

**The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment: Print,  
Performance, and Gender.**

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**Published version**

ANDERSON, Susan L. (2018). The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment: Print, Performance, and Gender. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 70 (3), 1136-1138.

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*The Elizabethan Country House Entertainment: Print, Performance and Gender*. Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 256 pp. \$99.99.

Kolkovich's detailed and well-researched study of Elizabethan country house entertainments places them within a variety of relevant contexts, showing how these events, though sometimes rather gnomonic, can illuminate the interweaving of gender, nation, family and hierarchy in Elizabethan politics and culture.

Part 1 of the book gathers together readings of country house entertainments as performance, considering the broad categories of place, gender, and hospitality. This section of the book is founded on detailed scholarship on the families who hosted the Queen and their connections with her, providing well-informed sketches of the hosts and their situations as each entertainment is introduced. Part 2 concentrates on print, covering publishers' targeting of a readership for entertainment texts, the texts' role in emergent news culture, and the management of the Sidney family's literary legacy. The focus on print is a welcome angle, extending the work of Gabriel Heaton and others on the afterlives of these events, acknowledging the distinctiveness of the print audience and therefore acknowledging the potential impact this might have on the text's representation of the event.

I did wonder if dividing "print" and "performance" into two different sections might efface somewhat the fact that our understanding of both comes from the same sets of source material (not all of which are printed). The division risks separating out too categorically readings that might have been more effectively combined to acknowledge the complexities of address and agency in these entertainments and texts. Having said that, this schema does help to create clarity by organising the approaches scholars can take to reading this material, and draws a broad division between the uses to which we can put it, whether that is as evidence of historical events or of literary techniques and traditions, for example.

Perhaps these concerns could have been addressed by an explicit theorisation of the alternative ways in which we need to understand the workings of authorship in relation to these entertainments, particularly in terms of the input and agency of other participants in the events besides the host and guest, and the possibility that bids for favour at these occasions were not solely directed towards the Queen. The question of who is speaking to whom can have more than one answer, and the framing of these texts by other agents interacts with and mediates the statements ascribed elsewhere to individual hosts. This complexity is brought out more effectively in the section on print, where the investment of printers like Richard Jones and Thomas Cadman in presenting entertainments as literature is deftly drawn.

There are some very interesting readings of specific gestures here, such as the examination of the moment where Elizabeth dismounted and raised Frances Seymour from her knees when arriving at the house on the Elvetham estate in 1592. More extended discussions also provide insight into the interaction between poetic and political statements. For instance, Chapter 2 charts the ways entertainments renegotiated the gendered expectations governing their hosts' political roles. The courtly eloquence of Petrarchan expressions of love that are familiar from sonnet culture featured in several entertainments, but Kolkovich demonstrates that there were alternative modes of address available, including the masculinity of military vigour and plainness presented at Rycote in 1592, and the pastoral evocations of chastity that argued for female courtiers' efficacy at Bisham in the same year.

The comparison of Philip Sidney's "The Lady of May" (performed in 1578) and Mary Sidney's "The Dialogue between Two Shepherds" (intended for performance in 1599 but never realised), neatly demonstrates how both texts scrutinise the modes of courtly rhetoric that they employ. Kolkovich traces the re-contextualisation of Mary Sidney's piece in different editions of the miscellany *A Poetical Rapsody* (reprinted four times between 1602 and 1621), showing how such texts can find new meanings and contexts, despite the indubitable occasionality of their origins.

Although the map showing the locations of the entertainments at the opening of the volume is a little cramped, the book includes well selected and presented illustrations, plus an appendix tabulating the dates and details of all seventeen Elizabethan country house entertainments that we know of. These features add to the book's utility as an excellent starting point for further investigation of these fascinating performances and the texts and other forms of evidence that remain of them.

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