



A Jovial Crew (Arden Early Modern Drama)

Richard Brome

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A Jovial Crew, or the *Merry Beggars*, is a comedy about four noble lovers who join the beggar community for a pastoral life of dance and song. Or is it? Whilst maintaining its unremitting good humour, *A Jovial Crew* shows that the literary depiction of beggar life, and real beggar life, are profoundly different. Daily aspects of life in the beggar world – poverty, dirt, licentiousness – come as a surprise to the well-born, who are ultimately led to question their own values.

The last production mounted before theatres were closed for the English Civil War, *A Jovial Crew's* exploration of class, commonwealth, kinship and kingship shows an intense engagement with contemporary politics. This edition, with dedicated sections on music and language in the play, argues that *A Jovial Crew* also offers a nostalgic farewell to English theatre. It explores Brome's attitude to performance and print, and follows *A Jovial Crew* from its first, Caroline staging, to its later manifestations as a Restoration comedy, an eighteenth-century opera, and a twentieth-century proto-Marxist tragicomedy.

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