

Mary Young
Professor Gerald Soliday
Reading Shakespeare Historically
April 2, 2009

Bergeron, David M. *English Civic Pageantry 1558-1642*. Rev. ed.
Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003.

In *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642*, David Bergeron presents an illuminating study of public spectacles during the late Tudor and early Stuart periods. Describing the involvement of citizens as spectators, participants, or sponsors as fundamental to the notion of "civic" pageantry, the author focuses on progresses, royal entries, and Lord Mayors' Shows from the time of Elizabeth I's accession to the throne until the closing of the theaters by Parliament under Charles I. He explores the evolution of civic pageantry from relatively simple entertainments to progressively more sophisticated visual and dramatic presentations. Maintaining that these events are often overlooked or superficially noted in the academic world, the author asserts the importance of English civic pageantry as a field of study.

Currently a professor of English at the University of Kansas, Bergeron received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in 1964. A review of his publications demonstrates that Bergeron has an interest in Shakespeare, James I, English dramatists of the late Tudor and early Stuart periods, as well as English civic pageantry.

For this revised edition of a book that was published in 1971, Bergeron notes that while little content was changed from the original text, he has written a different introduction (which includes an assessment of scholarship in pageantry studies) and updated information where necessary. In addition to effective illustrations that are intermingled with the text, the author includes a valuable bibliography that contains an extensive list of primary source material that he skillfully and abundantly incorporates into his work. In fact, his analysis of these pageants is dependent on such

contemporary sources as correspondence, diaries, guild and city records, and especially pageant texts that were printed to commemorate these civic events.

The book is divided into three parts: "Progresses and Royal Entries," "The Lord Mayors' Shows," and "Body and Soul." Bergeron begins with an examination of royal pageants in chronological order. As the years progress from Elizabeth's coronation, Bergeron discerns a developing sense of thematic unity with dramatic dialogue and action, with James's^S royal entry into London in 1604 as the high point for civic pageantry. As the number of progresses and royal entries decline in subsequent years, the author notes the growing popularity of the masque in the Jacobean and Caroline courts. Bergeron believes these developments coincide with increasingly elaborate Lord Mayors' Shows in London. With these annual mayoral events as the focus of the second part of the book, Bergeron explores these pageants with particular emphasis on the individual dramatists involved in their production.

The author devotes the final section to his understanding of the two components of a pageant—the "body" and the "soul." After a discussion of the artificers, planners, elaborate devices and complex machinery, and finances, Bergeron addresses the ephemeral nature of these events. "If the civic pageants can make an honest claim on our artistic and dramatic interest, then they must contain something that transcends their physical nature" (263). In this part of the discussion, he cites examples from late ~~16th~~^{sixteenth-} and early ~~17th~~^{seventeenth-} century English emblem books that correspond with numerous examples of devices and characters in pageants that present allegory, mythology, and historical events and figures as examples for the sovereign, the mayor as well as the citizens to emulate.

While Bergeron does believe there is an association between medieval morality plays and civic pageantry, he spends more time examining the connections between these public entertainments and theater. Throughout the book, the author emphasizes the involvement of leading playwrights and actors as an important factor in the increasing sophistication of the pageant as a

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dramatic form. Despite this increase in thematic and theatrical unity, Bergeron is always mindful of the preeminence placed on the visual elements of these pageants.

Well researched and engaging, this book does contain thorough accounts of individual pageants that could prove repetitive to one who was not interested in detailed descriptions of allegorical stories. Considering the extraordinary visual nature of these pageants, it seems that Bergeron could have provided more comment on the illustrations that are interspersed throughout the book. Perhaps his literary background distracts him from this kind of visual analysis. In view of his considerable attention to the Lord Mayors' Shows, it would have been helpful to have a greater sense of the social and cultural context for these shows. For example, were any guilds distinctive in their creative output? Can we recognize a difference between the guilds' involvement with the royal entries and the Lord Mayors' Shows? Overall, more demographic ^{social?} information would enhance the reader's understanding of the citizenry's association with these pageants. Finally, considering his emphasis on the participation of major dramatists in civic pageantry, Bergeron should have addressed the issue of Shakespeare's lack of involvement in these public entertainments.

Despite these concerns, this book is an impressive achievement—one that stimulates an interest in the topic and suggests promising areas for research. According to Bergeron, English civic pageantry of the early modern period accomplished three things—"to honor the sovereign, to entertain, and to instruct" (16). Through his analysis, the reader also appreciates how these pageants were used for political purposes—from the national to the local level. And, considering the involvement of leading dramatists and actors, one has a better understanding that Elizabethan and early Stuart theater cannot be so easily defined as performance on a regular stage. It is surprising that, over thirty years after its original publication, the author still felt the need to convince the academic world that this was a worthwhile area of study. With this book, Bergeron presents a compelling argument that firmly situates civic pageantry in the scholarly dialogue of early modern English social and cultural history.

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Biography: Currently a professor of English at the University of Kansas, Bergeron received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in 1964. His interests include Shakespeare, James I, English dramatists of the late Tudor and early Stuart periods, and English civic pageantry.

Summary: Asserting the importance of English civic pageantry as a field of study, Bergeron examines public spectacles during the reigns of Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I. The author explores the evolution of civic pageantry from relatively simple entertainments to progressively more sophisticated presentations. Despite an increase in dramatic form, these pageants remained dependent on visual elements. Through extensive use of primary source material, the author investigates these carefully planned events in terms of entertainment, theater, politics, production, and didactic purpose. The involvement of citizens (whether as spectators, participants, or sponsors) is fundamental to the notion of "civic" pageantry.

Outline

Introduction

Part One: Progresses and Royal Entries

- Progress entertainments—sponsorship by individual noblemen—though performances were held on private country estates, citizens had opportunities to observe and/or participate
- Royal entries—sponsorship by city/town and guilds—procession through the streets

1 The Reign of Elizabeth (1558-1603)

- Progress—emphasis on mythology and romance—entertainment more open, varied, and theatrical
- Royal entry—emphasis on history and moral allegory—early entry marked by simple scaffolding, fixed tableaux with no thematic connection, speeches—later entries demonstrate greater sense of theatrical action and unity due to increasing contributions of playwrights
- Elizabeth's participation in entertainments—interaction with actors and audience

2 The Reign of James I (1603-1625)

- Royal entry into London in 1604—high point for civic pageantry—lavish and dramatically sophisticated—emphasis on mythology, allegory, and historical characters—elaborate devices, thematic unity between pageant scenes, involvement of leading dramatists and actors
- James I's dislike of public performances
- Waning of the progress
- Increase in popularity of the masque

3 The Reign of Charles I to the Closing of the Theaters (1625-1642)

- Further waning of royal civic pageantry
- Charles I's cancellation of royal entry into London in 1626

Part Two: The Lord Mayors' Shows

- Procession through the streets of London—often included activities on the Thames river—emphasis on history, mythology, allegory
- As progresses and royal entries decrease in the early Stuart period, the Lord Mayors' Shows become increasingly complex and ornate
- Sponsorship of guilds
- Involvement of leading playwrights and actors
- Second decade of 17th century—best shows according to Bergeron

4 The Elizabethan Lord Mayor's Show—pageants become more sophisticated and elaborate as years advance

5 Anthony Munday—pageant-dramatist

6 Thomas Dekker—pageant-dramatist

7 Thomas Middleton—pageant-dramatist

8 John Squire, John Webster, John Taylor—pageant-dramatists

9 Thomas Heywood—pageant-dramatist

Part Three: Pageants: Body and Soul

10 Body: Men and Machines

- Rising esteem and increased responsibilities of the artificers
- Intricate planning by committees and large expenditures by guilds
- Elaborate and complex pageant devices and machinery

11 The Soul

- Didactic elements of these civic pageants
 - Emblems—allegory, mythology, historical events and figures—comparison with emblem books
 - Metaphors—i.e., gardens, marriage, sea
 - Themes—i.e., order, peace, temperance, immortality, virtue vs. vice

Bibliography

Index

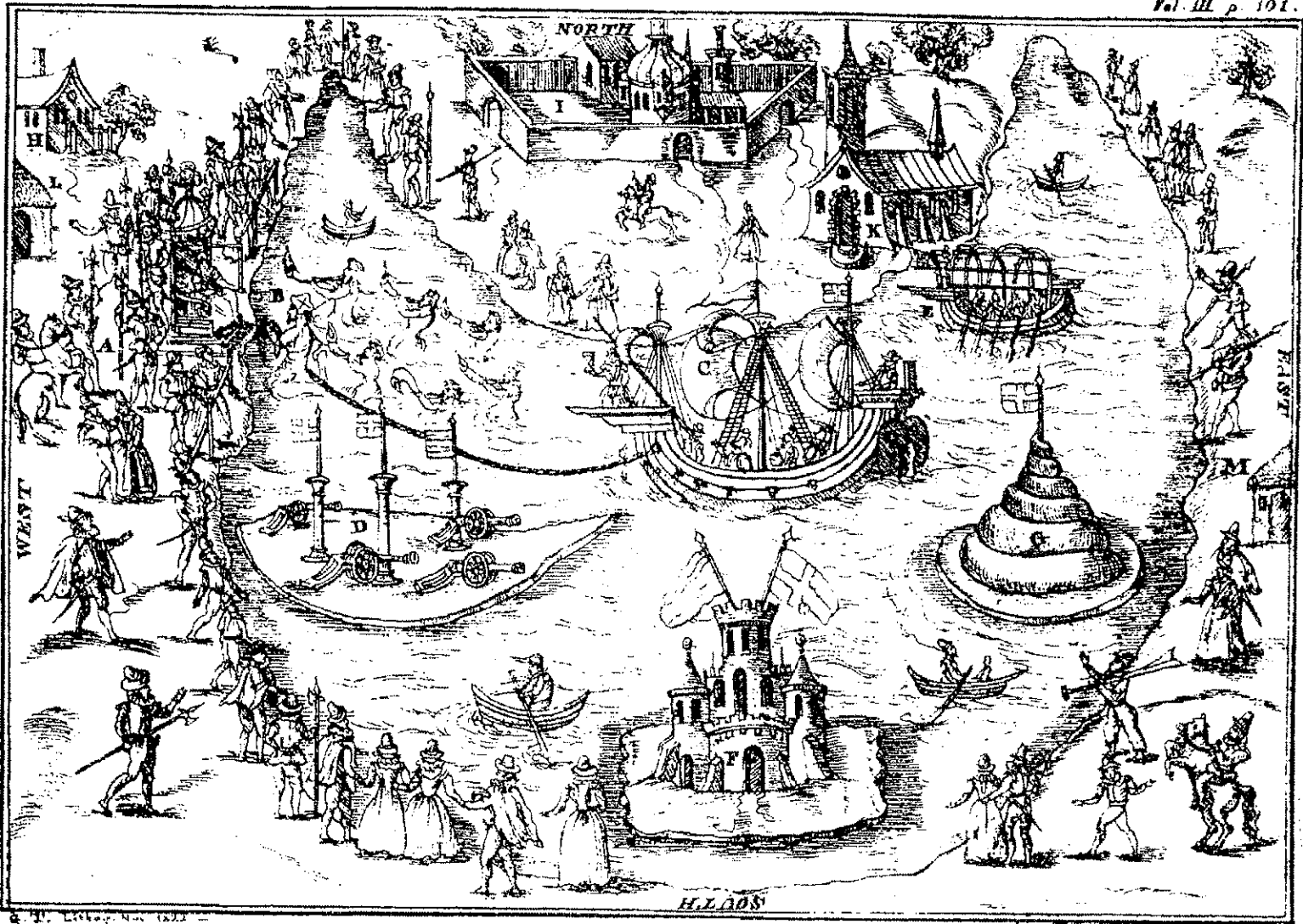


Figure 1. The crescent-shaped pond at the pageant at Elvetham in 1591.

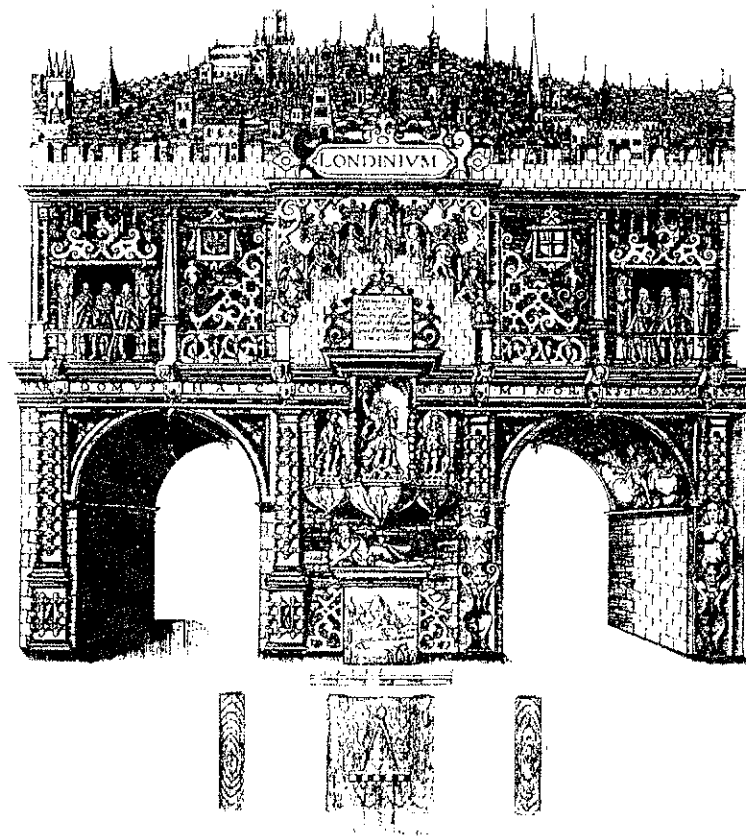


Figure 2. Londinium arch at Fenchurch, 1604 royal entry in London.

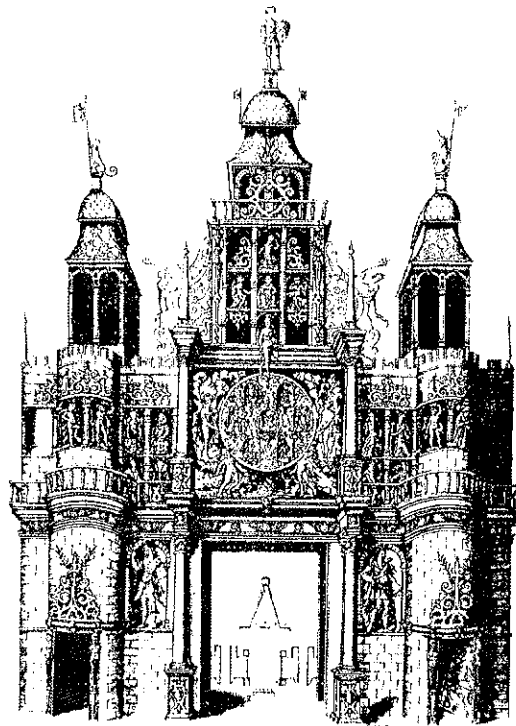


Figure 3. The New World arch in Fleet Street, 1604 royal entry in London.

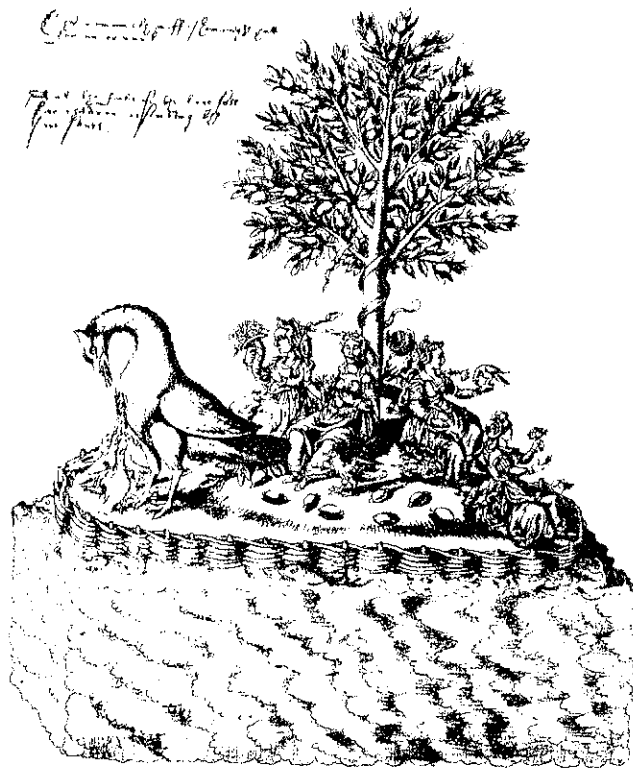


Figure 4. The lemon tree pelican device in Munday's Lord Mayor's Show in 1616.



Figure 5. The pageant chariot of Richard II and the Royal Virtues in Munday's Lord Mayor's Show in 1616.