

Paratexts in English Printed Drama to 1642. Thomas L. Berger and Sonia Massai, eds.

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Paratextual material has been a subject of increased interest in early modern English studies in recent years, inspired partly by the English edition of Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), but more generally by the materialist agenda of the

history of the book. Prefatory material to printed playtexts in the form of inductions, dedications, and epistles to the reader have always offered a critical lever on the plays themselves, especially in the case of an obsessive paratextualist such as Jonson, but other, less obvious features of the printed text can also yield valuable information, as paratexts supply contexts. Even at an undergraduate level, the close scrutiny of the title page to the first printed edition of *Tamburlaine*, for example, can be a useful introduction to a class on Marlowe.

The present edition, scrupulously compiled by Thomas L. Berger and Sonia Massai, and handsomely published by Cambridge University Press, represents a comprehensive sourcebook for all such study of early English printed drama. In place of facsimiles of the original texts, Berger and Massai offer exact bibliographical transcription with occasional footnotes to record printing minutiae, such as a turned *p*. Each play is tied to the numbers in Greg's *Bibliography of the English Printed Drama*, but single-text and collected editions are treated separately. Manuscript and Neo-Latin plays are not covered. There is minimal explanatory annotation, but Latin and Greek quotations have been helpfully identified and translated by Tania Demetriou. There is a useful finding list that classifies the different kinds of paratext and enables readers to identify all plays that have, for example, commendatory poems, a chorus, or an epilogue. There are also separate indexes of people, places, plays, and topics, which are of more variable usefulness. The index of places is splendid, since it enables paratexts to be linked to performance venues; but the relatively short list of topics, which has entries for playacting, playgoing, playreading, and playwriting, contains nearly 150 page references under the last undifferentiated heading.

It is at this point that one is bound to feel some frustration with the limited searchability of print (and print-era search engines), particularly as there are no STC numbers for quick location of the EEBO facsimiles and their searchable transcriptions. Here is an example. Prefatory matter for many different kinds of text tells the reader what to expect and what to excuse, or what the author hopes will be excused. In drama, reference is sometimes made to the playing time of the work, the time frame of the events depicted, and perhaps the discrepancy between the two. The prologue to Dekker's *Whore of Babylon* invites the audience to "fetch backe . . . winged Time" and "hold it but two howres" (1:335); the preface to Middleton's *Michaelmas Terme* explains that the action will present only those "familiar accidents" that happened over a period of "six weekes" (1:337); other paratexts refer to the period of years that the play tries to compress into its brief span. The passing of time is invoked in a different way by Heywood, addressing the readers of *The Four Prentices of London* in 1615, when he hopes that modern audiences, used to greater "accurateness both in Plot and Stile," will excuse his having followed the fashion of plays written "some fifteen or sixteen yeares agoe" (1:454). Anyone wanting to discover how dramatic paratexts comment on the business of dramatic mimesis might well want to search for time units or for terms such as "plot" and "stile," but will find it difficult to do so. With EEBO there is searchable text, but no defined corpus; here, the position is reversed.

This is primarily a work of painstaking bibliographical description, extending over 1,500 pages, which must have been many years in the making. The achievement is admirable, even awesome. These volumes will undoubtedly earn a place of honor alongside Greg's classic work. They do, in fact, still belong to the Greg era, when access to original copies of printed drama was more difficult to come by and scholars had to read more widely to find what they were looking for. Perhaps that is a good thing. Yet the defiant lack of complementarity with digital resources does make one hope for an electronic version of this material somewhere down the line.

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