the popular entertainment industry of the 1930s and the way they are treated today in such productions as Southpark's animated 22-minute retelling of *Great Expectations.* Sconce notes ruefully that Southpark's version of *Great Expectations* was the least popular of all its episodes and has never been rerun.

Dickens on Screen ends with a listing of television and film adaptations made from Dickens's novels. This filmography is far from complete —omitting, for instance, the 1922 version of *Oliver Twist,* starring Jackie Coogan as Oliver. It is an odd omission considering that a still from this movie is featured on the cover of *Dickens on Screen.*

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Anne Lancashire. *London Civic Theatre: City Drama and Pageantry from Roman Times to 1558.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 355. Appendices, index. U.S. $70.00 cloth.

Given her fearsome scholarship and vast erudition, Anne Lancashire suffers with surprising grace the stupidities and unproven assumptions that have marred the study of the early English theatre to date. At one point in her latest book she optimistically hazards the view that such prejudices "may finally now be extinct" (25). Alas, they are not: your run-of-mill teacher of theatre history no less than your average textbook introduction to drama still maddeningly repeats the idea that classical theatre traditions completely disappeared from Britain in the Dark Ages, and that theatre was "reborn," as if from scratch, in the tenth or eleventh century, from "within" the Church.

The idea is false and in *London Civic Theatre* Lancashire proves it so. This book should be required reading for all scholars and teachers of drama and theatre, not only because it establishes many of the facts (and corrects many of the fictions) about theatre in London before 1558, but also because it demonstrates the extent to which Medieval theatre in general was a civic activity, undertaken by secular city authorities and groups for the entertainment of citizens, celebrities, and tourists, while serving (or undermining) a variety of social, political, religious, and military agendas. As Lancashire shows, in the hundreds or thousands of plays, pageants, parades, mummings, variety acts and naumachia exhibited to Londoners

and their guests in the 1500 years before the advent of the Elizabethan public theatres, religion had a minor influence and the Church had no apparent role at all: costumes in London from Roman times through to 1558 were as likely to be designed and built for classical figures like Heracles, Hector and Troilus as for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Historians have also been wont to interpret the lack of surviving play-texts from pre-Elizabethan London as evidence that the city's theatrical activity before Shakespeare was negligible. Or, generalising on the basis of the provincial English plays that *have* survived, they have posited a single analogous form of theatre for London throughout the whole of the Medieval and Tudor period. The first assumption is weaker than most based on silence: material fragility and daily use would have made actors' play-scripts about as likely to survive into the present as their clothing. And the second assumption makes no sense at all: the fifty or so years from which the provincial manuscripts date, c. 1450–1500, can hardly be used to explain the preceding three hundred, especially in a wealthy cosmopolitan capital like London. (Theatre history shows that "provincial theatre" can differ radically from that of the cultural centre.) Through painstaking examination of the archaeological, archival, and printed evidence from the founding of Londinium to the ascent of Elizabeth—and building on the monumental accomplishments of the University of Toronto's REED project—Lancashire corrects both.

London's ancient amphitheatre, constructed in 70 A.D., improved in 125, and discovered as recently as 1987, is one of about nineteen or so structures known to have been built by the Romans in Britain. Extant data about first- and second-century theatre are scarce for any part of the Roman empire, and London is no exception. Lancashire nevertheless demonstrates the ways in which theatrical traditions were continuous in London through the departure of the Romans in 410 and even through the decline of Londinium itself. Roman plays continued to be known and important locations of civic spectacle continued to function as fulcrums of public activity. This was the case, most strikingly, for the amphitheatre itself: although in ruins it was used in the twelfth century as the site on which London's first guildhall was constructed.

By the 1180s London already possessed a reputation for staging plays, a neighbourhood frequented by students and young people seeking entertainment (Clerkenwell, just north of Bartholomew Fair), as well as an open market space at Cheapside soon to become one of the city's main venues for street-theatre. By 1300, garden-trampling audiences were enjoying wrestling and play performances at Clerkenwell (also known as Skinners'

Well); by the end of the century, royals like Richard II and Henry IV would be joining the crowds gathered there to watch a multi-day, outdoor cycle play, and one which may predate the better-known cycles of York, Chester, and Coventry. From the early 1400s onward, play-production in London seems to have moved indoors, into the halls of the city's craft guilds, where various groups of literates (clerks, school-boys, and professional actors) performed works such as interludes, moralities, farces, mummings, comic dialogues, satires of the clergy, mythological allegories, and pieces written for one man and a dog.

With guild membership a prerequisite for (and therefore virtually synonymous with) citizenship in London, the city's dozens of trade guilds constituted probably the most significant administrative infrastructure in the medieval city, fulfilling all the roles now taken by municipal and state government, from collection of taxes to the running of grammar schools (the Grocers operated three). They also hired plays and players, chiefly for their Christmas-season parties and regular company congresses. Working from guild and other civic records, Lancashire discovers the names of many of the players, what they were paid, what some were fed (rabbit), and the titles of many of the plays they performed or might have performed. We learn that even during the reign of Henry VIII four-man acting companies were already busy performing plays to the public, indoors, for money; some of these groups were The King's Players, including John English, William Rutter, and Robert Hinstock; The Queen's Players, including John Sly; as well as, by 1529, the Duke of Suffolk's men, the Prince's, and Gloucester's. We also learn that minstrels, still gamely trying to make a living in the fifteenth century, were going cheap (20 pence compared to the princely six or seven shillings earned by actors), and that costume-rental houses pre-existed the establishment of resident professional theatre companies (as they would do again, 400 years later, in Canada).

London's theatrical life also included spectacle-based street- and river-theatre: hugely expensive costumed parades with scenic floats, brass bands, maidens in towers scattering gold leaves, morris dancers and minstrels, mechanical effects and fireworks. Organised jointly (if not always consensually) by guild, city, and court officials to celebrate royal and ambassadorial entries, coronations, administrative swearings-in, and seasonal festivals, such street theatre included the Midsummer Watch in June, with its scores of cresset-lights carried by the poor for a welcome wage, and the Lord Mayor's Show in October. These processions followed the traditional civic parade-route (different from that used for religious processions); and although the throngs of onlookers were occasionally

treated to pageants of angels and devils, and repeatedly to the Annunciation pageant of the Drapers, medieval Londoners seem most often to have been entertained by paint-and-canvas ships, giants, falcons, griffins, lynxes, wildmen and Moors, real dogs and bears, profusions of red and white roses, and waterworks running with red and white wine. If this sounds like the kind of spectacle one might have seen in ancient Rome, it should: Lancashire's thesis throughout the book is that the London streets carried on the functions of the Roman amphitheatre (28, 50). (In fact the Fishmongers' pageant of 1298—with its gilded sturgeons, salmons of silver, and 46 armed knights riding horses disguised as pike-fish—takes us back even beyond Rome, to the animal choruses of Aristophanes.)

Now, parades are undoubtedly "theatrical", but like the Eaton's Santa Claus or the Macy's Thanksgiving parades, they stop looking like theatre when placed beside the contemporaneous activities of professional or even amateur actors. It bespeaks no bias against popular culture to raise the question of whether such phenomena really belong in the book's titular category of "London civic theatre." Lancashire might have explained her reasons for focusing on such ceremonials and military musters to the exclusion of, say, grammar-school plays and plays staged by the "law students" of the Inns of Court—phenomena which also have civic credentials and, as works of fiction, arguably more to teach us about pre-Elizabethan theatre.

Overall, however, this book has the great advantage (and credibility) of finally bringing medieval London into line with Continental theatre practices, especially those of France—not only in terms of its multi-day outdoor passion-play (the Clerkenwell/Skinners' Well *Passion of our Lord and the Creation of the World,* c. 1390), or in terms of its fourteenth-century puy (an international music performance competition), but also in terms of the decisive role taken by its business/craft associations in the production and consumption of theatre. Like contemporary Paris, where theatre consisted largely of farces performed by law clerks, medieval London enjoyed theatre thanks in large part to its professional middle class of Blacksmiths, Cutlers, Brewers, Carpenters, Merchant Taylors, Vintners, and Tallow Chandlers.

The book has two minor weaknesses. While Lancashire's methods in general could not be more scrupulous (nor her writing more beautifully lucid), her evidence for Roman theatre practices is drawn mainly from Bieber (1939), Brockett (first published 1968), and Arnott (1971), sources that do not exactly represent state-of-the-art knowledge of the field. Second, with 184 pages of text and 100 pages of endnotes, this is a scholarly

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book in the best as well as, very occasionally, the worst sense of the word: some of the distinctions it labours to make are microscopically small and dry. But since *London Civic Theatre* is the work on which more colourful histories will draw for decades, even centuries to come, we cannot complain. Someone had to expose her sinuses to the dusty documents, and we can only be grateful that, for the history of the early London theatre, it was someone with as discerning, logical, and unprejudiced a nose (and head) as Anne Lancashire.

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