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playgoer through the English sentiment for “mind-travelling” and the presentation of voyage drama. Although McInnis clearly lays out his conception of distributed cognition in the early chapters of his book, his analysis would be better served by a more detailed unpacking of this methodology with each case, mostly because cognitive approaches are relatively recent and may be unfamiliar to some readers. Overall, however, this book will prove insightful to scholars of early modern drama and its staging practices, as well as to those interested in new ways of understanding historical performance.


Reviewed by Sara Boland-Taylor, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

In Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance, Erika T. Lin moves between prevalent cultural practices and theatrical spectacles to analyze the attitudes and traditions that informed modes of spectating in early modern playhouses. Lin engages the new materialist tradition in order to develop a “materiality of performance” for the early modern stage; in so doing, she aims to illuminate the ways in which spectacular performances became legible to early modern audiences (7). Although she acknowledges materialism’s Marxist roots, Lin turns to Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and weaves in the Foucauldian notion of the historical a priori with the hope of analyzing “the process through which performance actively produces the historical a priori” (8, original emphasis). For Lin, performance is “material” in two key ways: first, the theatrical signifiers that make up performance (chairs, handkerchiefs, bodies) are inherently material; second, the fiction of onstage theatrical conventions have offstage social repercussions. In part by challenging the ways in which we understand “materiality,” Lin uncovers the complex picture of life inside and outside the playhouse.

Drawing from both historical phenomenology and historical formalism, Lin brings critical theory, print culture studies, and theatre history together in order to analyze performance elements of early modern plays within the public playhouse and their relationship to popular cultural practices. Because Lin’s work is ultimately theoretical, she does not pursue a comprehensive list of examples from early modern dramatic literature and performance. Instead, she limits her focus to works that she takes to be representative and accessible to a wide readership; as such, Lin’s case studies are canonical early modern plays, including Shakespeare’s Love’s Labour Lost and Macbeth, Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, and Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus.

The book is divided into three parts. The first, “Performance Effects,” lays the groundwork for Lin’s argument, acting in effect as a supplementary introduction to the following two parts. The single chapter in Part I, “Theorizing Theatrical
Privilege,” establishes Lin’s historical lens by arguing that although Robert Weimann’s concepts of locus and platea are still hugely influential in scholarly conceptualizations of early modern playing spaces, we need an “alternative model for understanding the authority of performance in early modern drama” (23). Lin problematizes naturalized assumptions about early modern stage geography and social privilege within the fiction of a play and maintains that moments in early modern plays that “foregrounded the process by which elements presented onstage came to signify within the represented fiction were theatrically privileged” (37, original emphasis). The rest of her study analyzes some of these “theatrically privileged” moments.

In Part II, “Theatrical Ways of Knowing,” Lin reconstructs the epistemological framework(s) within which early modern audiences were embedded. Chapter 2, “Staging Sight,” considers visual archetypes in science, religion, and art to argue that these early modern ocular paradigms affected the staging of early modern plays, thereby shaping “not only what playgoers saw but also how they saw” (43, original emphasis). The following chapter, “Imaginary Forces,” juxtaposes moments of metatheatricality with early modern accounts of supernatural events in an attempt to reconstruct the epistemological complexity of interpreting these moments in the playhouse. With respect to the multiple layers of theatricality in Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy, Lin argues that metatheatrical moments were not a commentary on “art as a reflection of life” as many scholars maintain. Rather, they were an articulation of the “spiritual implications of negotiating theatre as a semiotic system” and the anxieties associated with “interpreting seemingly real sensory experiences” (73). Through an examination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century treatises on demonic and ghostly visions in relation to metatheatrical moments onstage, such as those in Spanish Tragedy, Lin argues that modes of seeing, interpreting, and knowing had spiritual and moral repercussions for early modern spectators.

In her third and final part, “Experiencing Embodied Spectacle,” Lin continues to develop ideas about the moral implications of spectatorship wherein she discusses both “feats of activity” (107) and acts of dismemberment in the playhouse. Lin observes that early modern forms of entertainment not only included plays and bearbaiting but also unscripted inset spectacles. Among these “extratheatrical” forms of entertainment were dances, displays of acrobatics, and other performances of physical prowess. Throughout Part III, Lin engages scientific treatises that describe sight not only as a participatory activity, but also as a penetrating act. Physical spectacle presented onstage before early modern playgoers pulled audiences into the action of the play, implicating them in sensual acts of physical performance and violence. Here Lin argues for an active audience that produced cultural beliefs and practices through acts of spectatorship; early modern performance media “did not simply reflect existing cultural practices but contributed to them” (148–9).

Because Lin seeks to situate early modern staging practices within their historical performance traditions and cultural contexts, a clearer identification of her study’s periodization would serve her purpose well. Although her monograph “centers on the decades immediately before and after the turn of the seventeenth century” (10), Lin never explicitly states why; the designation thus comes off as arbitrary rather than purposeful. Nevertheless, Lin’s reading of early modern
performance traditions and spectatorship serves as a valuable working model for scholars of drama seeking to marry rigorous historical investigations with critical theory. For those interested in reception theory, material studies, and early modern stage practices, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* can be read productively alongside other studies in historical phenomenology as well as early modern audience and reception studies.

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Reviewed by Ellen Anthony-Moore, *Vassar College*

Stored in the chairman’s office of the National Theatre in London is a bust of Lena Ashwell with the caption “Actress and Pioneer of a National Theatre.” Other than this small remembrance, Ashwell’s contributions to British theatre have been almost overlooked. Margaret Leask’s *Lena Ashwell: Actress, Patriot, Pioneer* is an impressive, well researched, and thoughtful biography that seeks to bring to light the magnificent work of this almost-forgotten theatre artist. Leask’s book portrays Ashwell as an important innovator who was “influential in changing attitudes and providing positive examples through her commitment to improving the conditions of work and status of actors” (226). Scholarship of the Edwardian era typically focuses on the most well-known personalities: Ellen Terry, Henry Irving, Charles Wyndham, or George Bernard Shaw, among others. Leask’s biography, however, reminds us that alongside the glamour of the early nineteenth-century London stage there was also controversial and selfless hard work, by Ashwell and others, which formed the foundation for an upcoming century of experimentation and innovation in English theatre.

Ashwell began her career as a successful actress on the West End stage, and in the first chapter of the book, Leask details her collaborations with some of the most famous figures of the time. Using contemporary reviews, the book characterizes Ashwell’s life on the stage as full of highs and lows. She was often described by theatre critics as too modern and “neurotic” to be a great Shakespearean actress, and subsequently Ashwell became a representative of the “new woman” in Edwardian theatre. Known for her roles in contemporary plays such as *Mrs. Dane’s Defence* (1900) or *Diana of Dobson’s* (1908), her performances were associated with “realism” on the stage.

That said, it is not really her legacy as an actor that is the central focus of this study. Much of Leask’s book details, instead, the meticulous and exhausting work Ashwell and her troupe did to entertain British soldiers stationed abroad with musical entertainments and comedies, work that resulted in her being one of the women who received an inaugural Order of the British Empire in 1917—the first time women