

Early Theatre
A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama

Volume 11 | Issue 1

Article 14

1-1-2008

Book Review: Barbara Ravelhofer. *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Emily F. Winerock
University of Toronto, emily.winerock@utoronto.ca

Recommended Citation

Winerock, Emily F.. 'Book Review: Barbara Ravelhofer. *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.'. *Early Theatre* 11.1 (2008): 134-7 (paper). Article 14.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/earlytheatre/vol11/iss1/14>

processes by which meaning is created. Even so, the book does important work. It provides evocative and interesting close readings from a perspective that promises to challenge traditional ways of reading 'the' body in both the past and the present.

LISA DICKSON

Barbara Ravelhofer. *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp xvi, 318.

The last century has seen a marked increase in the quality of English Renaissance dance scholarship. Recent studies based on archival research have supplanted earlier works shaped by modern aesthetics; Ian Payne's *The Almain in Britain, c.1549–c.1675: A Dance Manual from Manuscript Sources* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) has superseded Mabel Dolmetsch's *Dances of England and France from 1450 to 1600: With their Music and Authentic Manner of Performance* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949). However, until now the most valuable explorations of dancing in the court masque have appeared in studies on related topics such as Peter Walls' *Music in the English Courtly Masque, 1604–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), and many scholars continue to rely on old standards like Enid Welsford's *The Court Masque: A Study in the Relationship between Poetry and the Revels* (Cambridge: CUP, 1927). Barbara Ravelhofer's *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music* fills this gap in scholarship. Ravelhofer makes a convincing argument for the interrelated importance of dance, costume, and music to the creation, performance, and interpretation of English court masques. She also challenges conventional research methods by drawing on evidence from modern-day dance reconstructions.

Ravelhofer divides *The Early Stuart Masque* into three parts: 'Dance', 'Costume', and 'Case Studies'. Part I provides detailed descriptions of English and continental dance sources, offers new research on the choreography and rehearsal of theatre dances, highlights tensions between practical and textual evidence, and examines the controversies surrounding female performance. Part II addresses the creation, circulation, and storage of masque costumes, considers costumes within the context of performance, and compares male

and female costuming conventions. Part III features three case studies. The first is a comparison of two Jonsonian masques, the 1609 *The Masque of Queenes* and the 1611 *Oberon*; the second is an analysis of Thomas Carew's 1634 *Coelum Britannicum*; and the third case study examines a little-known masque written by the Englishman Robert Bargrave around 1650 for a wedding in Constantinople. This last, seemingly odd choice is not an early Stuart masque, nor was it even performed as the wedding was called off, but it is the earliest English source to record masque choreographies (11). Ravelhofer uses this case study primarily to reflect on differences between Ottoman and European culture and theatrical conventions, but she does offer some (though perhaps not enough) fascinating details of Bargrave's choreographies, orchestrations, and mimetic devices. She only dedicates one subsection of *The Early Stuart Masque* specifically to music in the masque, but the writings of David Lindley, Peter Walls, and John Ward, among others, inform the work throughout. The bibliography includes a discography, and Ravelhofer examines the relationship of dance music and choreography in each of the case studies.

Masque dance and costume scholarship for the early seventeenth century has previously relied heavily on dancing manuals, illustrations, and narrative descriptions. Ravelhofer augments these sources by examining manuscript and printed sources in Munich, Paris, and Stockholm collections as well as in British and American archives. From domestic and Venetian calendar of state papers to royal account books and wardrobe inventories to entries in the Lancashire, Oxford, and Shropshire Records of Early English Drama collections, Ravelhofer's extensive and copiously documented research sets a precedent for future studies. This broad source base also leads her to conclusions that challenge current assumptions. For example, she observes that expenditures on masques were on par with those for other court spectacles (155) and that masque costumes did not circulate in the same manner as theatrical costumes (267). She argues that the 'current emphasis on how masques visually privileged the monarch's gaze by way of their choreographies and perspective scenery' is overstated (267) and that in masque creation artistic cooperation and use of known tunes or conventions were as much the rule as artistic competition and innovation (226, 252, 266–8). Another strength of *The Early Stuart Masque* is the careful distinctions Ravelhofer makes between continental and English sources: distinctions missing in works such as Skiles Howard's 1998 *The Politics of Courtly Dancing in Early Modern England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press). In her chapter on methodology, Ravelhofer provides

a nuanced discussion of the variable relevance of continental records when interpreting English performance practices.

Ravelhofer's most significant contribution is also methodological. To complement and interrogate more traditional sources, Ravelhofer brings in the evidence of modern-day dance reconstructions, in which '[c]urrent theoretical assumptions will be tested against actual choreographies and practical implications of performance' (9). For example, to prove the feasibility of dancing in chopines (platform overshoes worn by fashionable European women) she offers both early modern and modern examples. She quotes Fabritio Caroso's argument in the 1600 *Nobilità di dame* that with care a woman wearing chopines could dance 'entirely with grace, seemliness, and beauty' (112), but she also notes the experience of modern-day dance reconstructors Pat Rader, Laura Crockett, and Julia Sutton (113). Through practical experimentation these reconstructors found that wearing chopines while dancing had 'no serious impact on dancing skills or self-expression' (113, n 47).

However, incorporating modern, kinaesthetic explorations of historical material can be problematic. How does one cite reconstructions? How can one contextualize them? Most readers will find it difficult to assess the evidence of the reconstructors who vouched for dancing in chopines. Ravelhofer's reference to the experiment would better support her argument were it clearer that one of the participants, Julia Sutton, was the editor and translator of the edition of *Nobilità di dame* from which Ravelhofer quotes Caroso. Readers might also appreciate knowing that Sutton was the producer of *Il Ballarino: The art of Renaissance dance*, a 1990 video recording of dance reconstructions based on another dancing manual by Caroso. This video (available from Dance Horizons, a division of the Princeton Book Company) features Pat Rader, another contributor to the chopines discussion, as the lead female dancer. The reconstructors' backgrounds and qualifications increase the credibility of their conclusions and by extension the credibility of the contentions of scholars like Ravelhofer who draw on 'practical evidence' in their research.

The current interest in 'original practices' in theatre history circles raises parallel concerns. How should the results of projects like the University of Toronto and McMaster-based Shakespeare and the Queen's Men inform and complement more traditional research methods? How can a scholar's interpretation of a performance be open to the same scrutiny as that given documentary or literary readings? In both the historical dance and theatre communities, these issues have generally been bypassed as researchers present

practical evidence only at in-field workshops and conferences. Ravelhofer's provocative use of reconstructions in an Oxford University Press monograph challenges dance and theatre historians alike to establish effective, rigorous methods for presenting practical evidence to popular and scholarly audiences. A glossary of reconstructors, a dedicated section of the bibliography for reconstructions and performances mentioned in the text, and an accompanying DVD with clips of relevant performances, especially those from rare or privately owned recordings, would be helpful additions to *The Early Stuart Masque* and similar works.

The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music combines careful research, an engaging narrative, plentiful illustrations, and the experience of modern-day dance reconstructions to offer insights relevant to multiple fields, reflecting both the author's varied areas of expertise and the interdisciplinarity of the masque form itself. In this fine study, Barbara Ravelhofer broadens current masque scholarship by demonstrating how dance, costume, and music bridge linguistic and cultural barriers, mediate or further political agendas, and provide audiences with a splendid and memorable feast for the senses. *The Early Stuart Masque* grants readers a welcome invitation to these spectacular, sensory feasts.

E.F. WINEROCK

Bryan Reynolds. *Transversal Enterprises in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries: Fugitive Explorations*. Hounds mills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Pp xi, 271.

One of the thrills of reading early modern English drama or listening to it in performance is witnessing the evolution of a new literary language. Bryan Reynolds' *Transversal Enterprises* similarly blazes trails through a new linguistic frontier. Reynolds has invented a new lexicon to describe the unique approach to literary, performance, and cultural studies he calls 'transversal theory'. Just as early modern English authors created neologisms by adapting words from other languages, Reynolds adapts terms and ideas from Marxist, deconstructionist, and psychoanalytic theorists. The result is a radical and eminently useful set of new perspectives on early modern drama.