

and both of these with darkness and light” (225). In what feels like a definitive account of the poem’s movement from the darkness of books one and two to light in book three and after, Anderson shows how this transition is also a movement into uncertain knowledge. In Anderson’s account of analogy, Milton’s movement from dark to light is as much about optics as symbolism. According to Anderson, the relational function of analogy in Milton, and in early modern scientific and literary discourse more broadly, “is neutral with respect to content, as the greater materiality of twilight, for example, is not, yet both serve in their own ways to mediate extremes and opposites” (214).

Like one of Milton’s famous epic similes, Anderson’s *Light and Death* is richer and more complex with every re-reading. The impact of either work—a Miltonic simile or Anderson’s book—inheres in content to be sure, but as Anderson shows her readers, impact is a product of form too, and scholars of early modern literature, history, religion or science will value the impact of the thoughtful, indeed formal, complexity of *Light and Death*.

Igor Djordjevic. *King John (Mis)Remembered: The Dunmow Chronicle, the Lord Admiral’s Men, and the Formation of Cultural Memory*. Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015. xi + 204 pp. \$112.00. Review by DANIEL L. KEEGAN, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH (UAE).

Igor Djordjevic has produced a fascinating work of literary and cultural history, one centered around the sort of discovery that “any researcher in the early modern period dreams of, yet seldom finds” (6). In *King John (Mis)Remembered*, Djordjevic recalculates the trajectory of John’s posthumous reputation, especially as it intersects with a shadowy document called “the Dunmow Chronicle” and with the figure of Robin Hood (or, Djordjevic might have more accurately said, with that of Maid Marian). Djordjevic locates this intersection in the hothouse of theatrical and dramatic competition between the Lord Admiral’s and the Lord Chamberlain’s Men at the end of London’s sixteenth century. Djordjevic’s study will be essential reading for anyone interested in the historiographic, theatrical, literary, and

cultural reception of King John. It also provides suggestive tools for thinking about theatrical-cultural influence and inheritance and for rehabilitating neglected plays from the dramatic archive.

Djordjevic's avowed and insistent aim in *King John (Mis)Remembered* is to recalibrate critical and scholarly expectations for plays in the "topical cluster of King John" (6; all quoted emphases original). This recalibration can be usefully distinguished into two levels. First, he seeks to resist the expectations of "postmodern critics who seem unable to conceive any early modern John other than a proto-Protestant tragic hero" (188); he argues that "John ... *never* had a univalent meaning, especially in the Elizabethan period, and more broadly in the early modern period in general" (165). On this level, Djordjevic richly examines the particular engagements of the many texts in the topical cluster with the matter of John. It is this detailed examination that is the major accomplishment of this study. Second, and somewhat more problematically, Djordjevic seeks to beat back the political and interpretive desires of these "postmodern critics." We will return to what I see as the problems of this line of argument in conclusion.

In order to defuse the "postmodern" desires of critics for a political and religious John, Djordjevic turns his attention to the dialogues between different writers in the John cluster, from the middle ages to the Civil War. If, as Djordjevic writes, some of the texts in the cluster might rightfully be accused of "baroque entanglements" (142), the reception history that he tracks here might well be accused of the same. Djordjevic does a remarkable job of tracing these entanglements in detail: I sketch the main arc here.

Chapter One, "Reclaiming John from the Monks," establishes the "remarkable consistency" among the Tudor chroniclers "in their portrayal of the major events of [John's] life and reign" (14). Moving away from the "devastating" (13) portrayals by Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, "[s]ixteenth-century English chroniclers, in some cases due to a reforming zeal, but even more thanks to their period's developing critical approach to historical sources, did much to excavate a historically nuanced yet ambivalent portrait of John and his reign" (14). These portraits were, however, by no means univocally Protestant: although John Foxe with his "clear Protestant agenda" (18) "insists on an almost monochromatically positive view of John

as a victim of treacherous barons and perfidious churchmen” (19), most of the sixteenth-century chroniclers present him “as a much maligned, if imperfect, victim of overwhelming circumstances” (20). It was, however, his “conflict with the pope” that was represented as “the signal event of the reign and an exemplum teaching the most important political lesson” (20).

This exemplarity cannot hold in the face of Shakespearean political realism. Chapter Two, “Ground Zero: Peele, Shakespeare, and the Birth of the Topical Cluster,” “serve[s] as a descriptive introduction to the first works [George Peele’s *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (c. 1589–90, printed 1591) and Shakespeare’s *King John* (c. 1595–96)] that bring King John out of the mists of time ... to a popular audience” (22). These plays begin “the process of *de-exemplification* and *de-mystification* of John’s character that will be picked up and amplified by the [later] contributions to the cluster” (31). While both plays “essentially stage the basic elements of the propagandistic “thesis” of the Protestant apologetic approach to John’s reign” (24), these plays, and especially Shakespeare’s (through, according to Djordjevic, Shakespeare’s characteristic “unblinkered” (35) political realism), begin a process of unsettling this Protestant exemplarity.

It is at this point that things get really interesting. John suddenly becomes less a political or religious figure than an *erotic* one. The vector for this transformation is John Stow’s 1580 *Chronicles of England* in which Stow reproduces an episode from the *Chronicle of Dunmow* in which it is said that one of the major events of John’s reign, the baronial rebellion, was motivated by his lust for “Mawde called the Faire, daughter to Robert Fitz Water,” one of those rebellious barons (qtd. Djordjevic 43). This calumnious “*alternate history*” (47), which as Djordjevic argues was likely influenced by FitzWalter himself (48), was then picked up and adapted by such of Stow’s readers “as Michael Drayton and Anthony Munday [who] sought to capitalize both on its originality and its novelty” (47). Drayton converts “Mawde called the Faire” into the titular heroine of his 1594 long poem *Matilda*, which seeks to establish Mawde/Matilda as “a suitably *English* exemplar of female virtue and chastity” (57). According to Djordjevic, this adaptation “skirt[s] the political and religious thornbushes of John’s reign entirely, by reducing the whole civil war to an erotic melodrama

about a king who fell prey to lust and repented in the end" (57). Following Stow and Dunmow, Anthony Munday also "recast[s] ... a national uprising against royal power as predicated on John's lust, thereby reducing the *national* to a *familial* crime, and transmuting the *political* conflict into an *erotic* one" (75). The plays in which he does so—*The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* (1598) and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington* (1598)—also have the distinction of being "the first known dramas to stage King John and Robin Hood together" (61) and "the first [plays] to identify Maid Marian with Matilda FitzWalter" (76). From them John emerges "decisively *de-mystified* but now *re-exemplified* forever as a king who was a slave to extreme passions" (94).

John's reception by the Lord Admiral's Men is not entirely bad news for his character. Chapter Five, "The Sexy Side of History and the Specter of Bastardy: *Look About You*" examines how in this anonymous play (printed in 1600), John is once again staged in proximity to an eroticized politics; this time, however, it is not John's eroticized politics but those of his father Henry II that are staged, especially in terms of the competition that erupts between Henry's "estranged wife and ... the late object of his infatuation, the fair Rosamond" (102). Although John has been demystified by Shakespeare and Peele and reviled by Drayton and Munday, it is precisely "thanks to the essential ambivalence of [these] portrayals in the 1590s" that "John has enough elasticity" to emerge as the most complex among a collection of "ridig[ly]" defined characters (114).

Even so, the "long *shadow*" (165) of the libelous Dunmow Chronicle continues to extend itself in the cultural memory. Not everyone is taken in: Chapter Six, "Historical Poesy Strikes Back," examines two writers who sought to redress the literary rise of the FitzWalters and the moral fall of John. John Speed, in his *History of Great Britaine* (1611), feels "compelled to set the record straight regarding a number of historical fictions ... that had emerged over the two decades that preceded the first printing of his work" (118), especially by reevaluating FitzWalter. Richard Niccols, "editor and author of ten new tragedies added to the 1610 edition of *A Mirrour for Magistrates*" (118), rewrites John as the "undeserving victim of a vicious conspiracy between the malicious pope, the duplicitous French, his treacherous nobles, and

a fearful, ignorant, and inconstant commonalty that willfully gives up its freedom" (124). In this narrative, John "accepts no blame for any of his actions as king" (125); instead, Niccols invents a new but not influential "*alternate history*" in which "John is truly a king more sinned against than sinning" (126).

Chapter Seven, "Dunmow *Redivivus*: Vallans, Daniel, and Davenport," examines three attempts to square Dunmow with responsible historiography. Two historiographical attempts fail; one artistic attempt succeeds. "Vallans"—Djordjevic's name of "convenience" (132) for the unknown author of a 1615 text concerning the "famous history of the noble Fitzwalter" (132)—produces new archival sources, apparently from his own research, but is unable to "provide narrative coherence and to link the events [of Dunmow] to actual dates" (134). Samuel Daniel, who in his *Collection of the History of England* (1618) is able to "inoculate[] the story [of Dunmow] against its inherently sensationalist and melodramatic overtones" (137), nonetheless cannot help but fall victim to the "most egregious and hysterical charges leveled at John" by medieval monks (138). It is, however, Robert Davenport, the author of "the last Renaissance history play focusing on King John" (139), who provides a sort of hero for *King John (Mis) Remembered*; Davenport splices Dunmow into "the spine of the mainstream chronicle tradition" (150) and, thereby, "creat[es] what will stand as the last and most creative work in the topical cluster" (150).

I leave it to the reader to attend to the complexity of Davenport's effort (and Djordjevic's sensitive reading of this effort) to tie together "all the loose strings and attempts to reconcile hitherto conflicting narratives" (152). At this point, we can say that "what began as a few scattered medieval pieces of gossip ... became a coherent story revealing King John's irrational and homicidal grudge against an entire family because he had been rejected sexually by a woman" (144). In this story, "the truth was apparently not half as interesting on stage as the lie Dunmow had passed down through the ages" (146). Chapter Eight follows the "Long Shadow of Dunmow" "that falls across the generations" (165). Although John's reputation after Davenport was still by no means univocal, Dunmow's "umbra now starts to envelop an entire culture's memory of King John" (167) so that, of all the English kings who had "their peccadillos adapted for the stage ... John has

the dubious honor of being the only one whose reputation as a salacious creep was perhaps totally undeserved" (188). This reputation, moreover, began well before the habitual dating which "misplace[d] the turning point of John's relapse [into the disdain brought to bear by the monks] in the nineteenth century" (9).

Djordjevic's accomplishment of research is undeniable. Some points of presentation and argument may be critiqued. For a work determined to, among other things, reintroduce neglected texts into scholarly and critical discourse, more might have been done to ease the reception of these works. One character, Matilda Bruse, is mentioned (80) several pages before she is discussed in any detail (84–89); this is in a play (and indeed a paragraph) that involves *another* character named Matilda—Matilda FitzWalter/Maid Marian. Elsewhere, we are told that Robin Hood utters "an ambiguous riddle promising to be Richard [the Lionheart]'s bedmate, which not only reminds the audience of Robin's introduction as Richard's bedfellow but also establishes another intertextual link with Rosalind's riddling promises to her various suitors in *As You Like It*" (112–13): we are never told what this "riddling promise" is. The discussion, at times, gets tangled in the "baroque entanglements" of the plots it discusses.

We should return to the question of Robin Hood. As you will have noticed, I have only just mentioned him in my discussion of Djordjevic's argument. This despite the claim, enunciated early on, that John is transformed into our popular "caricature of political ineptitude, avarice, and boundless ambition" (8) because "his path intersected with a beloved figure of legend, the perennial swashbuckling darling of Hollywood: Robin Hood" (9). On the evidence of *King John (Mis) Remembered* it would be far more accurate, as I suggested above, to say that John's misfortunes began at the moment that he met Matilda FitzWalter who, in Munday's hands, would be identified with Maid Marian, making "a lasting imprint on the "greenwood saga" (76). In Munday's plays, Djordjevic admits, Robin's character "is probably the least interesting of all" (78) and in *Look About You*, the other "Robin Hood" play discussed, "Robin is unambiguously cast as a minor character" (101). Robin, moreover, has minimal bearing on Djordjevic's main argument. If this character was designed by the Lord Admiral's Men to "match and answer the popularity of the Bastard" in Peele's and

Shakespeare's plays (100–01), it seems like a bad job was done of it.

Robin Hood's prominence in Djordjevic's rhetoric, if not his argument, is tied to another problematical level of the book's discourse: Djordjevic's desire to castigate "postmodern critics" for their political and subversive desires. While he is evidently correct, on the basis of his own careful analysis, to criticize, for example, authors such as Stephen Knight who seek in Munday's plays a subversive Robin Hood—these plays, Djordjevic demonstrates, "are unambiguously *John* plays" (89)—he does so in the service of a model of politics and of political drama that is never clearly elucidated. Although I applaud Djordjevic's emphasis on the intra-topical cluster dynamics, it is at the same time surely no longer necessary to imagine "tenuous links between a Bankside playwright and a stormy scene in a chamber at Whitehall" (8) or a "direct causal link between the political goings-on at Westminster and the repertory of a professional acting company" (139) to find politics in a play. Although such imaginations are, as I take them, ones that Djordjevic attributes to his critical opponents, his own parameters for political drama could be more clearly drawn. How is it, for example, that "reducing the whole [baronial] civil war to an erotic melodrama" (57) can be interpreted as an *a*political gesture? Why might not such "reduction" be precisely political?

One more point on the framing of Djordjevic's argument: he intriguingly relies "on the lexicon of twentieth- and twenty-first-century film studios and cinema-going audiences (*prequel, sequel, reboot*)" in order to characterize the relationships between the different texts, and especially dramas, in the textual cluster. Although he notes that such "intertextual and allusive dynamics appear to have shaped early modern drama's topical clusters" (23 n.9), a more theorized account of these dynamics in early modernity would have been welcome. This is less a criticism than it is a note on the suggestiveness of Djordjevic's approach.

I have been obliged to leave out many of the intriguing interpretations that Djordjevic provides of the various entanglements of these texts: to note only one, his discussion of the abortive genealogy of the Bastard in *Look About You* is particularly exciting. One can only hope for more books like this.