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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Global Economics: A History of the Theater Business, the Chamberlain's/King's Men, and Their Plays, 1599–1642* by Melissa D. Aaron

Review by: Nora Johnson

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knowledge about the ways that early modern women participated in performance. As Phyllis Rackin notes in her afterword, “The essays in this collection provide us with evidence that was previously unknown or neglected of the widespread participation of women in the production of every possible kind of show” (317). At the same time, the volume illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of this kind of project, which has become increasingly popular in the current academic publishing world. Beginning life as a 2000 Shakespeare Association of America seminar on “Women Players In and Around Shakespeare,” the collection gathers a group of talented scholars whose work sometimes, but not always, fits well within the chosen rubric. As a result, the audience receives a rich gathering of scholarly material whose interrelationship is not always clear. In the case of this volume, readers wanting a glimpse at some of the exciting new work in this area will be well-served; those expecting a cohesive presentation are less likely to find it. Still, Brown and Parolin deserve our gratitude for providing a tantalizing preview of the scholarship approaching on the horizon as an important area of theatrical history comes more sharply into focus.

Global Economics: A History of the Theater Business, the Chamberlain’s/ King’s Men, and Their Plays, 1599–1642, by Melissa D. Aaron. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005. Pp. 250. Cloth \$47.50.

Reviewer: NORA JOHNSON

Every scholar who wishes to read early modern plays as reflections of their economic, material, and professional contexts faces the difficulty of explaining precisely how the drama can be said to perform such an act of reflection. Are plays somehow allegories of the economic conditions under which they are produced? Do they supply discursive constructions of authorship, collaboration, or patronage that shape and are shaped by the theatrical milieu? Are the plays simply to be mined for discrete bits of information about commercial practices, or do they make more complex statements about the business of playing through larger thematic structures? Each of these possibilities—and there are doubtless many others—suggests a different way of thinking about metatheatricality, about base and superstructure, about the possibility of theatrical self-consciousness.

Melissa Aaron’s study of *The Chamberlain’s/King’s Men* proposes a program of “economic readings,” seeing the plays as, whatever else they may be, “snapshots” of the company’s material and financial circumstances at various moments in its collective life. At best, this strategy leads Aaron into some very interesting ways of combining material and thematic concerns (it does not, by the way, lead her to consider economics in any way that could be considered “global”; the pun in the title is somewhat misleading). Her

pursuit of the evidence about costumes that may have been given to theatrical companies by aristocrats, for instance, causes her to speculate that the same bear costume might have circulated from *Mucedorus* through the *Masque of Oberon* to *The Winter's Tale*, "from the public theater to the court and back again" (90). This hypothesis in turn allows her to argue that when The King's Men use the bear costume they are implicitly critiquing the claims of the royalty-friendly productions in which the costume had shown up previously. *Mucedorus* had been able to protect Amadine from a bear, Aaron notes, as the presence of Henry and James had been able to tame the bears who pull Henry's chariot in *Oberon*, but neither the infant princess Perdita nor her tragically absent parents have the power to keep Antigonus from dying an awful death. While highly speculative, the argument is intriguing. It suggests that attending to specific props and particular performance contexts may make a real difference in critical debates about individual plays and in larger arguments about the relation of the players to their royal sponsors. It also helps to fill in the endlessly fascinating gap in our knowledge of the material world of early modern theater.

Aaron reads *Henry V* in the context of the construction of the Globe theater in 1599. She argues that the Prologue's famous references to the "wooden O" and the "unworthy scaffold" are in fact apologies not for the general inadequacy of the stage to represent Henry's reign so much as for the specific problems of the outworn Curtain theater. Contending that *Henry V* had been written for the new Globe, which was not completed in time for its first performance, Aaron uses the play and its surrounding business environment as a way of talking about the Chamberlain's company at that stage in its economic development, about "the precarious financial position of the Chamberlain's Men in 1598/99 and the marketing and investment strategies they used to combat it" (47). The audacious building of the Globe theater does reward intensive scholarly focus. Here, however, the notion of "economic reading," while it poses interesting questions in theater history, tends unfortunately toward a flattening of the text. This objection may well go double for a reading of *Hamlet* that brings to light a string of references that may or may not be about rivalry with the Admiral's Men. Given that the fact of the rivalry is already well established and the professional reflections on playing in *Hamlet* are very clear, one hopes for a more significant engagement with textual evidence.

In a very detailed and illuminating study of *The Roman Actor*, Aaron claims that the play is "prophetic" in its depiction of a form of patronage that draws players away from popular audiences and leaves them dangerously dependent upon royal approval. She establishes a clear set of similarities between the business of playing as represented in the play and the conditions that would weaken The King's Men disastrously under the sponsorship of Charles I and Henrietta Maria. The royal couple, Aaron argues, "loved the-

ater to death,” appropriating the King’s Men for their own purposes in a way that ultimately crippled the company, making them especially vulnerable as the monarchy approached its point of crisis. The picture given of court sponsorship in this period is both helpful and convincing, but in the end it is hard to understand why even the most prescient member of the King’s Men should want to stage a prophecy about the company’s own downfall, especially one that insults royal patrons while proclaiming alienation from larger audiences. If, as Aaron wants to argue, the company consistently made its choices for reasons that were heavily determined by economics and not politics or ideology, more explanation is required for this strangely negative form of self-publicity. Again, while the connections between the text and the economic and professional life of the King’s Men are clearly worth exploring, the use of the text as evidence for the economic history of the company needs some further consideration in methodological terms.

That said, this useful and ambitious history of the Chamberlain’s/King’s Men offers many strong arguments about a broad range of economic and professional questions. On the way to talking about *Henry V*, Aaron makes important interventions in the debates about when the Globe might have been completed, and what the costs and financial gains of this complex transaction might have been. Her reading of the King’s Men’s relationship to Jacobean patronage is a wonderful corrective to the New Historicist emphasis on court control. Stressing in particular the power of the playing company to represent the court before courtiers from other nations and before more popular audiences, Aaron helps convincingly to salvage the repertory from lockstep obedience to a putatively absolutist monarchy. She provides some finely detailed studies of the masques in *Henry VIII* and *The Tempest*, as well as *The Winter’s Tale*, and she makes an excellent case for reading the First Folio as a document with as much to say about theater history as it says about the history of print or textual studies. The book moves deftly from analyses of court politics to the larger economic background of the period to specific performances, props, and actors. Its picture of “the bold strategies of 1624,” in which the King’s Men risked punishment by producing both *A Game at Chesse* and *The Spanish Viceroy*, does much to solidify our understanding of the relative independence and stability of the company during that period (145). Though Aaron perhaps too self-consciously avoids writing what she calls a “master narrative” of the company’s history, the series of institutional moments she stitches together do nevertheless describe an enterprise that begins in chaotic struggle, achieves the stability to take economic and political risks, and finally loses its audience because of an excessive dependence upon royal favor. *Global Economics* may be something less than sure-footed in its use of the plays themselves; the work of Heather Hirschfeld or of Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean provides a better model of integrated institutional and textual analysis. As a self-professed set of snapshots, though, this is an illu-

minating and much-needed chronicle of the leading theater company of its time.

Representing the Professions: Administration, Law, and Theater in Early Modern England, by Edward Gieskes. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006, Pp. 365, \$60.00 (cloth).

Reviewer: REBECCA LEMON

In *Representing the Professions*, Edward Gieskes uses the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu to chart the formation of the professions of administration, law, and theater in early modern England. In doing so, he offers an ambitious study, ranging through the drama of Shakespeare, Jonson, Dekker, Beaumont, Massinger, Middleton, and others, in order to demonstrate the parallels between these three professional fields as each moves from the status of trade or guild into a profession. Complementing extant studies on the topic of the professions, including Wilfred Prest's edited collection on *The Professions in Early Modern England* (1987), Gieskes brings a particular insight to the discussion with his research on the labor of theatrical staging. By connecting the craftspeople and workers of the theater to playwrights, *Representing the Professions* challenges strictly literary approaches to drama and instead argues convincingly for the interplay of dramatic writing and theatrical practice.

Rather than viewing the professions through the economic frame that he finds typical of Marxian studies on the topic, Gieskes offers a "Bourdieuian literary history." This sociological approach has real advantages: Gieskes ambitiously considers a number of fields implicated in the rise of the professions—literary, historical, economic, legal, theatrical, and political—without privileging any one field. Yet this reliance on Bourdieu also presents difficulties for readers coming to the book with a primary interest in the early modern period: each chapter's extended engagement with Bourdieu comes at the expense of direct, detailed engagement with literary and historical texts. In the chapter on the law, for example, Gieskes offers a rich analysis of the rise of the legal profession, tracking the vast number of handbooks on the law that proliferated in the sixteenth century to support law students in their studies. Yet this discussion begins and ends with Bourdieu's terminology, locating the payoff of the legal history in the terms "habitus" and "field." In returning consistently to Bourdieu throughout its chapters, the book, as a result, allots proportionately much less space for the analysis of plays. This latter aspect of the book is disappointing given that Gieskes has skillfully assembled a fresh selection of understudied texts, which readers may be eager to see analyzed at greater length.

The book's first case study, on public administrators, traces the new men,