

This work reconsiders and disrupts the notion of the isolated female writer and instead establishes new circles of literary and epistolary production and consumption with women as the central agents. In many instances, we see alternate communities of female intellectuals created, or we see that female writers were often viewed as peers and essential communicants in more familiar and often male-dominated circles. This collection is an indispensable and learned enterprise that forces readers to reconsider women's mobility in traversing both physical and culturally sanctioned boundaries.

Ian McAdam. *Magic and Masculinity in Early Modern English Drama*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009. v + 466 pp. \$60. Review by GRACE TIFFANY, WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY.

Ambitiously, Ian McAdam surveys over half a century's worth of selected plays by seven major authors to advance his thesis regarding the changing significance of magic and magicians to the early modern English intellect. This book's eight chapters deal significantly with Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare (treated in five chapters), Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Milton, discussing these authors' relation to each other as well as to Renaissance humanism, alchemical and scientific theories, early-modern ideas about black and white magic, and the influence and legacy of the Protestant Reformation.

McAdam's complicated thesis is grounded in the puzzling but undeniable fact that, though English Protestant Reformers decried Catholicism as a religion of magical hocus-pocus and preached skepticism about many alleged manifestations of the miraculous in modern life, many Reformers showed profound interest in magic, demons, exorcism, and witchcraft. Some Puritans even practiced exorcism. Many early modern English plays displayed a like concern with the powers and dangers attendant on human involvement with the spirit world through the pseudo-science of alchemy or other ways of spirit-trafficking. So far, so good. Had McAdam been content to explore various plays' or even various playwrights' distinct treatments of magic without tying each author to his own master narrative, his

book would have made for easier and more informative reading. He sows confusion, however, by insisting that a “Protestant” crisis of masculinity is being worked out in various ways in the plays through characters’ engagement with feminizing witchcraft. McAdam finds that Protestant “inwardness” precipitated a horror at what a modern age would call the irrational subconscious, and that magicians in Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline plays and masques were seen struggling between “narcissistic self-containment” (through masculine control of nature’s secrets) and “sensual indulgence” (in a feminized and eroticized world of magic). From McAdam’s modern, skeptical perspective, belief in and struggle with the magic world of spirits was an early-modern way of coming to terms with the powerful subconscious energies of the human mind. Thus the Protestantism that informs the plays is less a form of Christianity than a way-station on the road to enlightened secularism.

There is more than one problem with this thesis, but one of the most obvious is that we cannot assume all these playwrights’ Protestantism. Indeed, especially recently, it has been argued that Shakespeare’s plays show not a Protestant but a Catholic sensibility. (McAdam partly acknowledges this in his discussion of *The Tempest*, but gives the idea short shrift.) McAdam’s interesting discussion of “emasculating” magic in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* assumes Jonson’s Protestant bias without mentioning the playwright’s (admittedly short-lived) conversion to Catholicism. (I happen to agree with McAdam that, as Jonas Barish showed long ago, Jonson’s views were in many ways like those of the Protestant moralizers, but certainly his professed religious sympathies are a complicating factor that should be mentioned in any discussion of the “Protestantism” of his plays.) Another problem is McAdam’s only partial historical contextualization of these dramatic explorations of magic. We might, for example, agree with him that Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* suggests that “magic as practiced by men, while linked with masculine aggression, is also in some ways paradoxically a compensation for the failure of masculine assertiveness and of what [Lyndal] Roper terms ‘phallic confidence.’” But without a demonstration that Greene’s characters’ use of magic to try to control women is somehow different than the actions of a medieval character who dabbles in the occult with the same aim—as

does John the carpenter in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*—we cannot be convinced that Greene's stagemagic is a Protestant innovation. The public stage was new, certainly. But was the idea?

As though aware that his theories are somewhat speculative, McAdam consistently frames them with tentative language: "The misogyny implicit in Mercutio's anti-Petrarchan stance *may* ... align itself with ... Renaissance magical aspiration," and one of Mercutio's lines "*may* recall ... the historical association of sodomy and sorcery" (163, my emphasis). *Comus's* Lady's "magical, virginal potency can be related to"—not "is related to"—the renewed English interest in the mid-seventeenth century" in hermetic philosophy (360), and another scholar's argument about *Othello* "*seems to me* to confuse a ... patriarchal social structure with a possibly more benign Oedipal structure" (227, my emphasis). McAdam's imposition of Freudian terms on Renaissance masques and plays, as in the just quoted sentence, sorts with his view that modern psychoanalytical theory is the valid science to be set against the religious "ideology" that hampers the plays' authors. A psychoanalytical understanding of human self-formation is the truth toward which Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Milton were all groping. Their magicians were early-modern therapists: "[a]n astrologer is like a skilled psychiatrist, plumbing the depths of the patient's unconscious and discovering connections to his or her broader social and physical context" (186). In *Othello*, "the movement from Venice to Cyprus" is "symbolically, a voyage into the unconscious" (209). McAdam finds Renaissance plays progressive insofar as they show "an increasingly metaphorical presentation of witchcraft—that is, an emphasis on psychological rather than theological meaning" (229). In statements such as these, McAdam seems unaware that psychoanalytical theory and practice, far from being universally recognized as a coherent science, is mired in charges of anti-scientific methods and occultism which are often levied by psychoanalytical practitioners themselves (against other psychoanalytical practitioners). McAdam is also unaware of the strength of his own anti-religious bias, which is evident in details like his casual use of the word "sodomasochistic" to describe the "Calvinist theology" of "self-sacrifice" (222) and his observation that Anthony Elson's discussion of *The Tempest* would be more helpful were it not "undermined by a critically reductive piety" (352).

Charmingly, McAdam admits that his judgment of Elson may “seem uncharitable,” since there is much “relevant material” in discussions that “take pains to reconstruct the religious context of Shakespeare’s cultural moment” (352). And, to his credit, McAdam himself gently criticizes discussions of Shakespeare and his contemporaries that project on them an anachronistic secularism. Crucially, however, he is himself guilty of such an anachronism in his insistence that Shakespeare’s great theme is “the sanctification of nature” (232, 338, 340). That phrase could mean several things, some of them credible, but to McAdam it means Shakespeare’s celebration of processes by which human nature can be purified without supernatural assistance. To many scholars, this Shakespeare will not sound like the author of *King Lear* or *The Tempest*.

Still, lest I “seem uncharitable,” let me quickly affirm that McAdam’s secular bias, though it limits what he can see in the plays, is not cripplingly “critically reductive.” McAdam’s primary and secondary research is thorough and everywhere evident in the book. He not only makes available to readers a fascinating array of selections from early modern texts discussing magic but draws into his discussion the comments on Renaissance magic of a wide variety of contemporary scholars, including many who hold viewpoints opposed to his. Further, his discussion of this broad range of plays discloses valid and interesting connections between early-modern magic and modern psychoanalysis. Finally, while his categorizations of the plays’ “ideologies” as Protestant ones are not always convincing, McAdam’s explorations cast real light on the vexed relation between staged magic and early-modern performances of masculinity.

Jonathan Gil Harris. *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*. Philadelphia. University of Pennsylvania Press. 2009. 4+278. \$59.95. Review by BOYD M. BERRY, VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY.

Overall, one could say that Jonathan Gil Harris’ *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* mounts a well-connected argument against linear and single readings and the distinctions and discriminations they have produced—that is, against what he takes to be dangerous nonsense.