

The book is organized around the stages of penitence: contrition, confession, restitution, and satisfaction. Its admirably clear introduction presents the main themes, arguments, and texts to be considered, defines the book's relationship to the "law and literature movement" (10), and clarifies the types of evidence to be considered. Chapter 1 studies the confessions of Mede and Contricion, or rather, their performance of contrition, in passus B3 and C3, and B20 and C22. Chapter 2, focusing on usury in canon law and in the B and C versions of *Piers*, addresses ways of thinking about restitution, and argues that Conscience repurposes "the canonist logic of corporeal usury" to present a new view of "spiritual usury," a concept canon lawyers treat skimpily (112–13). Chapter 3 continues to address restitution, via the confession of Covetise (B5 and C6); and Chapter 4 shifts to satisfaction, through the trial of Wrong (B4 and C4). Chapter 5 wraps up contrition, confession, and satisfaction through study of Patience's sermon (B14, C16). The epilogue returns briefly to material culture, quoting Luther's list of canon law volumes that he burned, including many studied in Thomas's book alongside *Piers Plowman*.

Since much of Thomas's argument relies on conceptual rather than lexical similarities, some readers might wonder if his claims are more a question of reader response than of authorial intent. That is, while a medieval canon lawyer might read *Piers* and see these points being worked out, one might nonetheless ask if that means that Langland was deeply familiar with the sources, or if he picked up on their ideas from friends and interlocutors. Ideas and problems surrounding confession, contrition, and penance were of interest to people other than canonists. Nonetheless, the book certainly elucidates the differences between B and C with respect to problems regarding charters, pardons, performance, and contrition, with church law proving a strong tool in this process. Throughout, Thomas provides strong organization and guidance to the reader through section divisions and signposting of his argument, as well as providing extensive examples to support his claims. Even where these may be arguable, the terms of the argument are well defined and easily taken up for further debate. Thomas engages with and builds on the work of many contemporary scholars, as well as making medieval canonistic texts available in extensive quotations and English translations. His familiarity with these sources is remarkable. This book is a substantial contribution to current scholarship. There is no comparable study. The scholarly community will appreciate the book's detail and analysis.

Nicole Clifton, *Northern Illinois University*
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Practical Cues and Social Spectacle in the Chester Plays. Matthew Sergi.
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Matthew Sergi's book title, *Practical Cues and Social Spectacle in the Chester Plays*, immediately maps a large geography and alerts his reader to the terrain ahead. He challenges

some long-held theories that constrain these texts within the relative and exclusive isolation of the merchant guilds themselves. Sergi is intent on connecting the surviving play scripts with a broader societal engagement in the development of the texts, as well as in the productions of the 1466–1578 performance window, an engagement which, he argues, has a greater implication for their contiguous influence on Cestrian quotidian culture in the late Middle Ages.

Sergi declares a theoretical affinity early in this work to individual views promoted by Bourdieu, Overlie, and Sponsler concerning matters ranging from deconstruction to the logic of practice, which he then utilizes to reinforce his social and staging conclusions. Sergi's particular focus is on the natural accretion to the plays of the implicit as well as inscribed cues, stage directions, and textual prompts, all of which "slide easily between margin and main text" (129) of the Chester plays and by extension indicate stage actions that were signals for direct engagement with generations of audiences. Well attuned to the scope and breadth of contemporary scholarship, Sergi proficiently negotiates the territory of the five surviving versions of the Chester cycle of mystery plays with a profound understanding of the array of original materials. These primarily consist of guild records, varying scribal histories, as well as Rogers's 1609 *Breviary*, and even more crucially, *A Stanzaic Life of Christ* and the Peniarth *Antichrist*, both of which he knows comprehensively and consults often.

Using a five-chapter structure including an introduction and a conclusion, which respectively focus on the Waterleaders' *Noah* and the Clothworkers' *Portents*, Sergi investigates all twenty-four surviving plays as well as the missing *Assumption*. An episodic structure is eschewed in favor of thematic groups, which in turn probe the porousness and diffusion of playing spaces in Chester *mise-en-scène*; the festive piety of food and drink employed in a recreation-as-devotional manner; collaborative text creation in relation to casting as well as to moving large masses of performers; the consideration of real and compressed time in the plays; and the spectacle of athleticism and its effect on audience behaviors and reactions. From his examinations, Sergi reasons that these "readings allow for the literate, didactic, devotional, economic, and political to coexist in these multivocal plays comfortably alongside the camp, carnal, communal, and childish amusements encoded in their practical cues" (208).

With superb acuity as a close reader, Sergi excels at etymological differentiations—English and equally well in Latin—and the careful consideration of performance probabilities deriving from them. Repeated instances of this precision characterize the nine tables that display meticulous patience with the minutiae of variant spellings and great skill in comparative analysis of textual incongruities. Astutely and conveniently, he has compiled his interpretations in parallel with Lumiansky and Mills's authoritative transcription of the plays and in close consultation with their *Essays and Documents*. This welcome arrangement provides a consistency and ease of reference that is both clear and concise.

In supporting some of his findings, Sergi's methodology is enhanced considerably by his admittedly limited production experience, some of which latterly with Poculi

Ludique Societas, or PLS, as Sergi acknowledges the renowned medieval performance troupe. However, this is not to suggest that *Practical Cues and Social Spectacle in the Chester Plays* straddles an exploration of practical aspects of early English play production by an academician with an examination of textual evidence by a practitioner. Rather, from this favorable vantage, although he reports his conclusions as an initiate, Sergi examines his evidence with instinctual acumen as a director. Much of the theoretical thrust of his paradigm hinges on his clear understanding of the exigencies of practical performance. While it is a thoroughly scholarly work, it also enjoys solid footing in a lived appreciation of theater practice. He employs his intuitions from these experiences and his comprehensive analytical skills using a finely ground lens that picks out textual as well as extra-textual detail in a precise manner.

In *Practical Cues and Social Spectacle in the Chester Plays* Matthew Sergi presents compelling arguments for engaging “the plays’ unexamined practical cues to illuminate the sociocultural mise-en-scène that has already been imagined for these plays, and often to recalibrate or challenge modern interpretations of that mise-en-scène” (240). This formidable monograph contributes important new research that enhances foundational works such as *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (ed. Lawrence M. Clopper [1979]). Sergi’s robust scholarship has added a worthy companion volume to the front ranks of early English theater studies.

Paul J. Stoesser, *University of Toronto*
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Religions in Shakespeare’s Writings. David V. Urban, ed.
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The essay collection *Religions in Shakespeare’s Writings* is decidedly not an attempt to settle the question of whether William Shakespeare was Catholic or Protestant, either in his confessional allegiance or his heart of hearts. What the collection makes clear is that there is still a great deal to say about religious matters in Shakespeare’s poems and plays. The essays, well researched and carefully crafted by their fifteen authors, are collected in a special issue of the MDPI journal *Religions*.

David Urban, who edits the collection and contributes one of the essays, counterpoises the volume against recent skeptical scholarship that “resists the idea that a positive understanding of Christianity is somehow foundational to Shakespeare’s works” (3). The essays in *Religions in Shakespeare’s Writings* amply demonstrate and artfully develop Urban’s somewhat minimalist claim that “Shakespeare’s various writings demonstrate a Christian grounding, whether that Christianity is Protestant, Catholic, or ‘mere.’” (3).

In “Shakespeare and Religion,” the review essay that begins the volume proper, John D. Cox points out that scholars like David Scott Kastan, Alison Shell, and Anthony