

Joanne Rochester. *Staging Spectatorship in the Plays of Philip Massinger*. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010. 166 pp. + 3 figures. \$99.95. Review by NANCY MOHRLOCK BUNKER, MACON STATE COLLEGE.

Joanne Rochester's important study addresses staged spectatorship in plays by Caroline playwright Philip Massinger. Each chapter presents a different form of metatheatrical inset: plays-within of *The Roman Actor* (1626), masques-within of *The City Madam* (1632), and the miniature portrait of *The Picture* (1629). The conclusion interprets paradramatic and trial scenes. Rochester argues that Massinger's onstage spectators typically "misread, overinterpret or otherwise misconstrue the metadramatic insets they watch, and their responses to these interpretations structure the plots of his plays" (1). She explores the vitality of insets in the Introduction, and assertively points out the presentation and representation of spectatorship as commentary on Early Modern audiences.

A key issue in the text is Massinger's status as a "transitional figure" with a career spanning the reign of two monarchs, three theatrical venues, and ever-changing audiences (3). As head playwright for the King's Men 1625-1642, both plays and their insets demonstrate staged spectator response as fundamental to the plot. Because Massinger foregrounds ethical issues, audiences both on and off stage must be aware of theatre's capacity to create moral judgments. In this way, Rochester argues, the playwright's dramaturgy is "exploration and analysis" (10).

Chapter 1 focuses upon *The Roman Actor* (1626), Massinger's most complex examination of theatrical process and interrelation of staging and spectatorship. Rochester reads the play through the lens of how theatre works, using the series of plays-within to instruct staged spectators toward judgment. Her seminal commentary deals with the tribulations of Paris, who "gets ambiguous admiration awarded to an actor, who cuckolds an emperor, and he gets it because of *what he cannot help*—the interpretations spectators put on what they see" (41). His destiny controlled by an onstage audience even as the theatre's real audience also is a fictional audience. For Rochester, Massinger's inset points out the critical responsibility imposed upon audiences who view public performances; they must look beneath the surface to

determine the playwright's message. Massinger's manifesto, the power of the theatre is that it provides the space for all types of discourse, informs this chapter and the balance of Rochester's study.

An overview of masquing culture begins Chapter 2; Rochester then examines masques-within in *The Duke of Milan* (1621), *The Picture* (1629), *The Guardian* (1633), and *The City Madam* (1633) suggesting Massinger's use of masque speaks to the form's popularity. Employing masques in a conventional manner as structural elements, Massinger writes them to serve as markers for plot shifts. Rochester explicates the masques in *The Duke of Milan* and *The Picture* that comment negatively on the courts which stage them; she also notes that these masques invert the accepted sexual hierarchy in marriage. Massinger's most elaborate and most complex masque-within, found in *The City Madam*, includes all spectacular forms of mythological characters as well as transformation through love. In its duplicity and deception motifs, the masque exploits onstage audiences' inability to see truth. Massinger, Rochester argues, expects offstage audiences to cut through the masque performance, and mitigate the weaknesses of the onstage spectators. The theatre audience witnesses Luke, the master actor, getting "caught in his own theatrical trap" (87). As the most inadequate spectator in the play's inset, he recognizes neither fiction nor truth, he is unable to distinguish between appearance and reality, and he is insufficient to provide the moral lesson. The theatrical audience then must be able to grasp the "allegorical truth the fiction contains" (92).

Chapter 3 first contextualizes the social and cultural environment alongside the intellectual notion of artist as "part of the theatrical world, influencing presentation of art on stage" (102). Rochester discusses pieces of visual art as spectatorial objects for the onstage audience in *The Renegado* (1624) and *The Emperor of the East* (1631); she closes with attention to the magical miniature in *The Picture* (1629). These property paintings are portraits tied to love or desire. Massinger gives the nudes of *The Renegado* fiery presence as they initiate the hero Vitelli's affair with the Moorish princess Donusa. Theodosius, the young emperor who scrutinizes portraits of women in *The Emperor of the East*, functions like a mirror for onstage and offstage audience members who must grapple with the person that is represented in the artistic image. The onstage spectator takes on heightened validity

in *The Picture* when the artistic image ceases to function as mimetic representation. Sophia's face, her soul, and Mathias's psyche disappear for the spectator. Rather, the art piece teaches a moral concept: Massinger's art functions within the play as a type of inset piece disclosing the spectator audience's passions.

The conclusion addresses three additional inset forms: paradramatic scenes, informal playlets, and trial scenes, each manifesting Massinger's extensive view regarding the importance of onstage spectatorship. Rochester argues that spectators react to events not formally staged—"pivotal scenes of conversion, seduction, or recognition" as "Massinger stages reception at the same time as performance" (126). Readings of these forms include a satiric treatment of Novall by the *Parliament of Love's* doctor Dinant and his "psychodrama staged" to cure the suicidal Martino in *A Very Woman* (130). In *The Roman Actor* the playwright asks his audience to probe for the "meaning and function of drama itself" (140). Rochester's discussion of the trial of King Antiochus in *Believe As You List* foregrounds the spectator whose interpretation is watched by another audience. In this play, the actor playing a king, is a "king forced to be an actor, to be literally dependent on spectator response for survival" (135).

Massinger's characters must be able to comprehend intentions based upon actions; the onstage spectator must be able to make meaning from the audience experience. Inset pieces are presented with the requirement that audiences onstage and offstage "correctly interpret" the plays presented; further, offstage audiences must investigate the moral and intellectual aspects of the spectators' behavior. Rochester's study makes a valuable contribution to theatre history, illuminating Massinger's place in performance and reception discourse, and argues for the function of self-aware reflexivity embedded in his works.