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.

Whereas English departments once trained to find the single best reading of a text, the word-play in Harris' title points in a multitude of other ways or directions. The argument proceeds in three movements: "Supercessions," "Explosions," and "Conjunctions"—that is, away from divisions and rankings finally toward "touching." Highly abstracted ideas in almost every sentence (including the titles of the three movements above), the book attends to matters in ways which often depart from conventional discourse. If humans disappear from the prose and abstractions only come to have agency, the third step—focused on touching—materializes abstractions, to adopt the lingo of this present, concluding the course of the whole. This is certainly not a textbook for beginning studies in English or literature, which is a pity, but my point raises indirectly the question whether there is any reason to think of a future for English departments.

Harris is focused upon visions of supersession that appear at first to be progressive—past to future—but which generate their own contradictions. Notice first of all that no humans are represented in his prose as acting; visions create change, which then create nominals (words that function as nouns but are transformations of verbs). The nominal "supersession" is only one such construct which it is difficult to de-transform. Who or what supersedes whom or what? When? How?

In the first of the three movements of his argument Harris turns, not unexpectedly given his concerns, to writing of Christian typology, which at its heart certainly involves supersessions. Many Christians employed typological language in and about "the time of Shakespeare," creating what are generally considered or treated as non-literary texts. His first example, presumably non-literary, is drawn from the poetry of George Herbert, commonly thought of as a literary text. Harris reminds us that typological writing can veil anti-Semitic traces. Christian doctrine sits atop Old Testament writing and supposedly goes beyond it, heading the reader into the untimely future. The chapter on Herbert would make a fine point of departure for the troubled history of the *literary*, though such an excursus is not undertaken.

Harris next takes up an east-west movement in the language of the second Henriad, which on the surface privileges European over Oriental practices that reinforces his point about east-west language

in Herbert's poetry. He focuses here on what he proposes was a self-conscious audience responding to self-conscious players who mimed elements of old fashioned bravado in early representations of over-bearing monarchs. The actors' bodies as well as their language gave the audience cues by moving from ranting to more moderate tones to show their skill in acting self-consciously in modes of both the past and present. (Machiavelli pointed out in passing that Islamic monarchs had a much simpler way to reform the situations of kings than did the king of France.) How one, at this distance, can determine to what extent an utterance or audience is or is not self-conscious is not addressed.

The second of the three movements of his argument is titled "Explosions," although he has very little to say about the original, purely dramatological sense of the word—hissing or driving (by making noise) a bad actor off stage—its sole sense in the time of Shakespeare. Explosions here create ruptures, breakouts, disruptions, and, in a way, discoveries.

The first part of this section focuses on John Stowe's *Survey of London*, especially his concern for Old Jewry. Reading his city as antiquarian, Stowe notes the uncovering of stones in the recent rebuilding of Ludgate—stones with Hebrew inscriptions. Harris takes seriously the charges of Richard Grafton, who ceased to be printer to the crown with the death of Lady Jane and who interested himself, like his fellow "commonwealths men," in antiquities. Grafton can here illumine Harris' over-arching resistance to Protestant visions, thus Stowe resisted the glorious triumph of Protestantism in London via his *Survey*. Stones from the Old Jewry did not form the conventional old version cancelled by the new Christian types according to Protestant visions of the New Jerusalem. Rather, they served to explode or "explose" conventional apocalyptic dreaming.

Chapter Four focuses on "the smell of gunpowder in *Macbeth*" and thus carries on a movement focused on seemingly more concrete matters. To be sure, we cannot recapture the smell of *Macbeth* in Shakespeare's time, but that has not been a problem so far. The smoke produced from an explosion of gunpowder was commonly likened to devilish matters, and so the thunder and lightning with which the play opens might perhaps have warned the audience of impending trouble.

The speculative mode of Harris's argument stands out when Harris writes concerning one Ralph Fitch and his report of his journey toward Aleppo that "it is tempting to speculate that Shakespeare, writing an exchange between characters who supposedly frequent 'the pit of Acheron' remembered the Tiger's [Fitch's ship's] journey to Aleppo precisely because" Fitch's narrative "led inexorably to the stink of sulfur" (137). This speculation, with its nested possibilities, is a temptation that Harris basically cannot resist.

As Harris' argument progressively and studiously, yet partially, materializes itself, his third and final section takes up "Conjunctions," first in considering how Hélène Cixous and Margaret Cavendish touch (an example of untimely conjunction) and then in considering the history of the fated handkerchief in *Othello*. Partly because he works close to the texts of the first pair, or perhaps because the reader gradually has seen the mode of his argument, or perhaps because both texts are unusual in their time, Cavendish's writing makes a kind of unexpected and rich sense growing out of that penultimate chapter. Both chafe "against singularity" (149)—that is, a sense of singular identity, by turning "texts" into "texxts." Their writings allow past, present, and future anachronistically to conjoin and transform each other; insofar as they produce palimpsests, they provide a way of looking (or touching) which does not write over past, present, or supposed future rankings. They are preposterous, shaking up past, present, and future in non-apocalyptic ways.

Completing the third movement, in Chapter Six, Harris proposes to depart from convention and take as his task to work out "another understanding of temporality" (169) via consideration of the fated handkerchief and what have been considered some of the play's problems, pursuing the napkin "in proximity to [Michel] Serres' … crumpled handkerchief," to uncover "the crumpled time of Shakespeare's play" (170). The play challenges "conventional understandings of agency, and hence to tragedy" (177). Given the several readings which various characters give of the napkin, it is clearly a palimpsest, "a writing surface upon which multiple signs and narratives are inscribed and erased" (179). The play requires not "a willing suspension of disbelief" but rather a "willingness to abide with contradictions" (183) so that it may be seen as preposterous. When he refers to the

handkerchief, he points to some joining or touching of disparates: "The task of thinking across and beyond the temporal partitions that subtly inform notions of racial and religious identity is thus a timely one," he closes (18).

Lest it seem this tripartite argument enacts a Hegelian synthesis, Harris appends "Dis-Orientations" as Coda: "Untimely matter … challenges the fantasy of the self-identical moment or period, of the sovereign moment-state divided from its temporal neighbors. It materializes instead a temporality which is not one" (189). Summing up, Harris brings his argument directly to our time. His argument helps "confound the fantasy that insists on treating the past as synonyms partitioned from the west. And in our war-addled time, such untimely dis-orientations couldn't be timelier" (194).

Judith Haber. *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xi + 212 pp. $90.00. Review by ELISA OH, HOWARD UNIVERSITY.

Departing from New Historicist emphasis on early modern plays' social and political context, Judith Haber's study raises the provocative question of how sexuality and sexual difference affect formal aesthetics. She posits that the plays of Christopher Marlowe, John Webster, Thomas Middleton, John Ford, and Margaret Cavendish represent varying degrees of non-phallic sexuality. That is, Haber claims that these plays feature "pointless play" (1) or infinite foreplay and the absence of a one-directional trajectory. By drawing attention to these plays' alternatives to traditional forms that parallel the consummated and reproductive heterosexual act, Haber suggests "that narrative 'history' necessarily partakes of the same culturally created connections to patriarchal, heteroerotic masculinity as all narratives, and needs to be radically reconceived if it is really to represent other positions" (2). Therefore, Haber asserts that attention to the "subversive power of the aesthetic" (4) is a critical necessity, because looking beyond the historical embeddedness of a text allows us to perceive the dominant discourse's pretense of being the only norm, though in actuality it is phallic and patriarchal. She argues that analyzing the aesthetic, long