

Playwriting Playgoers in Shakespeare's Theater. Matteo A. Pangallo.
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. 248 pp. \$59.95.

I have known about and admired Pangallo's work for almost three years, ever since I came across his website *Theatrical Failure in Early Modern England*. Soon after this, I discovered his provocative and well-crafted article "'Mayn't a Spectator write a Comedy?': Playwriting Playgoers in Early Modern Drama" (*Review of English Studies* 64 [2013]: 39–59). This article concludes with an account of Richard Brome's prelude and prologues to Thomas Goffe's *The Careless Shepherdess*. Of the three quarreling prologues, the second gets to make Pangallo's main point for him: "Must always I a Hearer only be? / Mayn't a Spectator write a Comedy?" (68). It's a fair question, and one that Pangallo will find posed repeatedly (with variations, of course) in the critical inductions that sometimes accompany early modern plays. A famous instance, and one about which Pangallo writes with great subtlety, is the arrogant insistence by George and Nell in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* that the theater company present not the performance they have rehearsed but one that will (for a change) honor the Company of Grocers and in which their apprentice, Rafe, will play the starring role.

So far I have described only what happens in Pangallo's article (though my quotation is from his book). I must now add that the article, with its subtitle slightly modified, and with a great deal of scholarly argument added, reappears as chapter 1 of the book. The proportions are significant: the article is a substantial twenty pages with seventy-six footnotes; the book chapter is forty-three pages of text with 185 endnotes. I did not find this expansion to be an improvement. Indeed, while I admired the adroitness with which the author was able to construct the category of the playwriting playgoer in the article, I found the more laborious presentation of the same case in the book chapter far less engaging.

The book as a whole retells the story of tension between professional playwrights, whose affiliations in various ways place them inside the entertainment industry, and amateur contenders, who might have something of value to offer even though their experience is limited to spectatorship. Pangallo finds it easy to support the amateurs—the "playwriting playgoers," as he repeatedly calls them. They do tend to emerge as an attractive alternative in the paratheatrical documents (such as inductions) that dominate chapter 1. And Pangallo renews his support for the amateurs in each of the subsequent chapters. I am left with the suspicion that he gives them more than they deserve.

In chapter 2, Pangallo explores the ways in which revisions called for in manuscripts by amateur playwrights may have a bearing on how a performance should be interpreted. In chapter 3, he does a detailed study of stage directions in several plays by amateurs. And in chapter 4, he foregrounds the question of when (and why) amateur playwrights made the decision to write in verse rather than prose, and vice versa. These are questions of great interest, and Pangallo has the intelligence and the research tools to make the most of them.

But a list of plays by amateurs imposes unexpected limitations. The canon Pangallo has to work with includes Robert Yarington's *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, Arthur Wilson's *The Inconstant Lady*, John Clavell's *The Soddered Citizen*, William Percy's *Mahomet and His Heaven*, Robert Chamberlain's *The Swaggering Damsel*, and Barnabe Barnes's *The Devil's Charter*. For anyone who wants to claim that amateur playwrights did a brilliant job, all things considered, this is a dismal record. Yes, it is possible to concede, from time to time, that the stage directions in these theater texts have been arbitrarily forced into the categories designed for them by a previous generation of scholars (R. B. McKerrow, Gerald Eades Bentley). But such a concession does not rescue these plays from the near oblivion to which scholarship has assigned them.

Pangallo is capable of doing first-rate work. But he will need to trust his own instincts more profoundly, and he would be wise to seek less help from the many mentors and sponsors whom he mentions in the acknowledgments. The next book he writes should be, above all, his own.

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Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History.

Chris Fitter, ed.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xiv + 264 pp. \$80.

Originating in a conference at the Huntington Library, this collection of essays digests for the study of Shakespeare what the editor calls the New Social History. This term refers mostly to the work of E. P. Thompson and Keith Wrightson, both brilliant, neither exactly new; the broad sweep of New Social History from the Annales School on is not discussed. Annabel Patterson's 1989 *Shakespeare and Popular Culture* is also a prominent reference point. In the afterword, Patterson declares she has not changed her mind in the last thirty years: popular Shakespeare "attacks class prejudice" (260), and how one feels about her stance will likely predict one's reaction to the collection, which consistently understands plays as instrumental political acts. "No one did more than Shakespeare . . . to publicize" that it was "commonwealth that legitimized the state" (80), declares David Rollison. It "would have been self-evident to the groundlings," argues Andy Wood, "that, though their rulers felt that scorn went in leather aprons, working people knew there was no better sign of a brave mind than a hard hand" (99). "Poor Tom is an activist project," insists Chris Fitter, "a serial exposé of government fatuity" (232). For Jeffrey S. Doty, "*The Tempest* ultimately refuses to ratify Prospero's coercive exercises of power and retreats from its characterization of Caliban as a natural slave" (250). Not every contributor finds Shakespeare's plays so politically and poetically unambiguous. Contrasting the rhetorics of popular Antony and virtuous Brutus, Markku