

Mark Bayer. *Theatre, Community, and Civic Engagement in Jacobean London*.

Studies in Theatre History and Culture. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011. xii + 258 pp. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-1-60938-039-7.

Bayer argues “that the London theatre of the Tudor and Stuart era was an important community institution.” Its impact was connected to the local contexts in which performances took place and the ways in which, in addition to staging plays, theatrical companies helped “neighborhood economies,” donated to local charities, strengthened “religious affiliations,” served as a source of “popular education,” and enriched social life (1–2). He reasonably assumes that people were far more likely to attend a theater located near their residence, giving audiences a local character that must have reinforced a sense of neighborhood identity in the precincts where they were located. Along with a parish church, a guildhall or a popular drinking establishment, a theater provided a site for social interaction where a sense of community might form. At the same time, the theatrical marketplace became increasingly differentiated, as some companies sought to attract elite audiences, while others sought to appeal to a more popular taste for plays featuring lots of action and spectacle. Bayer is primarily interested in Jacobean theaters that belonged to this second category: the Fortune and, especially, the Red

Bull. These houses and their repertoire have been relatively neglected by modern scholars interested primarily in Shakespeare and other playwrights who wrote for more elite companies. This book explores how and why they appealed to an important segment of the theater-going public, while simultaneously arguing that this appeal was connected to their location in London's northern suburbs.

Bayer's basic argument seems eminently plausible, although the scanty information that has come down to us about the composition of early seventeenth-century theater audiences makes it impossible to prove definitively. The attention he devotes to the Red Bull and plays written for it by writers like Thomas Heywood and Thomas Dekker is also welcome. He provides an illuminating discussion of the Red Bull stage — with its large playing space capable of allowing enactments of pitched battles, multiple trap doors, and machinery for pyrotechnical displays — and the kinds of plays written to take full advantage of the opportunities for theatrical spectacle that these facilities provided. He is equally revealing on the ways in which figures like the theatrical entrepreneur Philip Henslowe and the actor-shareholder Thomas Greene were connected to the Clerkenwell community in which the Red Bull was built, and the contributions of the theater's company, Queen Anne's Men, to local charities and civic institutions.

But unfortunately he also frequently overdevelops and overextends his arguments, making the book considerably longer than it needed to be. In an effort to add a theoretical dimension he invokes Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital. But although occasionally mentioned in scattered places this idea is never systematically developed with respect to theaters and their audiences. It often seems little more than a fancy way of making unexceptional points, like the observation that entrepreneurs wishing to build theaters needed to rely on social connections to involve other investors, while cultivating parish authorities who might otherwise try to block their project. Discussion of differences between theaters and their repertoires crops up in scattered places, in ways that seem slightly repetitious. Bayer's analysis of the mixed social composition of the suburban neighborhoods containing theaters is sensible and well-informed by historical studies of the metropolis but adds little truly new. His contention that Londoners tended to stay within their own neighborhoods because of the unpleasantness and difficulty of negotiating insalubrious and congested urban streets may have some merit. But it is not based on original research in the sources and strikes this reviewer as exaggerated and potentially misleading. Sources like legal depositions indicate that some Londoners, at least, thought little of traveling fairly considerable distances on foot, as does the slightly later diary of Samuel Pepys and Defoe's fictitious early eighteenth-century autobiography, *Moll Flanders*. Although historians have stressed the density of local precinct and parish institutions within the City of London — the square mile subject to the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction — we still know far too little about how much Londoners moved around within their city and how far they identified with specific neighborhoods, as opposed to more extended social communities. It will take much deeper research to settle these issues.

In sum this is a book with an interesting and plausible central argument, containing some interesting material but it would have benefited from more circumspection in presenting its case, as well as cutting and tightening.

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