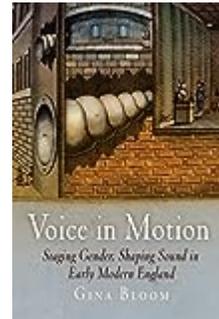**Gina Bloom.** *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. 277 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-4006-1.

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Out of Body: The Volatile, Material Voice

In this meticulously researched and carefully argued book, Gina Bloom attends to the way early modern theater was concerned with "the production, transmission, and reception of the voice" (p. 4). By considering the early moderns' sensitivity to the power of speech, even when "disarticulated" from the body as sound and breath, she rethinks and suggestively expands a model of vocal agency that has prevailed in feminist thought. As she notes in her introduction, one recognized project of the feminist movement has been to encourage women to make their voices heard, as well as to call attention to differences in the voices, spoken and written, of women and men. Over the years, the trope of voice has been widened to refer to the "specificity of the female body, to feminine expression," and to "women's subjectivity," until, as she points out, "a range of feminist writings imply an undertheorized system of analogies between voice, body, subjectivity, and agency" (p. 13). Published as part of the Material Texts series by the University of Pennsylvania Press, *Voice in Motion* targets "the material conditions involved in the communication of voice in an effort to theorize the relation between voice and agency"

(p. 5). Arguing that early moderns were concerned with controlling not only the power of voice within the body but also the more unpredictable course of the voice as it leaves the body, Bloom draws on materialist studies, as well as poststructuralist scholarship on performance and performativity, speech-act theory, deconstruction, and feminist scholarship to help define and track the materiality of voice as sound separate from the body. Her surprising discovery is that the volatility, not stability, of the "material voice" beyond the body as represented in the early modern texts that she studies makes it "a site of agency and tool of resistance to oppressive cultural forces," particularly early modern hierarchies of gender (p. 6). Where men and masculinity were invested in vocal control, vocal agency for women "may be constituted," she argues, "not disrupted, by the voice's volatility." Indeed, early modern plays suggest that a woman's voice may be most effective not when owned and mastered by her, but when relinquished "to the environment beyond her body" (p. 12). Part of this book's originality and achievement lies in the author's ability to sharply focus on and articulate the subtle materiality of what might

seem immaterial, and to make the reader listen in these plays to the drama of speech as moving breath and sound.

Drawing on texts from the late sixteenth century through the early years of Jacobean drama, Bloom has organized *Voice in Motion* to follow the progress of "vocal matter" from the physical act of speaking, to the movement of breath and sound through the air across space and time, to the reception of speech in the listener's ear. She concludes with a meditation on the figure of Echo. She begins with concerns evidenced in early modern drama as well as in other cultural documents, such as tracts on anatomy and vocal training and performance, with how to train proper control of the voice, a mastery central to masculine identity and authority. Of particular concern in the theater and also to masculine ideas of vocal control were those unstable voices in unstable bodies: the changing–cracked and squeaking– voices of pubescent boy actors, who played children and women in adult companies as well as adult men in children companies. Surveying pedagogical, musical, and medical tracts and the role of male youths in William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, and John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*, Bloom argues that thematization and performance of vocal failure becomes a way early modern plays explored the connection between "vocal instability and gender identity" and the threat represented to patriarchal institutions by the effeminizing, unstable voice.

Bloom next draws again on a variety of early modern materials–philosophical, medical, and scientific–to inform her reading of selected plays by Shakespeare, in which concerns with breath's "fragile materiality" intersect with anxieties about gender and power differences (p. 17). As Falstaff observes in *I Henry IV*, "honor" is as ephemeral as the air of the spoken word. If the breath is so fragile, how can men use their voices, which are made of breath and carried through air, to secure power over others? Bloom emphasizes that the volatile quality of breath becomes obvious in the theater as it does not on the page; and in *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Othello*, and particularly *King John*, men struggle to control or stop the breath of those who seem unable to control their own. Yet, Bloom argues that those being controlled, such as women, can acquire unexpected vocal agency by "the *disarticulation* of voice from body," because they continue to produce breath, which, carrying associations with wind and *spiritus*, produces more powerful meaning than their speech can convey (p. 68). Dramatic examples include the "honey breath" of Lavinia in *Titus*, whose flow pushes out blood between her lips after her mutilation, and Des-

demona's "balmy breath" that in the last act comes close to securing belief in her innocence.

The third chapter focuses on women as receptors and resisters of speech. *Voice in Motion* as a whole, but particularly this chapter, builds on recent work documenting the early modern soundscape, especially Shakespeare's preoccupation with the power of tongues on listening (or deaf) ears and the relation of listening to subjectivity. These works include Bruce R. Smith's *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (1999), Kenneth Gross's *Shakespeare's Noise* (2001), and Wes Folkerth's *The Sound of Shakespeare* (2002). Bloom proposes that the agency or subjectivity of women as chaste listeners in early modern drama may emerge from their "disruptive deafness" to voices of authority (p. 116). Protestant sermons highlighted the importance of opening ears to the word of God and salvation as well as guarding and closing ears against dangerous, false voices; as crucial openings that had no natural lids but led directly to the mind and soul, the ears were depicted as fortresses whose opening and closing required constant regulation. In a number of late Shakespearean plays– *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*– Bloom notes that hearing "functions as a site of gender differentiation: aural obstruction is disruptive for men but constructive for women, whose chastity is contingent on aural closure" (p. 18). Bloom then asks to what extent might this resistant hearing be enacting anxieties about the power, the "acoustic subjectivity," of early modern theater audiences, which included women (p. 151).

Bloom's final chapter considers Ovid's Echo as an important figure for early moderns of the unruly, especially female, disembodied voice and of the potential subjectivity the plays show to be available to women in the sound of voice alone–the theme of this book. The author argues that George Sandys's translation of Ovid's Latin gives more personhood to Echo than does Ovid. The "auditory agency" that Sandys gives Echo in his translation, however, he revokes in his moralizing commentary on the myth, where he uses the discourse of natural philosophy to dispel the haunting power of an echoing voice, which becomes instead an explainable acoustic phenomena. These contradictory portraits of Echo, Bloom observes, suggest the power for some early moderns of the ambiguous, disembodied voice, and Sandys's Christian and natural philosophic wish to separate himself from the pagan writer and the possible agency of that voice.

Echo has the last word, however, in Bloom's epilogue. In an entertainment composed by George Gas-

coigne on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's 1575 visit to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, at Kenilworth Castle, Echo's voice, in dialogue with the Savage Man, is made to praise Dudley's political and personal desires with respect to Elizabeth. Yet, another document, a letter falsely ascribed to a court official named Robert Laneham, mocks the laughable self-promotion of these entertainments, and describes Gascoigne's "dialogue" and its conclusion in a way the published text of the entertainment does not report; the Savage Man, acted by Gasgoigne, apparently bowed to the queen at the end and broke his staff, a piece of which flew loose and startled the queen's horse. An unruffled Elizabeth called out, "No hurt, no hurt!" above the subsequent confusion. Her own, unscripted voice echoed graciously as the fi-

nal word on the audacity of Gascoigne and his patron to attempt to control her speech. *Laneham's Letter*, Bloom argues, documents another example of the volatility of live theater–besides the squeaking voices of boy actors, the vulnerability of breath carried in the theater space, the possibility of "deaf" or resistant ears in the audience– which drove playwrights to reflect in their plays on the power of voice alone, without the body, as an uncontrollable force, often to the advantage of women. Bloom's critical point to feminist scholars, then, is about the usefulness of looking beyond the speaker's body "toward a more capacious definition of female agency," one that recognizes the power of the material voice to act at a distance from the body, not least when the body is powerless to act (p. 183).

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