the non-Shakespearean plays enjoying revival at twenty-first-century playhouses, Sanders undoubtedly references the drama that her readers are most likely to see live; as playgoers themselves, they may experience 'the kind of connectivity' in a modern idiom that early modern audiences could have experienced as 'different playwrights responded to and were influenced by each other [and] different venues and acting companies responded to and remade those repertoires, riffing off each other's work in highly creative fashion' (191). For those readers beginning a study of Shakespeare's period, that point of entry may be more empowering than a list of inventory items in *Henslowe's Diary.*

Kurt A. Schreyer. *Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014. Pp xv, 258.

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Shakespeare's Medieval Craft makes a substantial contribution to the growing number of studies on the continuing influence of the mystery plays on Elizabethan theatre. Kurt Schreyer's approach is both original and illuminating. He starts from the Chester Late Banns, the long verse advertisement for the pageants designed to inform the audience what they are going to hear and, more significantly for his argument, what they are going to see. The Late Banns were composed in the 1560s, and give us some of the best evidence we have for the nature of the plays in the final decades of their production in a Protestant regime. The Banns, in Schreyer's view, invite us to regard Elizabethan drama 'not as a canon of influential authors but as a history of theatrical objects whose stage presence demanded the skills of craftsmen-actors and play-wrights' (6). He accordingly entitles his first chapter 'Towards a Renaissance culture of medieval artifacts', and that is the main theme of his book: the 'remnants' of the title are above all the material remnants by means of which the spectacle offered by the pageants was transferred to the public stage, often complete with their associated meanings. These range in

scale from the three-tiered configuration of the stage to the ass's head, and extend out from the visual to the auditory, to the sound effects of storms or of knocking. The whole argument is backed by extensive documentation in both primary sources and more recent criticism: the notes run to over fifty pages.

Schreyer's primary example is the three levels of the stage, as found in at least some of the pageant wagons, with a heaven for God, the main stage for middle-earth, and a trapdoor for the zone of the dead or the devils. The key episode for his argument is the Last Judgment, where the dead arise and are separated by Christ into the saved and the damned. The purpose-built playhouses in London replicated this spatial arrangement. The representation of God may have been forbidden, but equivalent figures (pagan gods, figures who watched and judged the action) are frequent. The famous inclusion of a hell-mouth in Henslowe's list of stage properties is a reminder of how judgment remained a key issue on the Elizabethan stage (though it complicates the relationship of hell to the under-stage space: was it used when there was no trapdoor available?). The re-creation of these theatrical spaces, Schreyer argues, in turn 'inspired and encouraged playwrights to incorporate the machinations of demons and the providence of heaven into the plots of their plays' (111). Devils and ghosts would enter through the trapdoor, the devil portrayed, as the Chester Banns specify, 'in his ffeathers, all Ragged and rente'. Schreyer reproduces a detail from the Folger copy of the 1640 title page of Nathanael Richards' *Tragedy of Messalina,* a play that abounds in ghosts, that appears to show such a trapdoor (though it cannot be seen on the poorer image on *Early English Books Online*). As he points out, 'More than a century's worth of spirits linger behind that trace outline of the stage trap in the title-page illustration of Richards's play', and the play's dedication, in which Richards claims that his 'sole Ayme' is to 'separate Soules from the discovered Evill… flight from sinne for feare of Iudgement', reinforces the continuity (176–7).

Schreyer's deep reading in the primary sources helps to flesh out the detail of his claims, though the problem rapidly arises as to just what a perfunctory record might imply. He thus makes much of the mention of the large quantities of earth required for the staging of the York *Last Judgment,* an especially elaborate production. He acknowledges that this earth might have been used just for making plaster, but he makes the intriguing further suggestion that it might rather have served to make the pageant stage look like a graveyard, 'complete with mounds of dirt marking tombs that now stood tenantless'

(108). It is an attractive idea, as are some of the further arguments he builds on this hypothesis, for instance about the graveyard scene in *Hamlet.* Read thus, Shakespeare's preoccupation with the decomposition of bodies into earth recalls 'the cartloads of dirt tradesmen possibly heaped in mounds to give their Doomsday pageant wagon the look of a graveyard' (130). 'Possibly' so, and the connection would be striking, but the preoccupation with the decay of the corpse back into the earth was one of the great commonplaces of both the Middle Ages and the early modern period, and as the arguments progress it is easy to lose sight of the uncertainty of their foundation.

Schreyer's interest in earth is none the less one instance where the bringing to bear of an informed imagination on a bare record has the potential to illuminate later stage effects. Speculation is inevitable in a book of this kind, where evidence is thinly scattered and connections almost impossible to prove, but Schreyer does on occasion let initial speculation present itself as fact, or push an interesting hypothesis to make points that lose the connection between the source and target examples. I was pleased (as I would indeed be, having also suggested it more tentatively myself) to see him arguing for a link between Balaam's talking ass and Bottom's head. However, his suggestion is accompanied by an argument about the parallel made in anti-papal invective between Balaam and the pope, and about the satiric representation of the pope with an ass's head, a trajectory that heads away from *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* leaving the connection Schreyer seems to want to make inadequately explained. A comparable move away from the persuasive to the less plausible, or less explained, comes in his discussion of one of the links between Shakespeare and the mystery cycles that has been most widely accepted, not least because the play itself makes the connections so explicit: the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth,* where the Porter casts himself as the devil tasked with keeping hell-gate. This is one of Schreyer's principal examples of the importance of *soundscapes* rather than visual effects, the knocking recalling Christ's battering at the gates of hell in the *Harrowing* plays, and he explores it sympathetically and in detail. He asserts, however (by way of a rather irritating dependence on the idea of a knock-knock joke), that Macduff is a deeply flawed character, 'a deadly and determined military leader' involved in 'treasonous conspiracies against the crown' (156, 158), and therefore that the play is less pro-Stuart than has been assumed. If that were so, however, Hamlet would be even more deeply treasonous, since even he does not dispute Claudius's election, whereas Scotland is never quite presented as an elective rather than a lineal monarchy; none the less,

Schreyer seems happy to accept at face value Horatio's farewell to the prince as accompanied by flights of angels. The storm in *Macbeth,* also discussed in the soundscape chapter, leads to an error: the 1584 Chester record concerning a storm relates not to the doomsday play but to the successor to the cycle plays, the *Destruction of Jerusalem,* and the payment for it was made not to a 'man named Starche' but *for* starch — presumably to create the effect of rain or snow (142).

Limit such a book to what is provable, however, and it would not be written at all, and scholarship would be the poorer for its absence. Schreyer's large argument about the importance of spectacle, of *things* on both the pageant wagons and the public stage, and their capacity to transmit significance into a new age, is an important one, as is his plea for a recognition of the value of the past to the Elizabethans, a value made all the more urgent by the Protestant assault on it. Future scholars using his work could usefully check out the primary sources so as to evaluate for themselves the strength of his evidence, but his speculations are always good to think with, and many of them are genuinely illuminating for Shakespeare and the sixteenth-century stage more broadly. The fact that an element of scepticism may remain is no reason for not putting them forward.

Bart van Es. *Shakespeare in Company*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp xiv, 357.

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As Bart van Es notes towards the end of this study, theatre historians over recent decades have uncovered in increasing detail the extent to which Shakespeare as a dramatist was enmeshed in the material conditions of the early modern stage: its finances, its reportorial practices, its networks of patronage, and so on (307–8). Focusing on the institutional parameters that Shakespeare shared with his peers, however, is of no help when it comes to accounting for the differences between him and them. Why is it that Shakespeare, apparently working in the same conditions, produced plays that not only have been more highly acclaimed over the centuries, but that (in van Es's