



# **Staging Spectatorship in the Plays of Philip Massinger (Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama)**

*Joanne Rochester*

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The playwrights composing for the London stage between 1580 and 1642 repeatedly staged plays-within and other metatheatrical inserts. Such works present fictionalized spectators as well as performers, providing images of the audience-stage interaction within the theatre. They are as much enactments of the interpretive work of a spectator as of acting, and as such they are a potential source of information about early modern conceptions of audiences, spectatorship and perception. This study examines on-stage spectatorship in three plays by Philip Massinger, head playwright for the King's Men from 1625 to 1640. Each play presents a different form of metatheatrical inset, from the plays-within of *The Roman Actor* (1626), to the masques-within of *The City Madam* (1632) to the titular miniature portrait of *The Picture* (1629), moving thematically from spectator interpretations of dramatic performance, the visual spectacle of the masque to staged 'readings' of static visual art. All three forms present a dramatization of the process of examination, and allow an analysis of Massinger's assumptions about interpretation, perception and spectator response.

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