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William Tydeman begins his new book by observing “it is arguable whether the theatre industry during the period of ‘Eliza and our James’ could have offered its clientele the sheer variety of dramatic forms and theatrical modes deployed by its medieval counterpart between 1400 and 1500” (7). With this polemic in mind, Tydeman offers close readings of five key English texts, each representing not only a different dramatic subgenre, but an alternative type of staging. His overall goal is twofold: (1) to reconstruct the initial staging of the plays as well as (2) “to convey the spirit” (140) of that first performance—that is, to explore the complex interaction of the play itself, its staging, the general cultural milieu, and the expectations of the imagined first audience. The book is a companion volume to Tydeman’s earlier and more panoramic exploration of the medieval stage, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages: Western European Stage Conditions, c. 800–1576* (1978).

Following a brief preface and introduction in which he justifies his primary focus on the religious drama (“only scanty remnants of secular pieces survive from this period,” [xii]), Tydeman divides his presentation into three sections. In the first, an essay entitled “The Repertoire,” he provides a brief history of the English medieval religious and secular drama, observing that “medieval drama is predominantly celebratory and confirmatory rather than questioning or revolutionary” (8–9). As he goes on to show, however, this does not translate into a monolithic body of literary material. In the first section of the book the author places the works he has chosen to analyze in context of the general literary (drama) culture of the time. He emphasizes the variety of competing forms and their nonlinear historical interrelations and transformation. In part two, “Plays in Performance,” Tydeman devotes a separate chapter to each of the following: (1) “The Booth Stage: Mankynde”; (2) “Scenic Structures: the Croxton Play of the Sacrament”; (3) “Theatre in the Round: The Castel of Perseveraunce”; (4) “Processional Staging: the York Passion Sequence”; and (5) “Great Hall Theatre: Fulgens and Luccere.” In each self-contained essay Tydeman establishes direct links between the social and aesthetic functions of a play and its conjectural first staging. Part three, entitled “The English Medieval Theatre,” provides additional background on sites of performance, conventions of stagecraft, style of acting, liturgical and secular control of the theatre, and audience engagement with the plays. This final essay augments the discussion of related topics in Tydeman’s earlier book. Along with an index is a select bibliography which includes sections on dramatic recordings, books, and articles.

Tydeman does not generate any striking new insights into the early productions of the plays he has selected, nor does he attempt to offer any new
interpretations. He depends heavily on the work of several of his forebears, most notably Rich Southern, David Bevington, Glynne Wickham, and Stanley Kahrl. He occasionally takes issue with one of them on the staging of some aspect of a given play (e.g., with Bevington on the idea that the *Play of the Sacrament* ended with the action and audience moved inside a church [75]).

Tydeman's genuine contribution lies, I believe, in his juxtaposition of alternative explanations, and in the logical and meticulous way he examines these often overlooked texts, occasionally reading line by line in light of his considerable learning not only as a scholar, but as a modern director of medieval plays. He staged some cycle plays in Bangor Cathedral in March 1972. Tydeman is at his best in his discussion of the logical problems presented to a director by all the scatalogical activity in *Mankynde* (33), and when he pretends to be a citizen of York in 1468, watching the annual Corpus Christi Cycle. Such serious attention accorded these plays reveals the frequently unacknowledged skill and ingenuity of the medieval playwright and producer. Tydeman's book will prove useful both to the literary historian and student of the history of dramatic production.

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This anthology offers major selections from twenty-eight women who wrote between the second and the fifteenth centuries. Included are plays, lyric poems, prose narratives of visions, personal letters, sermons, and works of "visionary autobiography." Many of the authors are little known; ten appear for the first time in English translation.

This anthology of major selections is a textbook for use in advanced classes, but it is really much more. Assembling in one place medieval writings by women, it benefits students who may not be specialists in medieval devotional literature. The anthology provides access to some very interesting writings in medieval life and letters as well as the history or literature of women. Everything such readers will need is provided in the book: a full critical and historical introduction and comprehensive bibliography, section and author introductions, and notes of commentary and explanation. In providing such help to the reader, Petroff reveals her long-standing interest in this literature and shares her enthusiasm with the reader.

Almost all of the surviving literature by medieval women is devotional, and Petroff shows that the visionary writings are of special interest. In