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A Peer-Reviewed, Academic, Online Journal

Dedicated to the Teaching of Medieval and Renaissance Literature



Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments: From George Gascoigne to Ben Jonson.

By Gabriel Heaton. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. 272pp.

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Reviewed Work(s):

Source: *This Rough Magic*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (December 2011), pp. 108-111.

Published by: www.thisroughmagic.org

Stable URL: <http://www.thisroughmagic.org/logan%20review.html>

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Gabriel Heaton's impeccably organized volume examines the production of texts associated with entertainments performed for the Tudor and early Stuart monarchs Elizabeth and James I. The entertainments under consideration include a wide range of types of performances—tilting, speeches, singing, masques—but they all share one uniting feature: a royal spectator. Interestingly, many (though not all) of the entertainments Heaton explores were performed outside of court, commissioned and produced by the hosts of traveling rulers.

Heaton focuses his study specifically on manuscript versions of these entertainments, which he finds “particularly useful . . . because more information can be extracted from them about the precise context in which they were produced than is typically possible with printed texts” (5). In this way Heaton addresses a heretofore largely neglected aspect of royal entertainment studies; his concentration on manuscripts also enables the book to provide original insight on the circulation of such texts in early modern England. An unexpected and delightful feature of this volume is

the final chapter that recounts details of contemporary sales of these manuscripts, revealing the shifts in the economic valuation of such texts across the centuries.

The bulk of the book, however, is appropriately devoted to an historically situated examination of extant manuscripts from the period under consideration, exploring “how and why they were produced and circulated, and what this reveals about both the entertainments and the culture in which they were produced” (13). As noted, the volume is well-organized, primarily sorted into two distinct sections: one devoted to the entertainments performed for Queen Elizabeth, and the other to those produced for King James. The two sections are joined by a brief bridge that carries the reader through the transition from one reign to the next with a summation of the differences in the entertainments between the eras and the reasons for those differences. Each monarch is provided three chapters. Those devoted to Elizabeth’s entertainments focus on, respectively, a single entertainment text, the more generalized subject of “the Elizabethan tiltyard” (9), and the production and circulation of country house entertainment texts in general. The three chapters given James I retain the same central concerns but provide particular attention to Ben Jonson, examining two entertainments written by him as well as the role of these projects in the formation of Jonson’s authorial identity; these chapters also consider the role of the Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors in the circulation of entertainment manuscripts and the form of the Jacobean masque.

Ultimately, this book provides a specifically focused but clear and readable examination of its topic. It is both a helpful compilation of information on royal entertainments from 1575-1625 and a brave attempt to plot previously uncharted territory, offering hypothetical explanations of production conditions, performer motivations, and authorship issues that simply cannot be proven. Such suppositions subject any piece of scholarship to close criticism, but Heaton does the necessary legwork, providing both the full range of available evidence and transparent disclosure of every instance in which the interpretation he offers is only theory and not provable fact. For example, in Chapter 1 Heaton discusses the *Tale of Hemetes*, an instance in which the author of the text is not positively known; Heaton identifies one Robert Garrett as the most likely candidate and devotes three full pages to supporting his claim with evidence regarding Garrett's physical location at the time the *Tale* was written, his relationships to the copyist who wrote out the manuscript and the nobleman who commissioned the piece, and the cultural conditions that make it likely the *Tale* was authored by a young and inexperienced writer such as Garrett would have been.

Such research does not only serve its purpose in furthering scholarship on the production of early modern entertainment manuscripts—it also provides an excellent example of how to address the issue of missing or nonexistent evidence that beleaguers the study of early modern texts of all kinds. Similarly, the book as a whole is a useful read not only for those interested in this particular area of study but also for students

and scholars seeking an exemplar of how to conduct and organize an investigation of this kind.