

Julie Sanders. *The Cambridge Introduction to Early Modern Drama, 1576–1642.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp xvii, 261.

ROSLYN L. KNUTSON
University of Arkansas
at Little Rock

Early Theatre 18.1 (2015), 140–2
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12745/et.18.1.2568>

Cambridge published *The Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre* by Janette Dillon in 2006. That book approached its subject from a traditional perspective with chapters entitled ‘Places of performance’, ‘Actors and audiences’, ‘Writers, controllers, and the place of the theatre’, ‘Genre and tradition’, and ‘Instruction and spectacle’. In other words, it was an introduction to theatre history in Shakespeare’s time. This book by Julie Sanders, despite its duplicative title, is not that. It is, according to the Preface, ‘all about making connections’ (x). Those connections are between early modern drama and ‘the wider performance cultures of the court, of noble households and estates, and of civic communities, including that of the burgeoning capital city of London itself’ (x). Its chapters use genre — ‘Tragedy’, ‘Revenge drama’, ‘Histories’, ‘Comedy, pastoral and romantic’, ‘City comedies’, ‘Satire’, and ‘Tragicomedy’ — as the primary organizing principle, and the book punctuates these chapters with thirteen case studies, many of which explore aspects of early modern dramaturgy. The discussions are intentionally not chronological ‘in order to allow the rich lines of connection and synergy between [early and late plays] to emerge in fresh and unrestricted ways’ (x). Nonetheless, in a nod toward readers seeking a linear treatment of historical events with dramatic and non-dramatic literature, Sanders appends a selective chronology.

The strength of an approach by way of networks is that Sanders provides numerous engaging readings of those moments on stage from the early modern period that are very popular now and might have been so in their own time, moments such as the Porter’s drunken ramblings about damnation in *Macbeth* and the testy exchange among the con artists that opens *The Alchemist*. A weakness is that readers do still need to know a lot of theatre history in order to appreciate the connections explored in those readings of stage moments. Recognizing this fact, Sanders devotes the introduction to an overview of what she calls ‘deep theatre history’ (3) in which she addresses the rise of outdoor playhouses in the 1570s, major theatrical participants

including entrepreneurs and players, and aspects of performance including the use of properties and the proximity of the audience. Necessarily derivative and foreshortened, this overview is paired with case study B, 'An outdoor theatre repertoire: the Rose on Bankside', which looks more closely at the playlists and payments recorded by Philip Henslowe in his book of accounts familiarly called *Henslowe's Diary*. But this case study too is reductive, prioritizing the titles and authors of plays anointed by tradition as blockbusters to the neglect of commercially successful anonymous and/or lost plays. Consequently even the commentary on offerings at the Rose facilitates the ensuing idealistic view of the early modern playhouse world. In that view, Sanders imagines performances in which the networks connecting play scripts and early modern culture are always in high gear and audiences are attentive to every nuance.

A reliance on genre enables Sanders to make connections that are at once synchronic and diachronic. Case study A sets up the freedom gained from subordinating timelines: it blends an imagined performance of Shakespeare's *Richard III* in the 1590s with 'a very real, documentable experience' of Sanders's own 'in the late summer of 2012' (20). Chapter 3, 'Histories', tests that chronological flexibility. The focus plays are *Edward II*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, parts 1 and 2 of *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, parts 1 and 2 of *Edward IV*, and *Perkin Warbeck* (listed here in approximate order of stage debut). The discussion, which cuts across chronological lines, is governed by the following headings: 'Majestical matters', 'Historical perspective and pliant kings', 'Women in history: the female angle', 'Cross-fertilisation and sequences of plays', 'The common people', 'The matter of objects: crowns and cushions', and 'Conclusion: historic agency'. These headings imply a stability over time in the elements of 'Histories' as a generic description, yet Sanders emphasizes repeatedly that genre is an unstable construct, overlapping and blurring boundaries 'in ways that deliberately threaten to undo its own categorisations' (xiii). She negotiates the paradox of unstable categories by focusing instead on audiences and their 'multiple perspectives on plays, perspectives created from their own historical knowledges and theatregoing experiences [which were] necessarily built into the dramaturgy' by dramatists (96).

In chapters on the city comedy and satire, Sanders moves away from a heavy sampling of Shakespearean drama to plays by Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, Philip Massinger, and Richard Brome (to name a few). Here, the strengths of analyzing selected moments in drama by way of cultural and civic connections are most evident because the narratives of plays in these

genres are contemporary, local, and social. An illustration is the treatment of Gertrude (*Eastward Ho!*) as a representative of ‘the intense materiality of the aspirant culture of London in the early seventeenth century’ (138). Further, Sanders’s selected dramatic moments identify ‘a complicated landscape of trade and finance, markets and exchange’ in which women as well as coaches and clothing are for sale (141). The chapter on satire (more Juvenal than Horace) includes an extended commentary on the networks of law and the inns where poets and dramatists studied and socialized with the sort of men who would patronize the stages and bookstalls of London, even as those patrons were caricatured in the drama there on display.

The thirteen case studies offer a mix of commentary on dramaturgy (‘Staging violence’), textual features in performance (‘Opening scenes’, ‘The Visual Rhetoric of Dumb Shows’), theatre history (‘“Little eyases”’), composition (‘Collaborative Writing’), and print (‘Title Pages’). In some cases, these case studies are extensions of the chapter to which they are appended, as in ‘The boy actor’, which follows the chapter on comedy by exploring cross-dressed players, especially Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Others fit with more than one chapter: ‘The dramaturgy of scenes’, ‘Topical theatre and 1605–6’, ‘the second Blackfriars indoor playhouse’, or ‘skulls on the stage’. The interplay across these case studies and the chapters on genre suits Sanders’s methodology. It also justifies duplication; for example, Sanders discusses the opening speeches of *The Jew of Malta* and *Volpone* in more than one context because the soliloquies of Barabas and Volpone belong to more than one network.

By titling this book an introduction, Sanders and Cambridge imply a readership basically unfamiliar with the subject. The colloquial language in phrases such as the reference to Henslowe’s records as ‘a wonderful resource’ and the exposure of Epicene as ‘the big reveal’ also implies a pre-scholarly readership (11, 162). So does the tucking into parentheses of facts about players, playhouses, and playing companies. The attachment of dates to the book title implies a comprehensiveness, but Sanders has little to say about early modern drama before Marlowe, Kyd, and Lyly. The generic categories also imply a comprehensiveness not in evidence; by discussing primarily the chronicle history of the 1590s, Sanders omits mention of a huge number of plays given the history label in their own time as well as quirky generic deviants such as *George a Greene*. There is not much attention to the nuts and bolts of early modern stagecraft, and leading scholars on stage directions and performance features are absent from the bibliography. But, of course, choices are always necessary. By including many of Shakespeare’s plays plus

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.

HELEN COOPER
Magdalene College,
Cambridge

Early Theatre 18.1 (2015), 143–5
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12745/et.18.1.2573>

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