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## **The Medieval European Stage, 500-1550 (review)**

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REVIEW

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### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

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***The Medieval European Stage, 500-1550. Edited by William Tydeman.*** Series: Theatre in Europe: A Documentary History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; pp. lxii + 720. \$140 cloth.

In an ideal world, we would all have ready access to archives and we would all read Greek, Latin, Old and Middle English, Welsh, Old and Middle French, Old Provençal, Old High German, Italian, Dutch, Old Flemish,

and Spanish (to name a few of the languages necessary to the documentary history of the European Medieval stage). Absent that ideal, *The Medieval European Stage, 500-1550* offers infinitely more than the next best thing. In an impressive and voluminous compendium of more than 600 primary documents spanning some thousand years—all in eminently readable English translation—the editors tender a textual cornucopia that recreates the interrelations of the theatre, mime, music, law, ritual, religion, politics, folklore, and the beaux-arts. From the disgraced *scurrae* of late Antiquity, to a fistfight among medieval English clerics, to the forensic feats of Dutch *Frederijkers*, to the special effects in a Majorcan decapitation scene, to nativity plays in Siena, General Editor William Tydeman and nine Associate Editors have published a handsome volume that deserves to be a mainstay in any theatre library. Unfortunately, the \$140 price tag will be financially prohibitive to most readers; still, the book will doubtless surface on reserve books lists in university libraries everywhere, as well it should.

Tydeman's cogent General Introduction is followed by ten separate Chapters (A-J). "The Inheritance," edited by Nick Davis, lays out thirty-eight documents revealing some of the earliest medieval tensions between the theatre and Church. In "Latin Liturgical Drama," editor Peter Meredith reproduces thirty-eight representative texts describing the theatrical and prototheatrical activities of the medieval Church. Lynette Muir then turns in "Extra-liturgical Latin and Early Vernacular Drama" to ninety sources from all over Europe that capture the historical interplay between medieval Latin and vernacular dramatic productions. In "England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales," Tydeman presents seventy-one texts devoted to such theatrical events as mumming, Corpus Christi plays, and even actors' auditions. Next, Muir turns to 108 extant records concerning the performance of mystery plays, comedies, and processional spectacle in "France." "The German-Speaking Area" boasts forty-four varied documents compiled by John Tailby; while "Italy," edited by Michael Anderson, comprises twenty-eight sources ranging from the [End Page 658] theatrical activities of convents and monasteries to the rich theatrical life of Florence. Elsa Strietman and Lynette Muir guide us through "The Low Countries" with sixty-four intriguing excerpts that reconstruct a vivid picture of the diverse spectacles of a region that now includes such countries as Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. "The Iberian Peninsula (including Majorca)," edited by Louise Haywood, supplies seventy-four examples of interactions between learned and folk productions and Christian and secular traditions. Finally, Thomas Pettitt and Leif Søndergaard proffer "Traditions of the People: Customs and Folk Drama," one of the most interesting chapters of the volume in that it reveals the continuity of ritual activity across Europe. In addition to its detailed Table of Contents, the volume contains a list of all 633 documents. Moreover, the editors have furnished a Historical Table with a careful chronology of all the dates from 395-1609 that they deem of theatrical significance. Readers may also consult the especially useful "Glossary of Technical and Specialised Terms" to find everything from antiphon to *plen an gwary* to *puy* to *remembranza* to *sinneken* to four drawings illustrating liturgical vestments.

For all its merits, this remarkable volume has one significant drawback which, while not diminishing its value and utility, indicates nonetheless that its primary sources must be used with caution. The editors always provide the bibliographic information about the source from which their English translations have been taken. Often, however, those citations refer us not to the original manuscript or the earlier printed source but to someone else quoting that manuscript (occasionally twice or thrice removed). For example, readers seeking to consult the oft-cited Latin text of Honorius of Autun (whose...

Female impersonator Julian Eltinge also staged a transvestite Salome without the blackface and its accompanying grotesqueness. Eltinge's performance of Salome aimed at perfect imitation of idealized white womanhood, and the portrayal established him as a sexual object for both heterosexual women and homosexual men. African American performer Aida Overton Walker offered another twist on the fad as a part of her efforts to forge a respectable dance career for herself. She staged a Salome that was more artful than erotic. Even Fanny Brice had a Salome act, hers adding an ironic layer of Jewishness to the Biblical princess.

Responses to Walker and Brice revealed anxiety as well as pleasure. "While Walker was seen as 'too dark,' Brice was labeled, 'too New York,' and 'too Jewish' to be fully acceptable to non-Jewish audiences" (118). This "too-muchness" is at the heart of Glenn's analysis of New Women in performance. Indeed, her chapter on "Mirth and Girth" is about much more than the significance of fat jokes in the routines of successful female comics, although Glenn does an excellent job of unpacking the subject. Girth, in Glenn's context, includes many kinds of excess: too much personality, too much self-aggrandizement, too much sexuality, too black, too fat, too sexy, too loud.

The stigma of being "too much" was shared by feminist activists in the early twentieth century as they became increasingly demonstrative in parades, pageants, rallies, concerts and other performances. *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* shows the self-dramatizing, self-magnifying tendencies that connect the theatrical New Woman to the political New Woman, yet Glenn uncompromisingly acknowledges the fundamental differences between theatre and activism. "Theatre-licensed female transgression so long as it could sell as entertainment," she writes. "Female activism, however it might take on the look and feel of theatre, had vastly different agendas; its sharply defined social and political goals carried potentially revolutionary consequences" (128). Glenn's project in this study is to show the ability of the mainstream stage to "not so much resolve as to register" (8) emerging themes of modern feminism. In doing so she manages to prove popular entertainment's pivotal role in our broader cultural conversations.

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Wright Craig, Music and Ceremony at Notre Dame of Paris, 500-1550. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989. xviii + 400 pp. philological judgment is constant

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