

Adam Zucker. *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy*.

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It is refreshing in *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* to find a reassessment of the period's comedy that is also a clear-sighted confrontation with what Pierre Bourdieu, in particular, offers to early modern studies. Zucker's study is an achievement not because it mobilizes the materialist turn that now so deeply characterizes the field, but because it identifies such Bourdieuan concepts as "competencies" and the materiality of culture and its often obscured relations as precisely what is at stake in the emergence in the period of a new kind of comedy we now call "city comedy." Zucker maps this materialism across six plays, crossing generic, historical, and disciplinary boundaries to offer important new readings, not simply of the comedies but of the changing demographic and social textures of their society.

The title's "places of wit" stipulates the way that specific urban and suburban places become essential sites of wit and of comedy in the period. Four chapters plus an introduction and epilogue trace Zucker's opening observation that wit — that all-important comedic value — in the early modern period increasingly derived from local and material relations and practices in plays he describes as "comedies of place" (8). Zucker scrutinizes the social power of wit and extends links between wit, taste, and cultural fluency to specifically local, spatial competencies. Increasingly in this period, he claims, "To be witty, clever, or tasteful . . . is not simply to speak or act well but to exist in a privileged relation to the spaces and materials of a given environment" (3).

Ben Jonson and his local masterpieces *Epicoene* and *Bartholomew Fair* serve as Zucker's starting point and the book's thematic heart, but his study is significant for its diverse subjects, including Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* and three 1630s town comedies: *Covent Garden* by Thomas Nabbes, *The Weeding of Covent Garden* by Richard Brome, and James Shirley's *Hyde Park*. Chapter 1 reads *Merry Wives*, calling it a "paradigmatic comedy of place" (24) and an important link to the seventeenth-century comedies that follow. Addressing the Windsor setting's local and critical history, Zucker locates the key to the setting's "green materials" (30) in

how the play stages its middle-class protagonists employing these materials, and the power gained thereby.

Chapters 2 and 3 are double chapters, each discussing two important comedies, with the Jonson plays in chapter two establishing sensibilities and materialities of place crucial to Brome's and Nabbes's comedies of the nascent town in chapter three. With *Epicoene* and *Bartholomew Fair*, Zucker connects Jonson's investment in wit, taste, and the social power these accrue to their operation in specific London places such as the newly fashionable Strand and the annual Smithfield fair. The materiality of wit and social power is Zucker's interest, and his reading of the gallants — Dauphine, Truewit, Winwife — reveals how indelibly connected are these notorious figures of *sprezzatura* to the city's material relations and demands. This challenges long-established views of the gallants' mastery as inhering in their very distance from the actual and messy; instead, it is Jonson's "double move" (56) to stage his gallants as sure of their distance from the material city even while they deeply rely on it.

The debt of Brome, Shirley, and Restoration comedy to Jonson is nothing new, but Zucker's argument about it is, linking Covent Garden-set comedies to Jonsonian place-based wit and relations in light of the development of this famous piazza and the plays' staged explorations of new urban space, its possible uses and users, and what kinds of competencies it made possible. Chapter 4 takes up Shirley's *Hyde Park* (1632). With its setting in one of Caroline London's fashionable green parks, *Hyde Park* enables Zucker to circle back to the pastoral mechanics of *Merry Wives* and assess the uses, real and imagined, of a newer green material in a by-now-significantly-expanded urban and suburban society.

This is a provocative, intelligent, and wonderfully energetic book. With its precise close readings (besides the plays, a range of valuably historicizing primary sources) and its central argument's use and analysis of the utility and limits of cultural materialism, Zucker makes an important and timely contribution to scholarship on early modern drama and the relations between it and its time and place.

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