

McGavin, John J., and Greg **Walker**, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford Textual Perspectives), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016; paperback; pp. 224; R.R.P. £18.99; ISBN 9780198768623.

John McGavin's and Greg Walker's *Imagining Spectatorship*, from the *Oxford Textual Perspectives* series, presents a novel approach to the subject of medieval and early modern theatrics. Building on the recent scholarship surrounding the 'cognitive turn' in theatrical reception, and the work of such academics as Gary Taylor, Bruce McConachie, and Guy McAuley in addressing notions of spectatorship, this text seeks to further explore the physical and cultural conditions under which dramatic and theatrical performances were witnessed. McGavin and Walker identify a gap in the scholarship concerning the experiences of the spectator and the relationship that the 'two aspects of affect and space' (p. 4) played in shaping this experience. The primary contention of *Imagining Spectatorship* is that by considering these aspects in relation to cognitive theory methodologies, new insights into the spectatorial experiences of the past can be made.

Imagining Spectatorship is conscious of its own historical and theoretical challenges as it presents 'speculation and imagination' (p. 42) as necessary analytical tools. The lack of tangible historical evidence for audience responses emerges as a considerable issue so McGavin and Walker are forced to implement a more theoretical approach. Indeed, one of the motivations of this study is to offer alternative routes in which to understand medieval and early modern spectatorship. The authors thus attempt to explore audience activity through the lens of cognitive theory and the behavioral sciences, embedding these approaches within a larger framework of spectator and performance methodologies. McGavin and Walker acknowledge that this theoretical approach can't totally capture the many complexities of theatrical spectatorship, or the experiences of individual audience members, but posit that this method is one possible means in which to overcome the scarcity of source material.

This text presents a number of case studies, emphasizing different theatrical forms and the spectator responses that they elicited over the space of 150 years. The focus of *Imagining Spectatorship* is quite broad in this regard with McGavin and Walker attempting to present overarching commonalities in spectator experiences during this period. Their case studies range from morality plays, to pageants, tourneys, street processions, and more conventional forms of scripted drama. Furthermore, this text is not only concerned with the playhouses of this period but also the manorial halls, palaces, and city streets where public

spectacles were held. Each of these locations held their own unique spatial configurations and social traditions, shaping the responses of the audience. It is in these case studies that the strengths of this text's methodology are really illustrated, demonstrating that the lack of personal testimony for this period can be addressed through the careful application of critical and cognitive theory.

McGavin and Walker construct the spectator—either real or imagined— as active participants in the dramatic process. This characterization leads into one of the core themes of this study: the symbiotic relationship between playwright, actor, and audience, within the performative space of the 'theatre'. Within this space, the players and audience interacted in unique ways, shaped by the spatial and socio-economic characteristics of the playhouse, manor hall, or street where this drama was taking place. These interactions are also tempered by how playwrights 'variously imagined, pre-empted, and constructed' (p. 69) their audience. *Imagining Spectatorship* highlights how playwrights wrote drama in anticipation of audience reaction, reversing the usual focus of the scholarship by illustrating the spectator's influence on the construction of drama. McGavin and Walker thus attribute far more mobility to the spectator than has traditionally been the case, further posing questions to the current scholarship.

While the efficacy of this cognitive theoretical approach to early modern spectatorship is consistently demonstrated, it is in the last case study where this text encounters some complications. In this final chapter, McGavin and Walker shift their analysis to their own personal experiences in an attempt to join their 'spectatorship with that of sixteenth-century witnesses' (p. 147), reflecting on their engagement with the 2014 theatrical production of the 1552 *A Satire of the Three*, staged in the grounds of Linlithgow Palace, Scotland. The primary issue with this chapter is that its inclusion in this study is not exactly justified. Throughout this text, McGavin and Walker empathize just how important cultural and contextual factors are to the experiences of spectators, yet still attempt to present clear links between modern and past audiences. While this chapter was indeed interesting, it was somewhat lacking when compared to the quality of the preceding case studies in *Imagining Spectatorship*.

Imagining Spectatorship amounts to an innovative contribution to the scholarship on medieval and early modern theatrics. McGavin's and Walker's use of cognitive science within a broader framework of cultural, historical, and spatial theoretical methodologies allows us to gain further insight into a particular historical experience that has largely been inaccessible up until now. The critique of the cognitive turn in theatrical studies is also well-

measured, offering challenges to the current trends of this scholarship. Like all exemplary critical studies, *Imagining Spectatorship* opens up a number of possible theoretical approaches, prompting further work to be undertaken in this area.

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