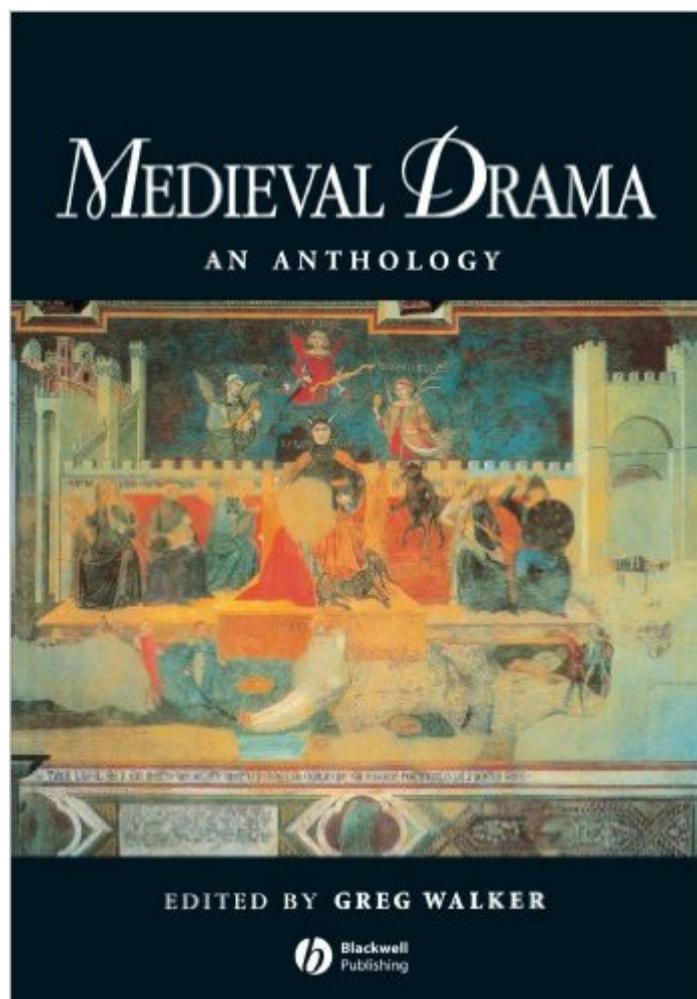


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Medieval Drama: An Anthology



Synopsis

This comprehensive anthology brings together a diverse collection of dramatic writing from the late fourteenth century to the onset of the Renaissance. The volume presents for the first time the key plays of the period in their entirety, alongside more unusual selections, covering religious narrative, religion and conscience, and politics and morality. The first section focuses on Biblical plays, including coherent sequences of the narrative Cycle plays from York and N-Town and supporting pageants from Chester and Wakefield. This approach allows a clear narrative line to develop, and permits the comparison of the treatment of key stories between the Cycles. The selected material demonstrates how the drama of the towns and cities of East Anglia and the North of England mediated religious culture to a heterodox urban audience, and explored biblical events in an intensely contemporary setting. In the second and third sections, the attention turns to secular drama, and the Moral Plays and Interludes. The featured texts illustrate the range of themes and issues covered, from the salvation of the individual human soul to the renovation of the political nation, and the variety of settings and audiences for which the plays were designed. The flexibility of the Interlude form is explored, as are the ways in which it was utilised by playwrights and their patrons to address issues of direct political and social concern to them and their audiences.

Medieval Drama: An Anthology is an indispensable guide to the breadth and depth of dramatic activity in medieval Britain.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I wish I had gone with a different edition for these plays - it's a lot of money to spend on a book that

is incredibly frustrating to use. I am using the book for my PhD exams in medieval literature and yet I find the glosses sparse and, as the other reviewer said, poorly keyed to the text. Each time you want to check a gloss, you have to do a decent bit of hunting to find the corresponding note and by that time, you've lost your place in the text. The format is very distracting and inhibits enjoyable reading. Further, the glosses could sometimes be more literal so as to emphasize the linguistic continuities between the earlier and the extant English vocabulary; the connections are rarely obvious in the translation choices, and that seems quite a wasted opportunity for undergrad students in particular who want to become more familiar with the original English of the plays. These complaints voiced, I will say that there is a lovely introductory section at the beginning of each individual play to acquaint the reader with the history and/or context of the work. The attention spent on each of the introductions is nicely done and alerts the reader to key details, interpretive trends or other useful information regarding the following work. These intros would provide a helpful starting point for the newcomer to medieval drama.

Most collections of medieval plays offer just a small selection of texts, usually concentrating on just one kind of drama (religious, secular, comic, historical, etc.) But this anthology really does have a comprehensive selection of all the best plays and pageants from the Mystery Plays to the Interludes of the mid-sixteenth century. It's even got David Lindsay's brilliant 'Satire of the Three estates' (in full!). It's very clearly laid out, and well-edited and glossed. By far the best volume I've read.

I LOVE having this collection at my disposal in one solid brick of a book. I already have a copy of the Chester cycle so it's ok with me that about only 3 of the biblical plays included are from Chester (not including the Post-Reformation Banns). The majority of them are from the York Cycle, actually all of them except for 3 from Chester, the N-Town Mary Play, and the Townley Second Shepherd's play. Then you've got a few Morality plays and slightly more interludes. The introductions are to the point and very helpful. As are the footnotes. But the format of the glosses! I wish the glosses were on the right hand side of the page and corresponded with each line of text. Instead, they are all cramped together at the bottom of the page, maybe to save paper, and it's a real pain for a few reasons: 1) You don't know if there are any glosses for a particular line unless you check, and when you check there might be nothing there 2) The text provides a line number every 5 lines and for me it gets irritating having to figure out what line I'm at so I can look up the gloss. Might not sound like a big deal, but because of the spacing, the fact that stage directions don't count as lines, and that a line can run down to the next sentence, it can be much more difficult than it needs to be 3) The

reading experience becomes very choppy and frustrating. Also, sometimes there is a gloss provided for a very obvious word and nothing there for a less obvious word. All in all, I'm happy to have this book and I would recommend it.

I am using this anthology in an undergraduate classroom, and I have many complaints. It is expensive, unwieldy (without much space for marginal comments) and the editorial glosses are submerged at the bottom of the page, so poorly keyed to the words and phrases they reference that my students seldom can figure them out. The criteria of selection are mysterious: no Digby play, very few Old Testament episodes from the cycle dramas, and a clear bias for the York cycle make Bevington's 1975 edition a more more reliable resource. Plus, no ecclesiastical drama (thus, little sense of the theatre of the mass). There is a nice selection of Interludes, but again, the glosses are hard to use and the type is so small that the whole thing is quite off-putting. I blame Blackwell: there should have been a lot more thought given to ease of use.

Although the short introductory essays are well-written and lively, the texts are poorly glossed and are filled with mistakes. My students were very frustrated with this anthology.

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