is not as decisive as might be thought, but it nonetheless retains a degree of incongruence in its invective "against euery dancer and danceresse, which in their dances haue no remembrance of God, are greatly culpable before the eyes of God himselfe, although they seeme to be without fault in the sight of men."[3]

Occasionally, the author lets slip a remark which jars with her otherwise insightful observations. For example, in a discussion of Ben Jonson's *Epicene,* Wooding observes that it incorporates discourse on 'ladies' minute attention to their dress and their talkative and overbearing natures, all perennial matter for comedy until political correctness served to unsex humour' (178). As anyone remotely familiar with the rich oeuvre of English theatre that stretches from the Wakefield Master to Neil Bartlett will attest, the medium retains a persistent subversive streak. Moreover, "political correctness" is an overused phrase tedious to the point of absurdity, and is unnecessary in scholarly literature.

This biography presents a detailed portrayal of early modern theatrical life and its vagaries. *John Lowin and the English Theatre, 1603–1647* provides a broad-ranging examination of both the players and the payers in one of the most vibrant epochs of English dramatic literature. While the elusiveness of the man at the centre of the book endures, Wooding's study brings a great deal of light to a previously shady subject.

Notes

1. Martin Butler, 'Lowin, John (bap. 1576, d. 1653),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17096, accessed 20 May 2014].
2. Rick Bowers, "John Lowin's *Conclusions Upon Dances:* Puritan Conclusions of a Godly Player," *Renaissance and Reformation,* 23 (1987): 163.
3. John Lowin, *Conclusions vpon dances, both of this age, and of the olde. Newly composed and set forth, by an out-landish doctor* (London: John Orphinstrange, 1607), Sig. B4^{v}

Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents, edited by Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper and Peter Holland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp.xiv + 263. Hardcover. $99.00

Reviewer: **JAMES SIMPSON**

By far the predominant historical influence on Shakespeare is the experience and, to a slightly lesser but still significant effect, the literature and drama of the later English Middle Ages. Thus in his first decade as playwright (1589–99), Shakespeare draws, mostly, on the traumatic experiences of relatively recent English civil war for the material of at least nine plays. In the second great decade, late medieval literature is extensively drawn on in at least *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), *King Lear* (1605–6), *Pericles* (1607), *Cymbeline* (1610–11), and *Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613). That cursory survey of source material leaves untouched the no less extensive theatrical influence of pre-Reformation drama (e.g., in the representation of "rude mechanicals" acting in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595); of pre-modern literary form (e.g., *A Winter's Tale* [1609–10]); and of explorations of pre-Reformation ethics in the context of new, Reformation spiritual disciplines (e.g., *Hamlet* [1599–1601], and *Measure for Measure* [1603–4]). Shakespeare's engagement with these pre-Reformation materials is exceptionally active and dialogic.

And yet, so many powerful structures, both cultural and institutional, keep us from attending to that dialogue. The deepest forces driving the conversation asunder are the different but most powerful forms of English and American cultural identity, which must preserve Shakespeare's cultural capital either for Protestantism or enlightened modernity. University curricula, hiring practices, and the marketing of publishing houses also play their powerful anti-conversation parts, in drawing the periodic boundaries so as most to neutralize what is especially dynamic about literature when read across time and cultural convulsion. Synchronic historicism has also been a conversation stopper, for different reasons, derived from Foucault, with regard to the relation of late medieval culture and Shakespeare. As Helen Cooper points out in her excellent introduction to this book, a "high proportion of books printed in the sixteenth century were medieval texts" (9), yet because our synchronic scholarly disposition is to restrict attention to books freshly written in a given period, we ignore the deeply layered effect of different yet contemporary temporalities (with, of course, one or two exceptions, such as Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (1977) and Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins* (1978). The synchronic focus on "now" will always be justified in literary study; it's just that we need a more capacious definition of "now."

The morose non-conversation situation is, happily, rapidly changing. Innovative presses are open to trans-Reformation talk (notably Notre Dame's ReFormations, with at least 10 volumes now out or about to appear). Collaborative volumes cleared the way: *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History,* edited by Brian Cummings and James Simpson (2010); *Premodern Shakespeare,* a special issue of *JMEMS* 40 (2010); *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England,* edited by David Matthews and Gordon McMullan (2007); and *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages,* edited by Curtis Perry and John Watkins (2009). Collaborative volumes get general conversations going; that attractive dialogue is now starting to give way to powerful single voices: thus, for example, leading the way, Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (2004) and more recently Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (2011).

The appearance, then, of *Medieval Shakespeare* is extremely welcome, not least because it, too, invigorates a vibrant conversation well underway but not yet quite in full swing. The twelve essays are divided into the following categories: The Middle Ages and Shakespeare (Bruce Smith and Bart van Es); Books and Language (A. E. B. Coldiron, Jonathan Hope, Helen Cooper); The British Past (Ruth Morse, and Margreta de Grazia); and The Theatrical Dimension (Tom Bishop, Michael O'Connell, Janette Dillon, Peter Holland and David Bevington). The great virtue of this ground plan is discursive breadth: book history and linguistics can find a place alongside theater history and thematic literary criticism.

I divide my response into the following categories: those essays whose argument understands the late medieval/early modern divide as part of the problem being addressed; those essays whose argument simply assumes the late medieval/early modern divide, and works within it; and those essays that do not have an argument. That triage embeds an evaluative ladder, from excellent to worthwhile to uninteresting. Whenever I mention an essay, I will summarize the argument as briefly as possible, except when there is no argument.

In the excellent category, I'd place Bart van Es' "Late Shakespeare and the Middle Ages" (the "medieval" in the late plays corresponds to the emergence of a cultural category of the "Middle Age" in the early seventeenth century). Van Es corrects the error of Ruth Morse (cited approvingly elsewhere in the volume (e.g., 22)) that the first usage of "Middle Age" was in 1618; William Camden used it in 1605 (44). And that's the date, van Es persuasively argues, that marks the point at which the late plays become "at once more modern and more medieval" (51). A. E. B. Coldiron's scintillating book historical essay, "The Meditated 'Medieval' and Shakespeare" (the new technology of England's printing industry faced a "content vacuum," which it filled with old books), offers a model for literary critical treatment of Shakespeare. Jonathan Hope's wonderfully polemical essay "'Not know my voice?' Shakespeare corrected; English perfected—theories of language from the Middle Ages to Modernity" sees Shakespeare on the medieval side of the divide on which we stand on the seventeenth-century side (performative spoken language—language that makes things happen—is the standard; to understand language as written and denotative is to work from a concept of language guaranteed to misinterpret early modern texts). The essay does not touch fierce Protestant repudiation of linguistic performativity, but opens the way for that discussion. Margreta de Grazia's illuminating, poignant essay "*King Lear* in BC Albion" argues, effectively, that *Lear*'s eschatological references point us to the comedy of Salvation History that at times looks like tragedy, only to underline that tragedy that looks like tragedy BCE really is tragedy. Tom Bishop's "The Art of Playing" is totally persuasive that Shakespeare's very frequent meta-theatrical consciousness of players of playing has profound roots in late medieval drama. Michael O'Connell's exemplary "Blood Begetting Blood: Shakespeare and the Mysteries" is an exceptionally suggestive meditation on the presence and meaning of actual blood onstage in both late medieval and Shakespearean drama. Finally Peter Holland's "Performing the Middle Ages" is an astonishingly fertile argument about the fact that historicism is Shakespeare performance is a phenomenon of the late eighteenth century, and certainly not of early modern performance practice. The empty soufflé of talk about the medieval/early modern divide being about "true historical consciousness" could be deflated by the scalpel of this essay.

Some essays (Helen Cooper, "The Afterlife of Personification," David Bevington, "Conclusion: the Evil of 'Medieval,'" and Janette Dillon, "From Scaffold to Discovery- Space: Change and Continuity") are less polemical about the relation between pre- and post-Reformation material: the medieval provides a frame and a set of resources for Shakespeare. Cooper argues, with great learning, that medieval personification delivered to early modernity a way of "conceiving, then dramatizing, the point where psychological and ethical analysis intersect' (116). Dillon's admittedly non-scintillating theater history essay traces the use of curtains within the stage space. Bevington's vigorous essay outlines very broad similarities of historical irony as a structuring principle in the cycle plays and the tetralogies.

This is, then, clearly a superb collection; it raises the level and widens the discursive scope of the nascent field described above. The only essays I found disappointing were those by Bruce Smith ("Shakespeare's Middle Ages") and Ruth Morse ("Shakespeare and the Remains of Britain"). Essays need at least one argument, but not too many. Smith has too many: he ponders on the meaning of "middle" in ways that would do an impromptu performer proud—how many middles can one think of? Morse has no argument. That historiography serves present interests is less an argument than a truism, so threadbare is the perception through overuse. On p. 135, with two pages to go in the essay and sixteen pages of generalities behind us, an argument is claimed: that Shakespeare needed British history to claim precedent as restoration. This, says Morse, is the "beating heart of my argument." That beat is very hard to detect.

Scholars across the Reformation divide will welcome this splendid collection, which animates and broadens many long-suppressed conversations.

Shakespeare. His new book, *English Drama from "Everyman" to 1660: Performance and Print,* was published in 2015.

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