultural assumptions and thus in understanding more about the context of a given play.

In 'What Was James Burbage *Thinking*???', Roslyn Knutson asks a series of important questions about James Burbage: why did he buy and renovate Blackfriars? Why this particular property? And did Blackfriars justify his initial speculation? The problems she cites seem enormous: traffic jams caused by too few access routes, neighbourhood resistance to the influx of tourists, disruption of local businesses, and street violence. Add to these the question of what the competition was doing: how did the repertory of the Admiral's Men and the Queen's Men speak to the repertory of the Chamberlain's Men or the repertory of the children's companies, and how would this conversation be affected by the eventual shift of the King's Men into two venues, the Globe and Blackfriars? Was Burbage thinking only in terms of

real estate profit, or was he predicting the eventual supremacy of the King's Men among London repertory companies? Whereas Knutson focuses mainly on 1596, attempting to see through the lens of James Burbage, Jeremy Lopez looks at 1599, trying to see through the lens of the antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson and thereby gaining a more realistic view of London theatre when balanced against the 'nostalgic historicism' of such plays as *Henry v* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Lopez describes his critical goal as identifying the problems Gosson saw provoked by theatre and playwrights: 'opportunism and the exploitation of popular fantasies and anxieties' — problems that continue to plague modern popular and literary-critical culture. Jeanne McCarthy also tries her hand at reading through a particular lens, this time Skelton's *Magnificence*, suggesting that the elite tradition of choir-schools may have influenced the decision to purchase indoor playing spaces: the first Blackfriars for the Chapel Children in 1576 and the second Blackfriars for the Chamberlain's Men in 1596. She does not argue a narrowly didactic approach to drama, however; rather, she attempts to dispel such a prejudice by demonstrating the 'intellectually creative energy' that place, action, and text inspire in audiences. Holly Pickett's essay shifts us to the Red Bull Playhouse (and ultimately to a Caroline theatre, probably the Cockpit in Drury Lane) in a discussion of the relation between theatre and religion, particularly over the presence of angel characters and the enactment of conversion on stage, both of which challenge modern critics' 'secularization thesis'. She argues that angel scenes need not be anxiously idolatrous for protestant audiences, but sees such scenes as reconnecting 'spectacle and salvation' in the context of sincere revelation.

The last essay in this collection, by Don Weingust, brings us back to a question that has recurred throughout the volume: what is the relationship between early modern theatrical practice and modern attempts to reproduce it in 'original practices'? What is the point of attempts at recovering theatrical praxis if we can't reproduce it? The problem starts with one big unanswerable question: what exactly *were* original practices? How did they affect lighting, perception of space, acting techniques, costume, music, or sound? How were rehearsals conducted? Who did the casting? Were pronunciations standardized in some way? If early modern actors wore contemporary dress, should modern actors also simply wear modern contemporary dress? Does OP invariably mean all-male casts? Such questions are left open-ended, with no discussion of actor response to working only with cues and lines rather than whole scripts, and no focus on the question, did the early modern theatre

use a director? As a summing up of the contents of this volume, this final essay seems a bit out of its element — oddly enough, since it is directly concerned with stage performance. But the overall effect of all the essays is to prompt us to rethink old assumptions about staging interiority and exteriority by understanding stage properties and rereading stage roles, costumes, and spaces. From that point of view, this book is a success.

Helen Ostovich

Elizabeth Klett. *Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National Identity: Wearing the Codpiece*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Pp 168.

Elizabeth Klett's *Cross-Gender Shakespeare* is an ambitious account of the burgeoning practice of women playing male roles in contemporary Shakespearean performance. The author states that the genesis of her project was the near-simultaneous experience of performing in a student production and seeing the second of her book's major examples of a cross-dressed Shakespearean performance, Kathryn Hunter as King Lear, onstage. Structurally, Klett pursues her inquiry chronologically with each chapter devoted to one high-profile production or to thematically linked stagings. She begins with an account of Deborah Warner's 1995 staging of *Richard II* with Fiona Shaw in the title role. She continues with Kathryn Hunter's performance as Lear in Helena Kaut-Howson's production, Vanessa Redgrave's Prospero at the Globe, and Dawn French's portrayal of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, concluding with a consideration of three all-female productions at the Globe in its 2003 and 2004 seasons.

The strength of Klett's work lies in the record it offers of the productions she has chosen to chronicle. The breadth of her research into these productions has enabled her to reassemble their key aspects for this account. She details set and costume designs, focusing on important choices such as the hospital-set prologue for Hunter's Lear (which framed the action with Hunter as an elderly woman before her appearance as the male king) and the construction of 'original practices' costumes at the Globe. Klett unfortunately provides few examples of practitioner experience in these roles and