

settles are not new—a haunting note of contemporaneity sounds throughout the volume if only to remind the reader that, though details and political specifics may have changed, the problems and discourses are part of the present world.

Cynthia Lowenthal. *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003. xxii + 270 pp. \$40.00. Review by ANDREW FLECK, SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY.

The Restoration theater allowed for a much greater openness than English audiences had experienced in earlier periods of public drama. Most significantly, women joined the casts of plays, but in numerous other ways the scope and interests of the theater changed radically after 1660. Cynthia Lowenthal attempts to explain some of these new interests in *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*. Arguing that the later seventeenth century was a period in which different forms of identity had to be reconstituted, Lowenthal shows that the theater allowed both for the violation of previous categories of identity and for their policing and confirmation. In this view, theater serves an ultimately conservative function, bringing to the stage the visual cues of identity that help to naturalize and inscribe notions of gender, status (rather than class), and national identity in a turbulent period of English expansion and consolidation. Each of her chapters focuses on a key play from the period 1656 to 1707 complemented by readings of several other plays, including in each instance a work of Aphra Behn's. A few of the points in Lowenthal's study are certainly interesting, but this poorly executed book undermines these few good points, making *Performing Identities* a frustrating and disappointing read.

Lowenthal argues that the Restoration stage explores and remakes English imperial, national, status, and gender identities. She begins with two chapters devoted to defining English identity in this key period of imperial and mercantile expansion. In the first, focusing on Dryden's *Indian Emperour*, Lowenthal suggests that England's emergence as a belated colonial power required an engagement with Spain's successful but declining legacy in the Americas. Reading Dryden's representation of the Spanish victory over Montezuma as a way of imagining the ideal English imperial project—Cortés

is made to stand in as the coolly rational English model, displacing stereotypical Spanish excesses onto his underlings—Lowenthal finds in this heroic play an effort to marginalize the “excessive and hypermasculine” Spanish failures in favor of self-discipline when confronting the wonders of the New World (55). In this play, and in Behn’s *Widdow Ranter*, the possibilities created by female characters allow for a legitimating transfer of the colonial mantle, passing over the uncomfortable fact of conquest as a *fait accompli*. Turning in the next chapter to national identity, Lowenthal finds that mercantile figures in the drama have to be appropriately disciplined and their foreign tastes contained. The buffoonish Dutch figure in Behn’s *The Dutch Lover* and the low-born but wealthy English merchants addicted to Spanish and French fashions in Wycherley’s *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* suffer humiliation and exclusion, while in Mary Pix’s *Adventures in Madrid* the English adventurers learn the “manly” lessons of “self-control . . . [and] delayed gratification” (109). These two chapters then, while focusing on the formation of English identity in the imperial and international arenas, simultaneously suggest the drama’s role in establishing appropriate notions of masculine, bourgeois identity.

In the final two chapters of *Performing Identities*, Lowenthal focuses primarily on the ways in which the period’s drama works to shape feminine identity. Here we find some of her best work in the book, as well as some of the indicators of the book’s flaws. In a chapter on “discursive identities,” Lowenthal traces efforts to represent female desire, to make the interior visible on the Restoration stage. Focusing on readings of Behn’s *The Rover* and Manley’s *Royal Mischief*, Lowenthal brings these two plays into a context of a kind of Restoration celebrity culture—the period’s fascination with the lives of its actresses when not performing on stage, concluding that there was a great deal of performing off the stage as well. The female characters in these plays and the women who acted these roles point to the possibility “that spectatorial relations are such that there is no possibility of a woman’s ever transcending her representation” (123). The representations of desiring women—the painted portraits, mirrors, and verbal depictions at the heart of Behn’s and Manley’s plays—ultimately mediate and circumscribe women’s desire and in turn stories of actresses’ behavior with aristocratic patrons outside of the theaters then serves to reinforce aristocratic notions of status. In her subsequent chapter, Lowenthal turns to the drama’s recurrent interest in sexual assaults. She associates this fixation with the mercantile culture’s search for novelty, complicated

by the transformation of the notion of “monsters” in the later seventeenth century from prodigies to pathologies. The works of Pix and Manley, Lowenthal argues, transform the previous treatments of rape on the Restoration stage and create a space for a female heroic in which a woman can claim a value distinct from “her unbreached body” and residing instead in “her strong and unsullied mind” (175). The book ends with an extended and uneven epilogue testing Lowenthal’s conclusions against five plays of the period.

If some of Lowenthal’s best work is to be found in the final portion of *Performing Identities*, some of the book’s weaknesses are most apparent here as well. Perhaps the dozens of typographical errors, reference inconsistencies, and awkward turns of phrase can be attributed to ineffective copy-editing. But muddled use of dates (the beginning of the Third Anglo-Dutch War in 1672 [p. 87] or 1673 [p. 76], for instance, or the misdating of Behn’s death [p. 66]) or references to figures from a previous period (Brubage [p. 115] or Frances Bacon [p. 145]) might be said to speak to larger problems. One of the strengths of *Performing Identities*, according to the publisher, is its engagement with the secondary literature. In fact, the excessive and inconsistent reliance on such sources ultimately undoes the book. Passing over numerous difficulties in this regard, two examples are illustrative. In one instance, the author relies on Lawrence Stone’s excellent study, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, in order to generalize about Restoration aristocratic attitudes, despite the fact that Stone’s study runs only through 1641. Elsewhere, in a chapter on national identity, Lowenthal relies on a single book by Michael Duffy in order to explain English attitudes towards various other European nations throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Drawing on a single historian’s work to understand English stereotypes of the Dutch, for instance, Lowenthal incorrectly explains that the English considered the Dutch to be “cowardly when drunk” (85) and a few pages later correctly describes a stereotypical Dutch character as aggressive when drunk (90). No comment is made about her own contradictory claims, just as in other parts of the book similarly unremarked contradictions arise. These inconsistencies and lack of self-awareness point to the limitations of *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*: it can offer suggestive readings, but it does not instill much confidence in its conclusions.