

*The Senses in Early Modern England, 1558–1660*. Simon Smith, Jackie Watson, and Amy Kenny, eds.

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Can present-day scholars re-create sensory experiences from the past through exacting attention to early modern objects and texts? No, and indeed the contributors to *The Senses in Early Modern England* foreground this limitation at the start of the volume, acknowledging sensory experience to be in its very nature ephemeral. This by no means lessens the importance of the book or sensory history as a field. For the driving project here is less a matter of recovery than discovery. Simon Smith, Jackie Watson, and Amy Kenny argue that attending to the sensory life of materials in their distinct early modern contexts affords new understandings of the senses themselves, and in turn deepens our awareness of sensory meanings in past artworks by reconsidering them through this culturally specific lens. Taken as a whole, this collection paints a vivid picture of the sensory landscape of early modern England.

The essays collected here arose from a conference on the senses at the Globe Theatre, and they share a common aim, if a disparate set of approaches. Divided into three

sections, the book groups chapters in order to address three cumulative questions. First, how do the five separate senses appear in early modern art? Second, what are the dominant contexts surrounding these representations? And third, how do aesthetic experiences impress upon the senses in drama, painting, and reading? One of the larger goals of the volume is to counter ocularcentrism with a balanced approach to the lower senses of smell, taste, and touch — yet sight still dominates the conversation. To the book's credit, the move toward synesthetic inquiry in six of the eleven chapters effectively dehierarchizes the senses. The volume elegantly uses the crux of sensory ephemerality to fuel intersensory and cross-media thinking, exploring — in Holly Dugan's words — what it means “to ‘see’ smell in the past after its materiality has long since faded” (98). Where prior scholarship has established the cultural significance of the senses, it is this synesthetic design in combination with the breadth of artistic forms included that sets this volume apart. The editors also self-consciously avoid the tendency to “lionize” Shakespeare (10).

In part 1, each sense receives a chapter of its own, diverging from Aristotelian tradition to instead progress through taste, sight, touch, hearing, and then smell. These chapters survey a helpful range of primary sources on the senses in order to establish their dominant associations. Watson addresses visual skepticism but extends the oft-discussed theme of appearance versus reality into the concept of social mobility behind staged exteriors. Eleanor Decamp, in a standout chapter, reveals the peculiar significance of the barbershop by theorizing the ear-pick as a material object and metaphor for the dangers of acoustic openness. Part 2, by contrast, considers the five senses as one entity. Engaging the senses through the filters of sexuality, light and shadow, and love melancholy, these chapters reinforce the reciprocity between sensation and culture. One of the most exciting claims within the book is Natalie Eschenbaum's insight about sensation as a fluid process. Using Herrick's *Hesperides* as a defining example, Eschenbaum traces how all five senses liquefy the perceiver through infusion. Reading perception in this way invites us to rethink ideas of distance in sensory mediation, because if “the medium conjoins the sensor with what is sensed” (122) then classical distinctions between higher and lower orders melt into one another. Moreover, chapter 6 usefully complicates the enumeration of the senses by positing sexual desire as a sixth sense.

The final chapters, in part 3, evaluate reader, viewer, and audience response. By turning to different arts, Smith, Faye Tudor, and Hannah August examine the relationships between the perceptual body and aesthetic experience. While Tudor focuses on vision in her study of the self-reflexive gaze in portraits by female artists, Smith and August underscore the multisensory cooperation required by looking at (as well as hearing) musical performances and reading for erogenous pleasures.

While it is neither the first nor the last book on early modern sense theory, these authors' findings provide a valuable foothold for future sensory historians, specifically, and for Renaissance scholars, more generally, in that “to understand a culture, we must uncover its ways of perceiving and acquiring knowledge” (Karim-Cooper, 218).

Ambitious in its scope, this volume is a significant contribution to cultural criticism and studies of aesthetic response.

Jennifer Rae McDermott, *John Abbott College*