Jennifer Summit. *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England.*
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. 336 pp. index. illus. $35. ISBN: 978–0–226–78171–6.

In meditating on the medieval commonplace that "memory is a library" (1), Jennifer Summit reflects upon the insight that libraries are much more than static repositories for books. They are instead dynamic sites of intellectual engagement, indeed of conflict, over the remembering, shaping, and reshaping of textual monuments of the past. Although this valuable and subtle study is grounded on the history of libraries, it represents much more than a bibliographical investigation. Instead it aims to demonstrate the vital place of librarianship in the formation of English literature, history, and culture of the late medieval and early modern eras. Summit integrates literature and history in her searching study of both the survival of books that were written in libraries and literary representations of libraries within books.

According to this study of sites of reading and writing in late medieval and early modern England, the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536–41) constituted the pivotal event in a process whereby books identified with medieval religious orthodoxy underwent adaptation and redefinition as a consequence of the English Reformation. Proceeding under the supervision of Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's vicegerent for religious affairs, the disestablishment of the abbeys entailed the dismantling of monastic libraries and the destruction of most of the books that they had preserved. Nonetheless Summit takes as her starting point an earlier event, namely the pre-existing foundation by Duke Humfrey of Gloucester of the old library that would undergo iconoclastic attack during the militantly Protestant reign of Edward VI before it eventually grew into the Bodleian Library. Although scholars have identified Duke Humfrey's munificent endowment as a liberating event, indeed as one of the first fruits of English humanism, Summit exposes the historical irony that the benefactor saw this collection as a repressive agent in the effort to suppress Wycliffite heresy. It is the first example among many of how libraries functioned to retard as well as to facilitate the advancement of learning.

Moving into the Tudor era, Summit complicates the standard view that publication of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* was a seminal event in the advancement of English humanism by demonstrating that More's fidelity to a monastic model of literacy and learning underlies a backward-looking critique of the "new learning" as an avenue to contemplative understanding. At the core of Summit's study is her investigation of the immediate consequences of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Central figures in the chain of events are John Bale, John Leland, and Matthew Parker, who in an apparent paradox favored the suppression of abbeys at the same time that their collection of monastic manuscripts "self-consciously advanced, rather than subverted, many of the same aims of the Reformation that resulted in the dissolution" (103). In an important discussion of *The Faerie Queene*, Summit demonstrates how Edmund Spenser built upon the achievement of this older

generation of Protestant antiquarians in his poetic representation of the library as a site for preservation of manuscripts identified with national memory.

A generation younger than Spenser, the antiquarian Sir Robert Cotton built upon the labor of previous collectors in gathering the greatest collection of medieval manuscripts. To the present day, the Cottonian manuscripts constitute the core collection of the world's greatest archive, the British Library. Summit documents the fact that Cotton followed his predecessors in transforming monastic manuscripts into sources for seventeenth-century Protestant historiography: "the Reformation as it is represented in the Cotton Library stands for a massive redistribution of texts" (196). Building on her illuminating discussion of Sir Francis Bacon as a practitioner of early modern librarianship, Summit moves on to a reconstruction of how Bacon, Thomas Bodley, founder of the library that bears his name, and Bodley's librarian, Thomas James, engaged in a "three-way debate over the roles of books, knowledge, and libraries in the seventeenth century" (201). This discussion brings to a close a richly rewarding study that carries the reader from late medieval origins in monastic and universities libraries to the foundation of great collections — the Cotton Library now part of the British Library and the Bodleian Library — that constitute England's chief repositories of national memory. This book should appeal to all who are interested in libraries, book collecting, books and reading, the history of the English Reformation, and intellectual life in early modern England.

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