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Review Of "The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment: Print, Performance, and Gender" By E. Z. Kolkovich

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BOOK REVIEW

The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment: Print, Performance, and Gender. *Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xiv+243.

The introduction to this book adroitly explains the first two terms in the subtitle, *Print, Performance, and Gender*. Kolkovich studies the country entertainments presented to Elizabeth I as site-specific events performed under the pressure of various needs. This book then considers how these performances assumed altered meanings in print. Less clear is why gender should be the third essential term. Gender is certainly relevant whenever Elizabeth is involved; especially revealing are occasions when women played roles in hosting and staging entertainments. Yet gender does not unify the ensuing study, which is bifurcated into sections on performance and on print. Gender is just one of the important concepts that the ensuing study covers, alongside regional versus national interests, and domestic interests in relation to foreign policy. “Genre” might have better served as the third term linking the other two. The author argues that the Elizabethan country house entertainment—“long unrecognized as a literary genre”—is a genre by asserting that it is one (2). A discussion of genre as a bounded but fluid category might have clarified how the oscillation between particular political needs and a shared literary vocabulary gives rise to a distinctive Elizabethan genre, at once transient and durable.

The overarching principle of the first section on performance is that entertainments negotiate particular interests with the need to affirm Elizabeth’s sovereignty. The first chapter discusses entertainments at the Theobalds estate of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, in 1571 and in the 1590s; and the 1575 entertainment at Kenilworth Castle, hosted by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. The 1571 Theobalds entertainment heralds Elizabeth’s

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supreme ownership of the country estate; Leicester's prominence and ambitions in foreign policy express themselves through a tenuous negotiation of the Crown's control and the earl's prerogative at Kenilworth. The 1590s entertainments at Theobalds reflect the aging Burghley's need to consolidate his family's status while still affirming Elizabeth's power.

Gender comes into sharper focus in chapter 2, which examines Petrarchan appeals in country entertainments. The primary examples are three 1592 performances at Bisham Abbey, Sudeley Castle, and Rycote Park. These entertainments "build political alliances among household women and Elizabeth" by imagining alternatives to Petrarchism as a language of male courtiership (52). Kolkovich's analysis of these fascinating entertainments is hindered by recourse to a simplified binary between heterosexual Petrarchan desire and female identification. In the 1592 entertainment at Sudeley Castle, the Ovidian Daphne (possibly performed by the Brydges' eldest daughter, Elizabeth) requires the queen's intervention to defend her chastity. A consideration of the prominence of the Daphne myth in Petrarchism and the subject/object reversals involved might have explained more convincingly how the queen's defense of chastity forges a bond with Elizabeth Brydges while still presenting the latter as a "young woman ready for marriage" (74). Kolkovich argues that "Daphne understood" what conventionally Petrarchan male suitors did not: "the desire to 'winne a maidenhead' was inappropriate in a political climate that valued female chastity" (77). Yet writings such as Walter Raleigh's 1595 *Discovery of Guiana* reveal this to be a misleading claim.

Chapter 3 introduces a new keyword: hospitality—and, specifically, the tension between free hospitality and gift giving as a demand for reciprocity. Entertainments at Elvetham (1591), Mitcham (1598), and Harefield (1602) respond to Elizabeth's promotion of hospitality as a corrective to rural poverty and to the flight of wealthy aristocrats to London. Yet if country entertainments perform hospitality, they are also gifts that seek favors. The Harefield entertainment shows how this kind of dynamic could foster a "queen-housewife analogy" that curries favor by casting the queen as a savvy and hospitable sovereign (118).

The overarching principle of the section on print is that publishers all seek profit but otherwise have divergent motivations. Richard Jones's 1576 octavo *The Princebe Pleasures, at the Courte at Kenelwoorth* serves as the first example in chapter 4. Kolkovich argues that Jones aimed to produce an "elite literary text" by emphasizing the "literary aspects of the Kenilworth performance" (131, 134). The reader must infer what "literary" means. The next major example does not offer a useful nonliterary contrast but rather the production of a "publisher of elite, regional material"—the Oxford University printer Joseph Barnes (147). In 1592, Barnes printed the only Elizabethan entertainment book to emerge outside of London.

Kolkovich argues that this provenance heightens tensions between rural centers and Elizabeth's national sovereignty.

Chapter 5 turns to the real alternative to "literariness": publications intended as news—and, specifically, as news for a national readership. Yet context threatens to become the argument: printers who generally specialized in news likely intended entertainments to be consumed as news. Compelling details become subordinated to this premise. In 1591, for example, William Wright and Thomas Scarlet published the text of an entertainment hosted by Viscount Montague, "the most public of Elizabeth's Catholic supporters" (156). Kolkovich argues that the extant versions of this text suggest a revised edition. These revisions downplay Montague's Catholicism to promote national unity. All of this confirms (and is confirmed by) the bookseller Wright's "interests in timely news and nation-building" (165). At the end of chapter 4, Kolkovich observes that her reading of Barnes's Oxford publication "supports the claims" of scholars who emphasize regionalism in early modern England (154). In the final paragraph of chapter 5, Kolkovich asserts that her reading of entertainments as national news "extends the claims of Richard Helgerson, Andrew Hadfield," and others who have focused on Elizabethan nationhood (191). While these chapters present useful evidence for the tension between local interests and national ones, no single, original argument is advanced here.

The final chapter shifts emphasis further away from performance, away from shared political concerns, and toward literary authorship. Kolkovich examines William Ponsonby's printing of Philip Sidney's "The Lady of May"—originally composed for a 1578 entertainment. Published after Sidney's death, "The Lady of May" speaks less to topical interests than to Sidney's poetic authorship. Mary Sidney's "A Dialogue Between Two Shepherds, Thenot and Piers" was written for an entertainment that never took place. Its inclusion in a 1602 volume affirms the Sidney legacy at the expense of praise of Elizabeth.

This book resists straightforward synopsis because it lacks a single unifying argument. Yet its virtue is that it assembles such a wide array of materials that Kolkovich has researched comprehensively. This monograph will appeal to readers with interests in performance studies, print history, gender politics, and the uneven development of English nationhood. A brief epilogue speaks further to why the Elizabethan country house entertainment is worthy of study: this genre (or subgenre) would shape the conditions for the rise not only of the Jacobean country entertainment but also the courtly masque and the country house poem.

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