

MATTEO A. PANGALLO, *Playwriting Playgoers in Shakespeare's Theater*. Pp. 256. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. £50.00 (ISBN 978 0 8122 9425 5).

Matteo A. Pangallo's book aims to re-evaluate the topic of playwriting playgoers in the years during which the commercial London theatres thrived, from the end of the sixteenth century to the closure of the theatres in 1642. These 'amateur' playwrights—a modern term, which Pangallo explains should not be taken to qualify their intentions, nor the quality of their work or whether they were paid or not for their efforts, but should simply signal 'their position as outsiders' (3)—learnt to write plays by attending plays: they were writing plays from without the industry, as spectators rather than actors of 'an increasingly—though always incompletely—closed industry' (3).

The principal aim of Pangallo's book is to challenge those scholars who dismiss the plays written by playgoers as 'naïve' and ignorant, by showing that, on the contrary, these outsiders were very much aware of the practices of professional playwriting, and that studying their plays can teach us about both 'the awareness of the audience and the practices of the playmakers' (77). Pangallo's repetition of the book's overall claim somewhat detracts from the many other points he makes about: how playgoers revised their plays by thinking about the effectiveness and suitability of the plays both on page and on stage, demonstrating a deep concern for audience reception (Chapter 2); how playwriting playgoers directly collaborated with the professionals and used stage directions to adapt plays for performance (Chapter 3); and finally, how playgoers were also aware of the ways in which dramatic verse created action and emotion (Chapter 4). Each chapter focuses on one aspect of play-making that shows how these 'amateurs' were aware of and in fact appropriated professional practices, but it feels as if Pangallo's focus on challenging older assumptions potentially limited the scope of the discussion and the reach of his observations.

In Chapter 2, on the topic of revisions in playgoers' plays, Pangallo points out how 'scholars usually assume that such revision[s] signal amateurish indecision' (75). Pangallo, using Walter Mountfort's *The Launching of the Mary* (1632-33) and Arthur Wilson's *The Inconstant Lady* (1627-30), offers instead a positive interpretation of these revisions: as a sign of the playgoers' 'creative experimentation' (75) and efforts to please other authorities involved in the making of the plays or the receivers of these plays. Like professionals, they understood that writing a play meant being part of 'a collaborative enterprise', involving the Master of Revels and the theatrical company which would perform the play, 'that required the necessary activity of rewriting' (76). However, as outsiders, 'amateur' playwrights could sometimes be freer in their decisions, as for example when Mountfort did not accept all the deletions suggested by the Master of Revels. Pangallo suggests that this might be because, as an 'amateur' playwright, Mountfort did not have to worry about possible repercussions on his future career. More questionable is Pangallo's suggestion that this behaviour might reflect the professional practice of keeping some of the material censored in the printed playtext in the performed version of a play. Unfortunately, this can only be speculation, as no evidence survives to prove this idea.

A few other generalisations appear in the book as well, such as when Pangallo talks about the use of old-fashioned rhyme in Alexander Brome's popular *The Cunning Lovers* (1632-39). Pangallo uses this example to claim that others in the audience shared Brome's taste for the older fashion, and that 'Brome's use of rhyme demonstrates how playgoers' plays might complicate how we determine theatrical fashion and, more broadly, how we reconstruct early modern audiences' expectations' (163). If looking at this kind of evidence can contribute towards building a more complex picture of theatrical practices

and audiences' expectations, it is also true that one instance cannot be used to claim that a whole 'theatrical fashion' can be rediscovered.

The strongest points of the book are raised in Chapter 3, which discusses how 'amateur' playwrights took their stage directions seriously 'as performance instructions' (104) that can reveal 'how these consumers saw and thought about performance on the professional stage' (104). William Percy's *Mahomet and His Heaven* provides the most interesting example. Percy revised his play with the aim of having it potentially performed by two different London acting companies: one adult company and one boys company (The Children of Paul's). Percy had learnt that players could change a script to make it more suitable for performance, and so in his stage directions he offered different options, depending on which company was going to perform his play. As Pangallo explores, Percy's stage directions show his acute awareness of how practical conditions, such as different-sized casts, could affect the performance of his play, or how different theatres might be able or not to produce certain special effects (visual or audio), or how certain props or costumes (like beards) would be more or less appropriate depending on the type of company. This is an excellent example of a playwriting playgoer showing his awareness of being an outsider, but also showing self-confidence about his work while at the same time being happy to concede some of his authority and collaborate with the professionals in order to produce the best staged performance possible.

Playwriting playgoers were 'concerned with theatricality, convention, and reception' (140), and as Pangallo claims, what we can learn from their plays can help us build a better, richer picture of theatrical practices. Pangallo encourages a positive attitude towards this material so often overlooked: as he makes clear, 'rather than discussing playgoers' plays as "imperfect", it is more precise, and useful, to read their plays as revealing a different understanding of dramaturgy, one that evolved in a different part of

the playhouse' (141). This invitation to challenge past perspectives on this material is the book's main contribution. Pangallo also inspires us to think more about non-canonical works, to open up new avenues of investigation, and to reflect on the importance of adding 'a different voice to the conversation' (163), which can be used as 'direct testimony' (187) of how professional plays were staged and performed in the first half of the seventeenth century.

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