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Jouve Martín, José R., and Stephen Wittek, eds.

Performing Conversions: Cities, Theatre and Early Modern Transformations. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. Pp. xiii, 202. ISBN 978-1-4744-8272-1 (hardcover) US\$110.

This second installment of the press's Conversions series emerged from the Early Modern Conversions project, which culminated in 2019 (earlymodern-conversions.com/). Its principal investigator, Paul Yachnin, is also the series co-editor, along with Bronwen Wilson. They co-sign a preface that situates *Performing Conversions* in relation to the wide-ranging research collaboration based at McGill University, which contemplated the period from 1400 to 1700 as the first global Age of Conversion. In keeping with this framework, Jouve Martín and Wittek structure their volume as an itinerary through a selection of cities—Lima, London, Venice, Madrid, Amsterdam, three in the Swiss Confederacy, and Mexico. They proffer the sampling as a “brisk, meandering tour of select sites that collectively make important, underlying trends easier to see” (9).

As a conceptual road map, the introduction, “Conversion, Cities and Theatre in the Early Modern World,” notes that “the question at the core of *Performing Conversion* concerns the ability of theatre to model, interrogate, inspire, condition and constitute conversional experience within the special representational space of the stage” (3). Each chapter has a thematic title, presumably from the contributing author. In parallel, the editors added running page headings that identify each contribution with reference to the city under scrutiny.

In chapter 1, “Venice: The Converted City,” Iaian Fenlon ponders *conversion* in the broad socio-cultural context of this metropolis. Fenlon demonstrates how theatrical public displays of civic piety in the later sixteenth century reified the “Myth of Venice,” long construed in terms of the city’s self-conception as an independent republic led by benevolent patricians for the benefit of all its citizens. The myth’s new iteration took shape through such dramas as processions and festivities, which portrayed this fiercely commercial metropolis as a conversion-oriented “City of God” (28).

In chapter 2, “Turnings: Motion and Emotion in the Labyrinths of Early Modern Amsterdam,” Angela Vanhaelen provides the most resolutely secular exploration of *conversion* in the volume, walking readers through the

threshold of Amsterdam's *Oude Doolhof* (Old Labyrinth). Here, *conversion* was construed as *beweeglijkheid*, understood as the powers of a work to move and transform (38), or as the twists and turns of fortune, called *staetveranderinge*. The only consideration here of religious connotations of conversion is by way of contrast, as Vanhaelen notes that Amsterdam's civic labyrinths were the first to feature different ways out, where public labyrinths across European cities had previously been monocursal mazes in church yards and town halls. In the Protestant city, the single way out allegorized the quest for divine truth (42).

Crossing the Atlantic, chapter 3, "Francisco Cervantes de Salazar's Mexico City in 1554: A Dramaturgy of Conversion," is from historian José-Juan López-Portillo. He contextualizes three dialogues composed by this Toledo-born humanist who relocated to Mexico City. López-Portillo situates the *dialogi*—equal parts didactic teaching text and dramatic script—in the long European tradition of urban praise dialogues (*laus urbi*), but also in terms of the mid-sixteenth-century controversies related to Spanish colonization.

Moving back to Europe, chapter 4, "Conversional Thinking and the London Stage," comes from co-editor Wittek. With Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Honest Whore* as his primary illustrative example, he suggests the London stage was a "playpen" where the idea of conversion could spark collective feats of imagination. The article takes shape in two distinct parts, each of which could stand alone, with the first concentrating on lexical and theoretical considerations germane to the overall social milieu of the early modern London theatre business. The second part begins, fittingly, with a quotation from the Second Quarto of *The Honest Whore*, which was published under the alternate title of *The Converted Curtezan*.

In chapter 5, "Religious Drama and the Polemics of Conversion in Madrid," co-editor Jouve Martín takes as his point of departure a little-known satirical play that belittled the prophet Muhammad. It was written in anticipation of the 1609 expulsion of Spain's native population of Hispano-Muslim origins, labelled "Moriscos" or "little Moors" in the period and in recent historiography. Jouve Martín juxtaposes two revealing misreadings of the satirical drama, the first by officials of the Inquisition, who censored it despite how its Islamophobic depiction of the prophet validated Spanish authorities' harsh treatment of Spain's population of Muslim heritage. Surprisingly, an expelled Morisco based in North Africa praised the play and its author for having the audacity to depict Islam's founder in the face of inquisitorial pressure. These contrasting readings,

for Jouve Martín, serve as points of departure for a concise survey of Spanish dramas of conversion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Moving north, chapter 6, “Theatre and Conversion in Early Modern Zürich, Berne and Lucerne,” by Elke Huwiler, explores how theatre participates in “conversional thinking” in three German-speaking cities of Switzerland in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. The first two cities she explores, Zürich and Berne, became Protestant strongholds; the third, Lucerne, remained a redoubt of Catholicism. Contemplating each city’s distinct theatrical environment in succession, Huwiler nonetheless finds a common link uniting the three, where initial enthusiasm in the sixteenth century about the power of theatre to promote ideological instruction gave way, in the seventeenth century, to a wariness of the entertainment medium for the very same reason.

Returning to London, chapter 7 is from Paul Yachnin, “Conversional Economies: Thomas Middleton’s *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*.” Middleton’s comic vision of city life serves a satire of an economic conversion, understood as social climbing and falling. Looking beyond London and England, Yachnin contemplates how such dramas invited reflection on the wider world of conversions, whether the forced religious conversions of Jews and Muslims in Iberia, European enterprises of conquest and conversion in the Americas, Protestant Reformation in Central and Northern Europe, or wars of religion in France.

In summary, each of the seven chapters—with individualized endnotes and bibliography—could stand alone. But more excitement and potential synergies come into view by following the co-editors’ city-to-city itinerary. Indeed, the volume promises to be a durable contribution to the study of religious conversion foremost, but also of economic and social change in the early modern era.

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