

The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England.
 Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock, and Abigail Shinn, eds.
 Ashgate Companions. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014. xiv + 382 pp.
 \$144.95.

This *Ashgate Research Companion* is an essential resource for the study of popular culture and is aimed at scholars and graduate students interested in literature, cultural studies, history, religion, and visual culture in early modern England. The fascinating and well-organized collection features twenty-four internationally recognized experts in their fields who have contributed top-notch summaries of current research on topics related to early modern popular culture and its medieval roots. Each entry also provides a select bibliography for research on the topic at hand. One of the innovations of this volume is its movement beyond the binarisms of past approaches to popular culture, revealing this subject's intermingling of elite and popular, high and low, written and oral, and sacred and secular dimensions.

In the introduction, Dimmick, Hadfield, and Shinn write that "Literature always gets there first" (1). Entries throughout the collection deal with the relevance of popular culture for literary works of all genres by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Dekker, Jonson, Middleton, Spenser, Donne, and Milton. The editors state that "many exalted people in early modern England appreciated culture also appreciated by those far lower down the social scale" (1). Elizabeth I, for instance, seems to have excelled at primero, the forerunner of poker and a card game enjoyed by all social ranks. Nevertheless, Dimmick, Hadfield, and Shinn contend, with respect to Joris Hoefnagel's painting *Fete at Bermondsey*, which provides the handsome cover illustration, that "social hierarchies are very deliberately delineated" at London celebrations like this depicted wedding that included high and low cultural elements. Collectively, the editors and contributors of these essays address the slipperiness of the term *popular culture*, which designates an elusive but rich and complex subject.

Part 1, "Key Issues," focuses on areas of study that are central for our understanding of early modern popular culture, spanning "speech acts, reading and writing, youth culture and religious belief, to festivals, myths and visual culture." The contributors in this section discuss sources such as "records of Stuart parliaments, sermons, Bibles, chapbooks, pamphlets, heraldry, classical myths, saints' lives, biblical imagery and drama" (7). In "Festivals" by Tracey Hill and "Myth and Legend" by Angus Vine, the authors point to the considerable overlap in characteristics between pageantry, progresses, and theater, cultural forms that scholars have often treated as separate. In "Popular Reading and

Writing” Femke Molekamp notes that cheap print publications often displayed a hybridity of genres and appealed to all sorts with varied tastes in reading. In “Visual Culture” Tara Hamling provides impressive images of different kinds of decorations on churches, houses, furniture, and clothing that provided keystones for social position.

Part 2, “Everyday Life,” concerns matters of importance to early modern “bodies-in-the-world,” such as “Courtship, Sex and Marriage” — Ian Frederick Moulton’s fine essay — as well as food and drink, crime, xenophobia, and cultures of mending. In “Food and Drink” Phil Withington remarks that culinary taste and skill extended across the social spectrum. Matthew Birchwood and Dimmock demonstrate that anxiety toward foreignness was tied to “increasingly globalized markets, not with specific national, religious or ethnic groups” (219). Abigail Shinn’s treatment of everyday objects in the Tudor comedy *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* exemplifies the deft balancing of examinations of literature and culture throughout this volume.

Part 3, “The Experience of the World,” focuses on early modern understandings of the world, including time, property, medicine, witchcraft, and military culture. In “Politics,” Hadfield adds the caveat that although literature shaped popular political culture, “plays cannot, of course, be reduced to topical political messages” (261). Elizabeth Sauer in “Riot and Rebellion” concludes that such expressions of popular protest were conservative as well as radical. In “Popular Medicine,” Margaret Healy furthers Helen Smith’s discussion of “Gendered Labour,” which for women ranged from textiles to the inspection of the bodies of plague victims, by pointing out that licensed physicians were outnumbered by other health care workers and that the majority of healers were women. As editors of *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, Hadfield, Dimmock, and Shinn have orchestrated a superb volume, which contains essays of a consistently high quality that will prove seminal for orienting and guiding future avenues of study.

JENNIFER C. VAUGHT, *University of Louisiana at Lafayette*