Shakespeare in Company. Bart Van Es. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xiv + 354 pp. \$45.

In Shakespeare in Company, Bart Van Es proposes that changes in Shakespeare's "working conditions" (ix) are reflected in the formal qualities of the plays he wrote and produced in four distinct phases of his career. By "working conditions," he means a relatively soft materialism, a concept flexible and adaptable enough to consider changes in Shakespeare's personal, theatrical, economic, and social worlds, as well as the increasingly corporate identity shared with his fellow tenants of circumstance, the other actors and sharers of the Lord Chamberlain's (later, the King's) Men. The "in company" of the title resonates with Burbage's troupe of players. Indeed, Van Es sketches out a kind of biography of the company as a sidebar to his full and detailed account of Shakespeare's oeuvre. The playwright's symbiotic relationship — as actor, sharer, resident playwright, and landlord — to the Chamberlain's Men was unique in the period and a factor that distinguished the company from other troupes in the crowded arena of early modern popular drama.

From 1592 to 1594, Shakespeare was a relatively conventional poet-playwright, according to Van Es; his ambitions were "literary" (vi), oriented toward poetry as a means of advancement. The formal, rhetorical, and prosodic characteristics of the early plays are cast as ephebic imitations of Kyd and Marlowe with less complexity and less contestation and transformation in imitation than others have claimed. Shakespeare's socioeconomic situation changed significantly when he became an investor, or "sharer," in the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594. The altered working conditions of Shakespeare's second phase (1595 to 1599), his deeper occupation with and in the company, become the fascinating, subtly argued, and richly researched heart of the book.

Shakespeare's artistic identity shifted quite dramatically as his literary interests assimilated into dramaturgy and performance. Equal partners in the company, he and his eight fellow actor-sharers remained a remarkably stable core for the company during this second phase. Stability meant that Shakespeare could write for specific actors, with

specific bodies, voices, idiosyncrasies, talents, and limits in mind. It is here that Van Es introduces the concept of "relational drama" (109). The relation of author to actor changed, as the playwright tuned his characters to the pitch of specific players; the relation of actor to character, a relation in performance rather than composition, became naturalistic and metatheatrical simultaneously. Stability also encouraged Shakespeare to take "long-term dramatic ownership of his drama" (110). His plays could expect a second and third life on stage in this company. "No other playwright had this sustained financial and artistic investment" (110) or such a continuing relationship with his own plays. During this phase, the company provided a "matrix through which [Shakespeare] could structure his thinking" (111). The effects were "transformative" for the company as well: the collaboration or fusion of interests between author and company "inaugurated a mode of production that was unprecedented, and would rarely if ever be repeated on the English stage" (111). This is a notable, controversial, and entirely persuasive claim. Van Es has a deep and broad knowledge of theater history and he puts it to excellent use. He regards Shakespeare as a "literary dramatist," but unlike others who use the phrase — Lucas Erne, for one — he grounds the poetic in the performative.

His materialist thesis becomes a bit strained once he turns to the third phase (1599–1608) and identifies the construction of the Globe and its corporate financial structure. Shakespeare and his fellow sharers participated in the joint-equity financing of the new playhouse so that the already singular actor-sharer-resident playwright became propertied in his craft and class, as part owner, or "housekeeper," of the Globe. The fellowship of sharers became a partnership of owners. Shakespeare's investment in the Globe roughly corresponds to a new investment in tragic form, of course, but a catalytic or causal relation of one to the other evades me. Van Es is quite persuasive, nonetheless, as he examines the intensification of relational drama, evident in both comic and tragic form. Individual chapters on Robert Armin and Richard Burbage, the comic and tragic geniuses of the company, illuminate the concentrated relations between the author creating, the actor performing, and the character performed in the problematic comic and tragic forms of this period.

Van Es is properly wary of an overly material relation between the fourth phase, notable for the turn to tragicomedy or romance, and the reacquisition of the lease for Blackfriars, an indoor theater with artificial lighting and the potential for enhanced special effects. In fact, he politely deconstructs a number of the familiar "common sense" speculations that have tried to bind the two together. The majority of the late plays were written, as he reminds us, before "this playhouse [even] became operational for the King's Men" (254). In the romances, Van Es notes, an emphasis on plot partially displaces character, which significantly reduces the relational qualities of the plays enacted. Shakespeare is "in the company of playwrights" in this period, more writerly and withdrawn from his performative relations, personal and collective. There are things to argue with here, to agree with, and at the same time complicate, all of which are signs of compelling and largely persuasive argument. All told, *Shakespeare in Company* is a thoughtful, deeply researched, and quietly provocative book that offers

a great deal to a great many — theater historians, New Formalists, and old (New) Historicists alike.

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