

Performance and Theatricality in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Mark Cruse, ed.

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This collection is the latest from the Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance series, and, as editor Mark Cruse makes explicit, it “is intended as a contribution to the increasingly cross-cultural and globally oriented study of theater and performance” in the period spanning 1300–1700 (ix). The book’s commitment to this orientation is vivid, as is its embracing of recent trends within literary and cultural studies concerning the ways we define and understand not only performance but also space. Cruse’s introduction begins by offering a characterization of performance in terms of space, production, and identity that clearly reflects the work of Michel de Certeau and, especially, of Henri Lefebvre and his understanding of spaces as produced, as contested, and as always performative.

The impact of this shift in critical approaches to space and performance, especially in the realm of medieval and Renaissance studies, has been evident in a number of recent books, such as Janette Dillon’s *The Language of Space in Court Performance, 1400–1625* (2015) and Jonathan Walker’s *Site Unscene: The Offstage in Renaissance Drama* (2017). Both superb studies focus solely on England and the reading of fairly evident, if complex, arenas of performance, and serve to point out what makes this new collection such a valuable addition to the field. Over ten essays, the collection encompasses territories in what is now Austria, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, and Spain, with a number of essays specifically focused on unpacking nuanced elements of performance within texts and genres not obviously theatrical or performance based. The result is a collection that will be of interest to graduate students and scholars in particular fields, based on individual essays, but also will be of great interest to medieval and Renaissance studies more broadly, for the complex picture created of performance as an essential and diverse component of European societies over this period of epochal change.

The sheer range of texts explored is impressive and serves to underline the collection’s overall thesis concerning theater’s “world-making role in medieval and early modern European societies” (back cover). Different essays take up medieval fables, written and oral lays and tales, a Sienese street spectacle, pictorial illustrations within a play and a chronicle narrative, more conventional but underexamined urban Carnival plays, scenes from a Brueghel painting repurposed by the artist, “intra-diegetic music” within a Spanish Golden Age play, and a Muscovite didactic drama about ritual and performativity. And while several essays engage with widely known and available works, such as Chaucer’s “Tale of Melibee” or Lope de Vega’s *La discordia en los casados*, many reflect extensive archival research or a revisiting of past research equipped with newer space- and performance-inflected questions. Both Lofton L. Durham and Claire Sponsler, for

example, return to previously studied medieval texts to query dimensions of performance in ways heretofore unconsidered. Durham studies the illustrations accompanying a medieval French drama, the playtext of which has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, while Sponsler scrutinizes *The Beauchamp Pageant*, a richly illustrated narration of the life and works of Richard Beauchamp (1382–1439), for traces of medieval theatrical practices and as an unlikely but important “part of the visual archive for performance history” (97). Sponsler’s essay is particularly exemplary for the energy of its prose and for the way its inquiry is structured, with engaging and important questions about its close reading for performance. (The book’s dedication gently signals the sad fact of Sponsler’s untimely death in 2016.) Her essay also is emblematic of the collection as a whole, in the quality of its writing and scholarship and in its grounding in significant and often complex questions about the precise nature and function of the performances being located and traced.

I did find myself wishing for several features whose absence somewhat undermined the book’s intention to represent a cultural and disciplinary diversity in the study of performance. Foremost of these absences was any list of contributors supplying disciplinary affiliations. The omission of an index and a slightly more developed introduction from the editor also would have strengthened the overall project, given the book’s scope and theoretical investments. For years, however, Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance has published and thereby made available to the field important and current conversations in medieval and Renaissance studies, and this latest volume impressively continues this work.

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Lyric Address in Dutch Literature, 1250–1800. Cornelis van der Haven and Jürgen Pieters, eds.

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Lyric Address in Dutch Literature is a notable volume within the current field of historical Dutch literature, focusing on cultural-historical questions and noncanonical text corpora: it provides an assembly of close readings of Dutch historical poems by mostly canonical authors, and aims to understand these poems as “linguistic events in their own right” (10). The volume may be read as a response to scholarship that reduces literature to an instrument that directly reflects a socio-political world. As Jürgen Pieters, one of the editors, states: “poems are not stories. . . . To reduce these texts to mere narrations of events is to go against their nature as poems” (127).

The ten chapters, written by senior as well as early career scholars, all start with an edition and English translation of the selected poems, to make these texts accessible to