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Shakespeare in Company. By Bart Van Es. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xiv, 357. \$45.00.

Bart Van Es, from the very outset of his book *Shakespeare in Company*, offers as his thesis that "Shakespeare's decision to become a stakeholder in the theatre industry transformed and would continue to affect the way that he wrote his plays" (2). At first glance, this thesis sounds rather simplistic, but over the course of his book, Van Es couples that simplicity with an incredibly detailed and thoroughly researched look at not only the Shakespearean canon, but also a wide cross-section of Renaissance drama. Even when Van Es seems to stray from that thesis—particularly in his chapters on Robert Armin and the Children's Companies—he ultimately ends up deftly bringing his reader back to it in the chapters' final paragraphs.

Van Es offers a segmented look at Shakespeare's professional career, combining textual close reading with cultural materialism in order to see Shakespeare's plays as part of a professional marketplace. Of the four "Phases" of Shakespeare's career that Van Es identifies, it is the second, Shakespeare's emergence as a "company man," that serves as the foundation for the rest of the book. Van Es argues that Shakespeare began to distinguish himself from his contemporaries beginning in 1594, in large part due to the unique material working conditions that Shakespeare enjoyed from that time forward. Van Es outlines these conditions in detail, pointing out how Shakespeare enjoyed the general stability of his profession that came as a result of the 1594 establishment of a duopoly of acting companies, which "now resided long-term at specific venues and became exclusive providers of dramatic entertainment at court" (108). Van Es argues that Shakespeare's status as a sharer gave him the added ability to play a role in the casting process, enabling him to write plays for a specific, stable group of players. This led to a transformation in Shakespeare's style, from a creator of literary drama to a creator of "relational drama," or plots featuring "relationships within and between clusters of characters" (119). This ability, derived from his combined status as a player, a sharer, and a dramatist was, Van Es argues, "without parallel amongst his contemporaries," and this difference between Shakespeare and his peers in material production caused his career to take a dramatically different—and more successful—path (125). Though the entire book is well worth the read, it is this section that offers the crux of his argument, while the rest of the book either sets us up for this argument (Phase One) or builds on the foundation established here (Phases Three and Four).

The first section, "Phase One," covers the early years of Shakespeare's career, specifically his status as one of many "conventional poet-playwrights." Van Es, pointing to well-known incidents such as Greene's famous attack on Shakespeare and accusations that Shakespeare had "borrowed" lines and stylistic elements from Marlowe, notes that "that truth hides something more difficult and complex. Shakespeare is influenced by Marlowe, but so are his other contemporaries" (24). Van Es further demonstrates that Marlowe's own work was frequently "intercut with the work of others" (26). This layering of authorial voices was less about theft, and more about the working conditions of the Renaissance playwright. Van Es argues that the playwrights themselves

lacked a certain level of "personal connection" to the playtexts that they created, with the texts frequently being altered, expanded, and otherwise modified—by any number of playwrights—in order to suit the *company*, not the original playwright. As a result of this, Van Es argues that the early stage of Shakespeare's career was that of a literary dramatist, meaning that his work was derived "from an expansive network of high-status classical and vernacular drama" (73) that focused far more on academic sources than it did on individual characters.

Van Es identifies Shakespeare's membership in the Globe partnership as "Phase Three" of his career. From a critical standpoint, this section is difficult to classify. It is, by a significant margin, the longest section of the book. On one hand, that length is justified. Van Es weaves together a multitude of sources to paint a vivid and engaging picture of the formation and legal elements of the Globe partnership, the arrival of Robert Armin as the new company fool, the rivalry with the children's companies, and the growing importance of Richard Burbage as the sole lead actor. He goes on to ultimately connect these topics to his idea of Shakespeare's style being influenced by his unique status in his company, showing how each of these events solidified, formally and informally, the strength of those company bonds. On the other hand, this lengthy section serves primarily to add nuance to the points that Van Es had already made in his discussion of Shakespeare as a company man. In his discussion of the Globe partnership, Van Es highlighted the peculiar legal language of the agreement, which was structured in such a way that prevented dispersal and mortgage of the asset, which further served to solidify the stability of the company (158). In his discussion of Armin, Van Es identifies the ways in which Shakespeare incorporated Armin's previous writings and "caustic insanity" into his new work (193).

Van Es suggests that Shakespeare adapted aspects of his style in order to defend the public stage against the new threat of the children's companies in the early 1600s, specifically adding elements of marriage such as "dowries, pregnancy, and sexual gratification" as "drivers of plot" (222). While this change in Shakespeare's style has been previously recognized, Van Es argues that "what has not previously been acknowledged ... is that at least a part of its origin must relate to the friction between the new cynical and misogynistic comedies of the boys' stage and the more gynocentric drama of the adults" (222). Van Es suggests that, due to the financial interest he had in the Globe, Shakespeare "adopted many elements of the drama that [the boys' companies] had brought into fashion, but he also offered a counter-narrative to their culture of wit" (230), with the intention of winning both the educated and the popular audiences by uniting the theatrical traditions that appealed to each.

Finally, Van Es offers a short discussion of Richard Burbage, highlighting both his financial importance to the company as well as his theatrical importance as the undisputed leading man with the departure of Will Kemp in 1599. Van Es, leaning heavily on the work of James Shapiro, points out how Shakespeare, at the turn of the century, began writing lead roles almost exclusively for Burbage—characters which, like Hamlet, featured the "internal state of the central protagonist" in order to play to Burbage's strengths (247).

In the final section, Van Es offers ideas about "Phase Four" of Shakespeare's career, specifically dealing with Shakespeare's oft-disputed "late style" and his odd return to co-writing plays. In this section, far more than the previous three, Van Es relies upon a certain amount of speculation. That said, where he does speculate, he is very convincing and, as always, he offers thoroughly documented support for his ideas. Just as Van Es identified 1594 as the key moment that Shakespeare's work began to take a unique turn, here he identifies 1608 as the year that Shakespeare turned back to his earlier roots as a poet. The crucial moment, according to Van Es, was the move by the older members of the Globe partnership to take over the lease on the indoor Blackfriars playhouse. Whereas in 1594, Shakespeare was able to create "relational drama" due to his unique status as player, playwright, and sharer, in 1608 "only half of the Blackfriars tenants were regular performers," a situation which "crystallized a separation between housekeepers and mere actors that had been in progress for some time" (258). Van Es suggests that this move distanced Shakespeare, likely long since removed from the stage as a player, from the player-sharers in the King's Men, creating a third tier in the company power dynamic. This distance from the regular actors would thus make Shakespeare's primary influence, once again, the other poets with whom he was interacting, both in London and in Stratford (276-77).

Van Es's last regular chapter focuses on Shakespeare's return to co-authorship, primarily with John Fletcher. The chapter opens with a brilliant discussion of the collaborative production of *Sir Thomas More*, though this discussion felt a bit out of place at this point in the book. Van Es convincingly dates this collaboration to the first "phase" of Shakespeare's career, leaving the reader to wonder why this material was not included in the first set of chapters, where it would have been an ideal illustration of Van Es' argument. From there, Van Es addresses the nature of Shakespeare's late-career collaborative writing, focusing on his move away from distinct characterization and interaction towards a new mode of spectacle. He notes that "for Shakespeare, the practice of co-authorship is difficult to detect, in part, because it co-exists with a stronger tendency towards imitation" (300). He illustrates this imitative sense of collaboration in a discussion of the influence of young John Fletcher on Shakespeare's late work.

I would have liked to see Van Es draw a parallel between the Shakespeare/Fletcher dynamic that he discusses here and the Shakespeare/Armin dynamic that he had so wonderfully discussed earlier, as both partnerships involve Shakespeare adapting his style by making it open to new influences. While Van Es does not draw that exact parallel, he does sum up that idea at the close of this final chapter, wherein he notes that "the poet's farewell to the stage was something less romantic than the drowning of Prospero's book and retreat into contemplation. Shakespeare simply changed the company he kept" (301). This multivalent sense of the term "company" runs throughout Van Es's book. He at times seems to delight in changing the sense of the term, shifting from discussions of Shakespeare's acting company, to the company he kept at New House in Stratford, to the "company" of his contemporaries—with the latter, as Van Es demonstrated, oft neglected. Van Es, in his

conclusion, situates his work as an attempt to bridge the gap between historical/material study of the Bard and an approach that views Shakespeare as a figure of transcendence. It remains to be seen whether Van Es, or indeed anybody, will be able to bridge the two sides of the "Culture Wars" (307), but regardless, this study will surely be an important and oft-cited contribution to a myriad of topics in Shakespeare studies.

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