

Buckingham was behind William Painter's attempt to get a reversion to the mastership in 1622-3 is disproved by a letter from Painter to Cranfield, showing clearly that Buckingham had nothing to do with the matter. But this by no means destroys the value of Dutton's book; he prompts us to think more carefully about the role of censorship in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, and to see it as having a positive as well as a negative side.

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Hospitable Performances: Dramatic Genre and Cultural

Practices in Early Modern England. By DARYL W. PALMER. Pp. xii+220. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1992. \$28.50.

Palmer's book begins innocuously enough with what he almost apologetically calls 'a rather traditional excavation of hospitable artifacts from Elizabethan and Jacobean England' (p. 26). His real interest, however, is not so much in the practice of hospitality as the representation of it in plays and other writings. In particular, he seeks to approach matters in terms of 'contextuality'; Greenblatt and Bakhtin (whose age it is, p. 113) are acknowledged heroes, and 'New Criticism', which I thought most people had almost forgotten about, is described as 'still-powerful' and possibly to blame for the wrongful absence of some 'fascinating social and ideological analyses' because of its supposed 'painstaking totalization' (p. 39).

How well does Palmer's approach succeed? It is not easy to decide whether, in particular considerations of texts and contexts, his judgements are persuasive or not because of the method adopted or for other reasons. But there certainly are not a few times when I found myself suspecting that a wrongheaded reading might just possibly have been avoided if more attention had been paid to the texts and less to the contexts. Thus we find Palmer taking Maynard Mack to task for expressing 'dogma' in: 'The motivation of the sisters [Goneril and Regan] lies not in what Lear has done to them, but in what they are. The fact that they are paradigms of evil rather than (or as well as) exasperated spoiled children whose patience has been exhausted gives them their stature and dramatic force' (quoted from *King Lear in Our Time*, 1972, on pp. 179-80).

Mack's statement seems to me to make excellent sense when weighed against the actual facts of the play. Palmer, however, while admitting that his own 'contextualization' cannot contain the manifold 'nuances' (*sic*) of Goneril and Regan's actions, suggests 'that we return these women to their households in the English countryside where paradigms of evil may appear to be paradigms of a failed royal progress. As social historians have made clear, the failure of the countryside may easily become the failure of woman.'

But Shakespeare's play does not in any sense establish a connection between Goneril and Regan's evil and 'a failed royal progress'. To see such a connection is both incorrect and fanciful. Yet from this point about *Lear* we move abruptly to the following material (still on p. 180):

As a prologue to Macbeth's arrival, Shakespeare evokes this topical significance through the First Witch's tale:

A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap
And mounched and mounched and mounched.
'Give me,' quoth I.
'Aroint thee, witch!' the rump-fed ronyon cries.
Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' th' Tiger:
But in a sieve I'll thither sail

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And, like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do. (1.3.4-10)

This creature's complaint has less magic in it than bad hospitality. If women, as Hyde says, are at times the special collectors and distributors of gifts, then the witch's need to do evil really responds to a failure of giving. Historians have begun to confirm this anthropological perspective. Keith Thomas points out that the old woman turned away from the gate without the traditional care of hospitality was practically an emblem for the age's neglect of hospitality.

Inasmuch as one can follow what is happening here, Palmer seems to be guilty of establishing illegitimate connections. It may well be, for example, that some 'real' witches, outside *Macbeth*, turned evil as a result of other people's failure to give. And Palmer's remark to this effect is perhaps of some use in relation to a play like *The Witch of Edmonton*. But that does not mean that we have any reason for believing that Shakespeare, in *Macbeth*, sees his First Witch in such a way (even though she is refused chestnuts), let alone that the evil of that witch has anything to do with the evil which Shakespeare presents Goneril and Regan as having.

For Palmer, the reality which is *not* in the play is at times more important for what he thinks the play says than the reality which is, and thus he approvingly remarks that 'No one who has ever seen Peter Brook's interpretation of "Lear as guest" will ever forget the flying plates, pounding, yelling and belching' (p. 170), and he presses his case against Lear's supposed misdemeanour as guest yet further, and equally fantastically, by describing the conduct of Elizabeth and her retinue. Thus he comes to the amazing conclusion: 'The queen's party could always be counted on to destroy hedges and ruin the grass. Lear is finally most probable and most royal' (p. 171).

Palmer's reading of Shakespeare's comedies struck me as less crassly wrong and procedurally inappropriate than that of the tragedies, but this is not to say that it necessarily commands assent. For example, he claims about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that 'The [aristocratic] order triumphs, but the agency of the ruler, like the agency of the householder Egeus, seems diminished'. But it is not diminished. On the contrary, it is enhanced. At the beginning of the play, Theseus appears to concur with Egeus in relying on the law of Athens to get Hermia to see what seems to be the error of her ways. At the end of the play, however, when it has become obvious to Theseus that, to promote legitimate human happiness, he has to overrule Egeus, he does so, and Shakespeare indicates unequivocally that the power of the ruler is stronger than that of the law.

The best part of the book, in my view, is the centre, in which Palmer has much of interest to offer on materials that do not get read very often, yet deserve more attention, not least for their portrayal of notions of hospitality. Much in Chapter 4 ('Pageantry, Hosts, and Parasites'), especially the material on Nashe, is commendable.

However, Palmer's treatment of more unequivocally 'canonical' texts does not finally prove particularly illuminating or accurate, despite his admiration for what he finds 'provocative' or 'radical' in other academics.

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