Spectacular Performances: Essays on Theatre, Imagery, Books, and Selves in Early Modern England. Stephen Orgel.
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011. xix + 284 pp. $80.

Another review of this book previously appeared in volume 65, no. 2 of *Renaissance Quarterly*.

In the acknowledgements to *Spectacular Performances*, Stephen Orgel says that he was won away from all other publishers by his Manchester University Press editor, who sang the "siren song, 'You can have as many illustrations as you want'" (4). Readers will be as grateful to this editor as Orgel is. The book contains over 150 illustrations, ranging from beardless portraits of English monarchs to woodcuts to film stills to some really striking representations of the rape of Ganymede. Some of the illustrations readers will have seen before: the portrait of Elizabeth I in coronation robes, for example, or the title page of the 1605 edition of Sidney's *Arcadia*, or Albrecht Dürer's naked self-portrait. These familiar images are given vital new significance in the context of the less familiar images reproduced alongside them: Richard II's coronation portrait (the only such portrait of a medieval king, and a clear model for Elizabeth I's); the title page of William Cunningham's *The Cosmographical Glasse* (1559), whose decorative woodcut was reused for numerous later texts, including the 1605 *Arcadia*; and a Dürer portrait of Willibald Pirckheimer, across the top of which was written, in Greek and by "someone with access to Dürer's studio," the phrase "with a man's prick up your anus" (256–57, 255).

Besides its scores of illustrations, this book contains thirteen essays unified by the theme of "performance construed in the largest sense, as theater and pageantry, as the deployment of a personal style, as imagery of various kinds, and even as books, which in the early modern era often include strongly performative elements" (1). Only five of the essays were written specifically for this volume, but they are carefully interwoven with the eight previously published essays (some of which have been revised for inclusion here), so that the book follows a real thematic arc. In the final essay, "Ganymede Agonistes," Orgel traces an evolution in artistic representations of Ganymede from highly sexualized passivity (as in a chalk drawing by Michelangelo, reproduced on page 264) to triumphant sexual aggression (as in an image from Johann Wilhelm Baur's 1639–41 *Ovidii Metamorphosis*, reproduced on page 269). Orgel's interest in the historical and cultural movement of the icon of Ganymede is characteristic of his interests throughout the book — of his sensitivity to how iconographic traditions enfold and produce surprising contradictions (as well as homologies) over time. One of the book's most exciting arguments in this regard is in "*Othello* and the End of Comedy" (first published in the 2003 volume of *Shakespeare Survey*), where Orgel returns to Thomas Rymer's familiar objections to *Othello*'s handkerchief and double time scheme in order to demonstrate that, in one crucial place, Shakespeare actually works to make it seem like less time has passed than possibly could have. This argument appears on page 99 and is made, appropriately, with the help of a detail from the 1623 Mercator-Hondius atlas.

As always, Orgel's style is lucid, conversational, and unassumingly self-referential. He represents himself as continually working on and reapproaching from different angles questions that have concerned him throughout his career: what is the relation of the copy to the original? How does one distinguish between and adjudicate among different versions of the same thing? What is creative about imitation? These questions are asked most explicitly in chapter 11, "Plagiarism Revisited," which is a retitled reprint of an essay that itself revisited an earlier essay — Orgel's 1975 "The Renaissance Artist as Plagiarist." This essay culminates in a polemical argument against treating historically particular forms of imitation and citation (the pastiche of Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia*, for example) as mere plagiarism. To do this, Orgel argues, is to treat the past "as a childish or recalcitrant or incomplete version of ourselves; it fails to acknowledge the ways in which early modern societies were genuinely different from ours and their terms significantly untranslatable — requiring us, that is, not to 'modernize,' but to learn their language" (227). As is clear throughout the book — most especially (for me) in his discussions of royal self-presentation (chapter 1, "I am Richard II"), of structural "forgettings" in early modern drama (chapter 5, "*King Lear* and the Art of Forgetting"), and of Prince Henry's art collection (chapter 12, "Devils Incarnate") — Orgel is fluent in the language of the past, and continues to make it possible for us to be as well.

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