

Kenneth S. Jackson and Arthur Marotti, eds. *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*.

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Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous* (Columbia Pictures, October 2011) resuscitates the age-old question: "who" was Shakespeare? During the past decade, early modern scholars have insistently asked not "who" but "what" was Shakespeare: a recusant, Catholic sympathizer? A closet Calvinist? A politic Protestant? The fascination with Shakespeare's identity reflects a zealous scholarly preoccupation to define the spiritual and ethical possibilities that these early modern plays offer to a postmodern, secularized world. In defining Shakespeare's religion, we define our own. Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti, whose 2004 essay "The Turn to Religion" captured a critical conspectus, edit a collection that mediates between a past religious and present ethical Shakespeare. Grounded in a Derridean insistence that the "dialect between the two is the thing," the essays challenge binary categories, blurring the "religious and the secular, faith and reason, the transcendent and the immanent." Split into two methodological sections, the book reads both historically and theoretically, its division illustrating the collection's central premise that dialogue happens across the lines.

In an exceptionally strong and coherent set of historical essays, part one shows Shakespeare to be a religious skeptic who nonetheless desired to forge new community bonds through "psychologically and ethically powerful theatre." Robert Miola opens by rehabilitating two familiar Jesuits, William Weston and

Henry Garnet. He presents us with beleaguered Catholics committed to ministering to their “persecuted flock” and thus challenges the polemical caricatures of English Jesuits as equivocating frauds bent on religious war. In an outstanding reading of *Titus Andronicus*, Gary Kuchar argues that the play exposes a breakdown in ceremonial coherence that underlies the crown’s failed efforts to unify England through the new liturgy. Its ceremonial confusion precipitates shocking violence, a potent reminder of the perils of religious schism. What does it mean to believe? Richard McCoy asks in a reading of *The Comedy of Errors*. In a deft reconsideration of Reformation debates about the Eucharist by way of Romantic conceptions of “negative capability” and the “willing suspension of disbelief,” McCoy shows how Shakespearean theater conjures a miraculous aura without taking sides. The play thus inspires affections and belief, which in turn perform the cultural work of restoring amity. Sarah Beckwith sees a similar impulse toward community building in *Cymbeline*. In a compelling argument, she asserts that the sacramental language of penance fosters the social reconciliations that close the play and that result in what she calls a “Eucharistic community.” The social importance of ceremony, confession, and communion also informs Hannibal Hamlin’s exploration for how *King Lear* rephrases the book of Job and dramatically illustrates that no theological argument can provide a satisfying answer to Job’s basic question of “why me?” Hamlin’s conclusions sum up the argumentative thrust of part one: Shakespeare’s theater provides an emotional testing ground that can transcend theological bickering and envision new communal forms.

Shakespeare’s dramatic religious questioning, part one suggests, extends beyond doctrinal difference to address fundamental aspects of human sociality and community. The theoretically oriented contributors in part two take up the philosophical import of religious experience on community. Reading Job theoretically rather than historically, Julie Reinhard Lupton turns to Shakespeare’s use of Job as a figure of “commutativity” whose suffering reminds us of what happens when institutional forms break down. Ken Jackson follows with a convincing reading of *Richard II* that reveals the huge personal consequences entailed in a theologically driven model of political and legal action. Both Gaunt and Richard are shocked when their expressed commitment toward ideals of sovereignty asks them, like Abraham, to give absolutely everything. Reading through the lens of Buddhist thought and William Empson, Lisa Freinkel addresses *Timon of Athens* for its staging of the problem of Christian dualism, while Joan Linton brings the work of Walter Benjamin and Eric Santer to a reading of the “absent presence” of Falstaff in *Henry V*. James A. Knapp fittingly closes the collection with a reading of *Measure for Measure* that dismantles religious piety as expressed through state law, showing how Shakespeare judges the system rather than the individual. Although I found the essays that form part two to be less cohesive and persuasive, collectively they provide a vocabulary to address the complexity of talking about religious themes in our own historical and ethical moment.

Shakespeare and Religion bridges a gap within Shakespeare studies by bringing under one cover early modern and postmodern perspectives on religious experience.

Its hybrid vision pushes beyond the binaries of entrenched doctrinal and scholarly positions to show that the search for community is a past and present concern, a particular and universal quest.

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