

garner Reformist sympathies or did the audience continue to harbor bitterness against the remodeling of a civil tradition? Both of these options could be used to support Lerud's argument in favor of the intrinsic value of the cycle plays to civic identity.

Despite these minor reservations regarding the structure and breadth of this work, I maintain that Lerud's book represents a valuable contribution to a growing theoretical concern with the role of place in socio-cultural identity. Like those of all scholars of the performance conditions of medieval drama, his conclusions tend toward the conjectural. Still, he presents a fresh, lively approach to the York and Chester cycles, encouraging us to creatively re-visit medieval staging by linking seemingly inconsequential textual references with particular civil locales — and consequently with political and religious ideologies. The issues that could have benefited from further expansion here, such as the role of the *platea* and viewer receptions of Reformist alterations in the Chester cycle, will provide useful avenues of research for future scholars of medieval drama.

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Thomas Rist. *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate. 2008. Pp ix, 165.

Thomas Rist's first book, *Shakespeare's Romances and the Politics of Counter-Reformation* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), was an incisive contribution to what was then the relatively new fashion for reading Shakespeare in the light of the echoes and traces of post-Reformation Catholicism in England. His new study of revenge tragedy intensifies that interest. It brings both the considerable strengths and the weaknesses of the first book into play to produce a provocative study with a sharply defined thesis that should interest any scholar of the period's dramatic and theological currents.

Rist's book focuses mainly on *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Atheist's Tragedy*, *The White Devil*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*. His central argument is that Jacobean revenge tragedy is not the anti-Catholic genre he tells us (not entirely convincingly) most previous critics have claimed. In fact, he argues, its persis-

tent concern with 'remembrances' of the dead serves to centre the genre not within Reformist but 'traditional' theology. The latter term he borrows from Eamon Duffy; it is one that many historians of the period have criticized as un-nuanced and based in confessional rather than scholarly discourse. Rist uses it unapologetically, thereby setting out his confessional sympathies boldly.

His main critical targets (not, I think, an inappropriate metaphor for his breezily aggressive stance towards dissenting readers of revenge tragedy) are those who see the genre as exploiting or advocating anti-Catholic and especially anti-Spanish (and, less obviously, anti-Italian) sentiments. He particularly takes aim at a series of articles from the 1970s by Ronald Broude, who argues, Rist states, that revenge tragedy is unambiguously Protestant in sympathy. After tracking down some of Broude's articles, I find this characterization a little overstated: Broude's primary focus, typical of Old Historical studies, was rather on the etymological and legalistic background of revenge and justice.¹ Rist does score a palpable hit or two but his opponent's weapon is blunted by age, and certainly not 'bated', as the greatest of all revenge tragedies, *Hamlet*, puts it. (I should add that Rist does also have some sharp thrusts at *Hamlet* in the course of his argument which show him to be a practiced and subtle man with the rapier when dealing with a worthy foil.)

Putting the puzzle of his rather outdated main opponent aside, Rist's worthwhile goal is to bring the work of revisionist historians of the post-Reformation period, like Duffy and Haigh, to bear on the early seventeenth century, and to show how remnants of Catholic ('traditional') thought and practice continued to surface in English culture two and three generations after the Henrican Reformation. His focus is on commemoration or 'remembrance': a term which embraces funerals, memorials, and petitioning or praying for, or even more generally thinking about, the dead. The Reformation historian Peter Marshall has shown how contradictory and muddled were the practices (as opposed to the theological orthodoxies of Rome or Geneva or anyplace in between) around the dead and 'remembrance'.² We should never forget, moreover, the sociologist Michael P. Carroll's constant reminders in his many studies of popular religion of the shifting gaps between practice and the official positions of church authorities. Unfortunately, Rist tends to judge the plays he considers according to their adherence to official or at least authoritative theological positions, at times almost wanting to award points to the works in question based on how they 'respond to' debates and whether they 'favour' traditional religion or its opposite (97). *The White Devil* ends

with a Catholic memorialization; the Duchess of Malfi's views are, unfortunately, Reformed. But theatre is not theology; plays are not sermons or creedal statements. Early modern dramatists were primarily playing with audiences' expectations of genre; 'revenge tragedy' is a theatrical label (and, incidentally, not in itself an early modern term) and certainly not a theological category.

Insofar as plays bring out theological issues — and Rist is correct in pointing to them — they do so without requiring to be judged as correct or incorrect. Indeed, it is the very murkiness of the issues that enhances the theatrical effectiveness of such plays. Is the ghost in *Hamlet* a Protestant 'goblin damned'? A Catholic 'perturbed spirit' in purgatory? And as one of my students (an incipient theatre historian not a theologian) put it, what in hell is the ghost doing beneath the stage? Perhaps the only unambiguous statement we can make about *Hamlet* is that its theatrical power rests on its very ambiguity; the same can be said, to a slightly lesser extent, about the other plays that fit the revenge tragedy genre.³

Despite an unfortunate level of rigidity, Rist's book raises some fascinating issues. He points helpfully to the theatre's exploitation of post-Reformation anxieties about the dead. He insists that there are serious theological issues in play in a theatrical tour de force like *The Revenger's Tragedy*. He provides a useful corrective to those who see it as mere sensationalist entertainment — although three recent productions at the Red Bull in New York (2007); the Royal Exchange, Manchester (2008); and the National Theatre, London (also 2008), certainly showed how theatrically opportunistic the play can be, with a level of ferocious farce just as powerful in its own way as the magnificent melodramatic tragedy of the two Webster plays. Like *Hamlet* itself, all three works transcend the genre label of 'revenge tragedy'. Rist is also right to point out that, from beliefs in local charms and spells or in fairies right through to theatre itself, the old 'traditional' magical world which Thomas Cromwell and his gang of intellectuals and thugs thought they were destroying for ever in 1538 continued to permeate English popular culture into the early seventeenth century and beyond.

Finally, I would add that the book suffers from some inconsistent proof-reading, with occasional misplaced modifiers, inconsistent authorial pronouns (I, we, one), and incorrect prepositions (for instance, 'in analogy to' on page 145): all matters, alas, that 'traditional' rather than 'reformed' publishing might have picked up through that now rare role of an in-house proof-reader. We authors need to beware of our own infelicities. Otherwise the book is, as

is typical of Ashgate's varied and innovative offerings, handsomely produced, and deserves to be on many library shelves.

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Notes

- 1 See, for instance, 'Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England', *Renaissance Quarterly* 28.1 (Spring 1975): 38–58.
- 2 See *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 3 For a more nuanced reading of 'remembrance' in *Hamlet*, see Alison A. Chapman's recent essay, 'Ophelia's "Old Lauds": Madness and Hagiography in *Hamlet*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 20 (2007): 111–35.

William W.E. Slights. *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp xii, 205.

William W.E. Slights offers a refreshing entry into the increasingly crowded (but vibrant) field of body criticism in *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare*. Ever since Jonathan Sawday published his important and influential book *The Body Emblazoned* in 1995, many critics have reinforced his assertion that the early modern period witnessed a dramatic, even revolutionary, break from past understandings of the body as the mechanical Cartesian subject was ushered in to displace the perspective that saw the subject as a microcosm of divine creation. Slights prefers the argument promoted by critics such as Andrew Cunningham and Nancy Siraisi who have 'tended to concentrate on continuity and incremental refinements of proto-body science rather than on the overt hostilities and thrilling reversals implicit in the revolutionary model of historical change' (16). Although the early modern period scrutinized and at times modified older systems of knowledge about the body, it did not reject them outright. Slights makes a convincing case for this thesis in chapters organized around a variety of early modern representations of the heart: the graphic heart, the passionate heart, the narrative heart, the villain-