



Radical Comedy in Early Modern England: Contexts, Cultures, Performances (Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama)

Rick Bowers

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Drawing on the generic and mythic strength of comedy and the theories of Bakhtin, Bergson, and Hobbes, this book identifies the radical nature of early modern English comedy. The satirical comedic actions that shape the "Shepherds' Play," Thomas Dekker's pamphlets, and the comic dramas of Marston, Middleton, and Jonson are all driven, Bowers points out, by an ability to criticize authority, assert plebeian culture, and insist on the complexity and innovation of human discourse. The texts examined (including *The Jew of Malta*, *Metamorphosis of Ajax*, *Antonio and Mellida*, *Bartholomew Fair*, *The Alchemist*, and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*) simultaneously create and employ standard comedic elements. Farce, absurdity, excess, over-the-top characters, unremitting irony, black humor, toilet humor, and tricksters of all types - such features and more combine to satirize medical, religious, and political authority and to implement necessary social change. Written with a narrative ease, *Radical Comedy in Early Modern England* shows how comic interventions both describe and reconfigure prevalent authority in its own time while arguing that, through early modern comedy, one can observe the changes in social behavior and understandings characteristic of the Renaissance.

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