

The Bedford Level Corporation won little succor from government thereafter and was chronically under-resourced throughout its history. Unanticipated consequences of the drainage, not least the rapid lowering of the peat surface, led to recurrent flooding and failure of the scheme. Drainage arrangements largely reverted to local communities and indeed individual farms. Ash does not deal with this subsequent history, although he acknowledges it, and indeed nor could he have given the scale of archival endeavor displayed. Yet it raises questions as to how enduring such state building was and, indeed, what if anything was being built; and whether this is the best frame in which to understand the events. It would be useful to compare the drainage projects to other moves to regulate and manage rivers, estuaries, coasts, and navigation over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Equally, we still lack a detailed economic history of the Fens to be able to more objectively assess the impact of drainage and the various claims made by projectors. Nevertheless, Ash's work will long remain an essential account of these important events.

Paul Warde
 University of Cambridge
psw1000@cam.ac.uk

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This edited collection takes a novel approach by focusing on performance aspects of medieval drama, rather than its literary or historical context. As such, it presents a valuable addition to an underexplored facet of medieval drama. Importantly, the volume also directly addresses questions posed by lack of evidence: Why is there no recorded evidence about certain performances or aspects of performance? How can we investigate such unrecorded facets of medieval theatre? The contributors also do not shy away from questioning what constitutes performance. The editors also make a commendable attempt to offer a pan-European approach, although English material does dominate.

Claire Sponsler opens the volume by addressing important questions of sources and methodologies, using John Lydgate's *Disguising at Hertford* (c.1427) as a test case. While Sponsler acknowledges that practice-based research is often difficult to fit into current academic structures, she stresses its crucial importance: it can shed light on specific events, open up the corpus of events to be studied, and draw attention to scholarly assumptions. This chapter is therefore of particular interest to academics and students who are interested in performance as research.

Many of the allegorical plays of the rhetoricians of the Low Countries may appear static at first sight, but as Bart Ramakers points out "Performance reconstitutes the playtext" (39). He convincingly demonstrates that we need to acknowledge the appeal of the visual and aural elements of the so-called *zinnespelen*, which formed a large part of their meaning and ensured that these plays presented entertaining spectacles.

In the next chapter, Tom Pettitt investigates the significance of "visit customs" (57), using a newly devised concept of "interaxiality" ("an action-orientated analogue of the concept of 'intertextuality,'" 53). He fruitfully focuses on several well-known English plays, including biblical plays, the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* (c.1461), *Fulgens & Lucrese* (1490s), *Wisdom* (c. 1465–1470), and *Mankind* (c.1465–1471).

In her chapter, co-editor Katie Normington starts by stressing the importance of impressive costumes for medieval theater and many other medieval entertainments. Using evidence from historical records such as sumptuary laws, she asks what records of clothing can tell us about

acting. Normington argues that clothing served as a disguise, but that both the player and the role remained to some extent present for the audience.

The next chapter takes us to fifteenth-century Florence as Nerida Newbiggin charts the development of dramatic and theatrical spectacles there from *laude* to *feste*. She suggests that we should look at the whole production process in terms of performance, rather than focus only on the events on the actual feast days.

David Klausner notes that “modes of drama without text or action may have been predominate (or at least common) in the late Middle Ages” (109) but that they present unique challenges in terms of research. Although Klausner admits the difficulty—or even impossibility—of ever proving such absence, he amply shows that allowing for the possibility that there was no text or action helps us better understand various records from England, Wales, and Ireland.

The next chapter turns its attention to the audience, in particular in relation to “danced spectacles” (124) in court settings across Europe. Jennifer Nevile demonstrates that looking beyond the principles and rules of dance laid down in contemporary treatises, and instead taking into account the event as a performance with actors and audience offers valuable insight into the performance, meaning, and experience of such spectacles.

Katryn Dickason also focuses on dance as performance, but in relation to a very different phenomenon, namely the so-called dance mania that spread across Europe during the Middle Ages. Rather than trying to find a medical explanation for the phenomenon, she assesses it within a religious context, and traces its development into an institutional devotional exercise.

The next two chapters turn to equine creatures, albeit in very different settings. Femke Kramer uses rhetoricians’ farces featuring “horseplay” to demonstrate the rhetoricians’ predisposition to apply a text-based approach to performance. Max Harris explores the versatility of the Palmesel as a semi-automatous dramatic participant in religious processions, with special emphasis on two Palm Sunday processions in Austria. Both of these chapters also explore past and present productions.

This interest in modern productions, and how they can (not) be used to assess the performance and significance of past practices, is also present in Leanne Groeneveld’s examination of the Rood of Boxley. But the main focus of this chapter concentrates on the performer/onlooker relationship in relation to an animated semi-automaton.

In the final chapter, co-editor Philip Butterworth, with Eric Williamson, uses a London maintenance document of a semi-automaton of Saint George and the Dragon (and fifteenth-century scientific and technological knowledge) to explore how this automaton might actually have worked.

For a book dedicated to performance, it is odd that there is no chapter specifically dedicated to stage directions and what they can tell us about medieval performances. Stage directions crop up in various chapters, but a more in-depth discussion would have enriched the volume even further. It would also have been nice to have a more even balance in terms of geography (medieval French theater is barely mentioned), but given that the book is in English, the imbalance toward English material is understandable. Overall, then, this is an accomplished and well-rounded volume that will be greatly appreciated by scholars of medieval drama because it significantly enriches our knowledge of the field.

Charlotte Steenbrugge
University of Sheffield
c.steenbrugge@sheffield.ac.uk