

Review of Janette Dillon, *Theatre, court and city, 1595-1610: Drama and social space in London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) ISBN 0-521-66118-8

'Practical deconstruction' might seem a contradiction in terms, but this excellent book shows how poststructuralist thinking about binary opposites can produce sensitive dramatic readings. Dramatizing an attack upon London, Thomas Heywood's *Edward 4* focusses on crucial boundary points (city gates and bridges) separating those 'within' from those 'without', but binary substitution (lord mayor for king, king for commoner, lady mayoress for Jane Shore, Shore-as-wife for Shore-as-mistress) cannot sustain the grand theme that loyalty to city equals loyalty to nation; the exchanges seem exploitative rather than beneficent. Dillon offers a similarly poststructuralist reading of *Love's Labour's Lost*, showing that the academy reproduces the very city evils it opposes: the men are bound by oaths and signatures, are subject to surveillance and, finally, intrusion from without. Even their oath mirrors the apprentices': for a fixed term they must 'live-in', work hard, and not marry.

Dillon's reading of the War of the Theatre plays and of the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* address the self-contradictory nature of satire--to expose filth one must wallow in it--and the already-contained subversiveness of city-sanctioned excesses such as the apprentice riots. Best of all are Dillon's readings of Jonson's newly discovered *Entertainment at Britain's Burse* and of *Epicoene*. Robert Cecil intended the *Entertainment* to stage a magical transformation whereby tawdry commerce acquires transcendent authority by king James's presence in the shopping centre, but Jonson's heart lay the opposite way, in bathetic revelation of the dross underlying impressive spectacle. Having compromised for the *Entertainment*, Jonson expelled his bad feelings via *Epicoene* in which the body-as-spectacle is shown to be a vile collection of shop-bought parts. Across the period Dillon relates the plays to the shifting tensions between court and city, and shows that the drama subtly, but unmistakably, registers these changes.