EDITOR'S FOREWORD

As recently as 1972, it was possible for David M. Bergeron to complain that scholars dismiss the spectacles and public entertainments of early modern England as "scarcely worth the trouble of serious study."[1] Three decades later, the case has altered. Contemporary scholars have turned with increasing historical interest and theoretical sophistication to interrogate—and thereby to trouble—critical assumptions about what constitutes fit matter for "serious study," as the vast body of early modern entertainments, civic pageants, festival shows, rituals, masques and plays has been enthusiastically embraced and eagerly anatomized to new critical purposes. Scholarship itself has altered greatly during these decades, and with the steady dislocation of traditional notions about the boundaries that distinguish disciplinary pursuits, especially those boundaries once thought to secure, more or less absolutely, the divide between social and political history, on the one hand, and the literary and performing arts, on the other, attention to the spectacles and public entertainments of early modern England has achieved a fascination, even a sense of urgency that earlier scholarship could hardly have anticipated.

Such fascination grows partly from what Stephen J. Greenblatt defined for the generation that followed as self-fashioning—especially the politically pointed self-fashioning of elites who dramatize in their infinite variety of public displays those imaginary means by which power seeks to contain and control the always unruly body of the state.[2] In the aftermath of the new historicism and the rise of cultural studies, every dramatic performance is an artifact whose making speaks potentially to large concerns about that now familiar triad—gender, race, and class. The new historicism has long ago ceased to be new, but its impact on contemporary critical studies remains arguably strong, even as the need to produce better, more reliable histories

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[1] *Twentieth-Century Criticism of English Masques, Pageants, and Entertainments: 1558–1642* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1972), Introduction, n.p.

[2] *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

has become clear.[3] More recently, the fascination with early modern entertainments derives too from the turn toward religion that distinguishes so much academic work in the period, as scholars are discovering in spectacles and public performances ready vehicles for exploring how religious experience—conceived in the full range of its expressions among the culture's institutions, its codes of behavior, and its structures of belief—is made visible in dramatic displays. Piety is increasingly prominent as a subject of historical interest in relation to political authority, individual agency and subjectivity, and as a dimension of lived experience that merits attention in its own right.[4] Increasingly, too, with the rehabilitation of the aesthetic as a category for scholarly inquiry, such entertainments are proving fertile ground for reopening questions about the nature of authorship, generic distinctions among kinds of dramatic entertainments, and the material conditions—the local contexts and conditions of entertainment practices themselves—that shape specific performances in specific times and places.[5] Contemporary scholars have turned, then, to the study of the spectacles and public performances in late Medieval and Renaissance England for motives nearly as diverse as those bodies of material that they seek by anatomy to understand.

Beyond fascination, the sense of urgency that so often attends these scholarly studies derives arguably from the heterogeneous—even miscegenational—quality of the materials under investigation. By their very nature—whether they emerge as the spectacles crafted by guilds, the cooperatively compiled dramas of professional acting companies, the powerfully encoded products of patronage, or the self-consciously fashioned dramas of the aspiring author, such entertainments are always, as performances that intermingle the visual and the aural, spectacle and music, dance and words, conspicuous illustrations of culture at play in the activities of creating and recreating itself. Conceived by pictorial analogy, such entertainments resemble less

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[3] See "Introduction: Demanding History" in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 1–5.

[4] See Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; repr. 1990), pp. 1–16.

[5] See, for example, Heather Anne Hirschfeld, *Joint Enterprises: Collaborative Drama and the Institutionalization of the English Renaissance Theater* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

Caravaggio's luminously present beings who look ready to step live from the canvas than Giuseppe Archimboldo's factitiously mannered creatures, assembled from the raw materials of nature—vegetables, fish, or stones. Amidst their heterogeneous intermingling of the stuff of culture—song, dance, music, spectacle, and words—we see the "seams" in their making, and experience the promise of discovering (and hence the urgency to discover), as Philip Sidney would write, how and why their makers made them.

It is to that promise of discovery that this volume of essays owes its beginnings. In the spring of 2004, a new institute called MARCO (the Medieval and Renaissance Curriculum and Outreach Program at the University of Tennessee) held its third annual symposium on the topic of "Spectacle and Public Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance." An interdisciplinary collection of major scholars from the United States, Canada, and Great Britain assembled in Knoxville to deliver papers to professors, students, and interested members of the public, and to engage, formally and informally, in discussions both among themselves and with that large and diverse audience. As a creative component of the symposium's activities, two performances were staged by the University of Toronto's *Poculi Ludique Societas*, the Chester *Coming of Antichrist* and George Peele's *The Old Wives Tale*. In turn, the success of those performances helped to swell the size of the audience for the lectures, and to lend to the symposium the feel of a community—not just an academic—event.

Many of the papers in this collection are easily recognized as the products of that particular symposium organized for the needs of that particular audience. With an eye toward making the strange familiar, and with the intention of informing students and the public at large, Richard Emmerson's essay on "Antichrist on Page and Stage in the Later Middle Ages" displays the distinguished scholar working as a distinguished educator, reorganizing large territories of knowledge for fresh explorations in his subject matter. Once again, as the director in charge of staging the Chester *Coming of the Antichrist*, Peter Cockett writes from the vantage of a performance critic, exploring the challenges of balancing a commitment to historical authenticity with the need for dramatic accessibility. In Richard McCoy's essay on "Spectacle and Equivocation in *Macbeth*," the economy of focus throws into sharp relief for its audience of readers—as it did for its original audience of auditors—the significance of a single "secondary" character (Malcolm) for a reassessment of the tragedy's

meaning and power as a public performance. In Peter Holland's paper on the mapping of Britain in *King Lear*, early modern cartography supplies a significant storehouse of historical material for illustrating the play's engagement with issues of nationhood, just as it served as a wonderfully lucid device for illuminating the meaning of that engagement for the audience. In turn, Sarah Beckwith's playful and provocative engagement with the language of knowledge, self-knowledge and acknowledgment in *Measure for Measure* recapitulates, as it extends, the clarity of her spoken performance's intellectual engagement with the text. The essays in this collection do not read as the paradigmatically predictable products of the academic conference, and their freedom from that paradigm is arguably a measure of new strength obtained, at least in part, from heightened accessibility. All of the essays printed here have been revised in light of subsequent rethinking on the part of the authors. Once more, several of the essays in the volume were included by invitation, and such essays have given to the collection a greater range than the limited resources of the symposium could afford, and an opportunity to mingle with the views of the internationally established, diverse perspectives from a greater variety of scholars (some younger, some already established themselves) at work in the area.

No volume entitled, *Spectacle and Public Performance in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, could pretend to treat comprehensively a body of materials so conspicuously vast and heterogeneous. Rather than efforts to survey the territory, the essays published here are to be understood, by contrast, in the best and original sense of the term as "essays," as trials, attempts, experiments to open alternative ways of understanding important aspects of that vast corpus of entertainments, mystery plays, civic pageants, courtly masques and professional dramas that constitute its subject. It is a book that freely crosses traditional period lines, as it includes studies of late Medieval as well as Renaissance entertainments, and a book that seeks to impose no uniform "period" terminology on its authors. When historical boundaries between cultural eras are themselves matters for contemporary critical debate, it makes sense to allow the traditional descriptive terms, "Medieval" and "Renaissance," to coexist as chronological markers (however imprecisely) with that even more difficult-to-define catchall, "early modern."

Once more, the essays in this collection are not organized according to a single critical or historical methodology, even when their

subjects are similar in kind. They employ, instead, an eclectic range of interpretive practices, which reflect the variety of interpretive practices now current in the field. For instance, Robert Barrett and I both write about civic entertainments, but to different ends. While my essay seeks to question still-current theoretical accounts of power and agency by examining the staging of debates about words in Elizabeth I's coronation procession, Robert Barrett's careful archival research enacts a historical recovery of the political circumstances that explain the absence of the "Triumphator" in the 1610 *Chester's Triumph in Honor of her Prince*. One paper seeks retrospectively to challenge the ideological determinism of materialist and historicist interpretations of culture, while the other supplements new historical work with additional—and necessary—historical labor. In turn, as illustrious examples of what I have called "the rehabilitation of the aesthetic" in contemporary dramatic criticism, Nora Johnson's theoretically provocative interrogation of the "magic" of authorship in *John a Kent and John a Cumber* finds its complement in Lauren Shohet's rigorous reassessment of genre as a necessary "locale" for reading mid-Caroline masques. Tom Bishop's essay on the aftermaths of English court masques illustrates, in turn, the power of the new materialist criticism both to recover greater knowledge about the staging practices of early modern performances, in the full specificity of their production, and to reflect upon the significance of those practices for understanding the social significance of the genre. And as one more example of the diversity of critical approaches employed in these essays, Tiffany Alkan's paper supplies an intertextual reading of Busirane's mask of Cupid in *The Faerie Queene*, a reading that highlights the indispensability of courtly entertainments for understanding Spenser's literary production, and the dark liminal quality of that production as it is analyzed from anthropological and psycho-sexual perspectives.

All of the essays in this volume have at their center the spectacles and public performances of Medieval and Renaissance England, and that national perspective gives the volume a certain focus. When Peter Holland writes about the mapping of Britain in *Lear* or Richard McCoy about the political dynamics of equivocation in the "Scottish play," a national perspective becomes especially meaningful to the papers' arguments. The volume possesses an important coherence, too, in certain pairings between and among the essays. Most obvious, Richard Emmerson's survey of the Antichrist on page and stage finds a useful partner in Peter Cockett's account of the PLS's (*Poculi Ludique*

Societas's) staging of the Chester *Antichrist.* Three of the volume's essays attend to Shakespeare's public performances—however differently pointed that critical attention proves—and three provide special attention to the Renaissance court masque. Just as interesting, however, and just as significant are those less obvious relationships that bind one essay in the collection to another. Nearly all of these essays supplement their individual readings of individual texts with self-conscious critical reflections about how best to undertake the interpretation of early modern performances, and in the aftermath of those major revisions in hermeneutic theory taking place since the 1980s, such self-consciousness remains one of the distinctive characteristics (and, arguably, one of the strengths) of contemporary critical practice. New critical movements are often productive of new critical pieties—the insistence, for instance, upon reading theater strictly in terms of social or political determinants—and the papers by Johnson and Shohet illustrate pointedly the potential gains of reassessing the new pieties as well as the old.

Other connections bind the essays in the collection. Not surprisingly, religion appears front and center as a prominent issue both for the scholar of Antichrist who illuminates the variety of his late Medieval representations and for the director who ponders how to make the Antichrist's demonic "miracles" meaningful for a contemporary (and mainly) secular audience. Moreover, as an indicator of the turn toward religion in recent criticism, Sarah Beckwith's meditation on *Measure for Measure* performs much of its critical work against the background of early modern inwardness conceived in Christian terms; her argument illuminates what she calls the "peculiarity" of Shakespeare's relation to the Middle Ages, evidenced by his use of theater to combat the skeptical alienation of Renaissance culture and the empty theatricality of mere signs. Partly in response to Beckwith's argument about Shakespeare's use of theater against theatricality, Richard McCoy's essay on *Macbeth* attends to the less radically iconoclastic spokesmen of the Reformed church as a means of contextualizing the value of theatrical signs—the equivocal dissimulations of a Malcolm—to clarify important realities and to reconstitute community. Also, my own effort to interrogate the near-obsessive preoccupation with words in Elizabeth's coronation procession trades centrally on the new prominence of the Word in Protestant England, and the complex epistemological consequences of heightened awareness

inside humanist culture about the always conditional relationship between signs and the things they signify.

Other readers of the volume will discover other connections among these essays for themselves. This is not to lay claim to some sort of overarching scheme that unifies its contents. Similar to most collections of its kind, the value of this book depends largely upon the quality of its individual essays, and upon the power of those essays, circulating through scholarly publication, to report, extend, and renew those engaging conversations about the significance of early modern spectacles and public performances, which had their beginnings in MARCO's third annual symposium.

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