



Imagining Shakespeare's Original Audience, 1660-2000: Groundlings, Gallants, Grocers (Palgrave Shakespeare Studies)

Bettina Boecker

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There is a comparative dearth of hard facts on Shakespeare's first audiences. Regardless of this, Shakespeare criticism over the centuries has imagined them in various and often contradictory ways: as rambunctious groundlings, refined gallants, or staunchly middle-class grocers. This study argues that the Elizabethan audience is an essential part of Shakespeare as a site of cultural meaning, and that the way criticism thinks of early modern theatregoers is directly related to the way it thinks of, and uses, the Bard himself. The book traces the critical fates of the Elizabethan audience from the beginnings of Shakespeare criticism in the long eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth. It shows how – and why – the people who flocked to the theatres of early modern London metamorphose from an unruly, uncivilised mob to an egalitarian, proto-democratic community held up as a model to later generations.

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