

RECENZJE

Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik
Faculty of Philology
Jagiellonian University

*RELIGION AND DRAMA IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND:
THE PERFORMANCE OF RELIGION ON THE RENAISSANCE
STAGE*, ED. JANE HWANG DEGENHARDT AND ELIZABETH
WILLIAMSON, ALDERSHOT 2011, p. 281

POPULAR THEATRE AND RELIGIOUS CEREMONY IN TIMES
OF SHAKESPEARE: *RELIGION AND DRAMA IN EARLY
MODERN ENGLAND: THE PERFORMANCE OF RELIGION
ON THE RENAISSANCE STAGE*

To a reader even slightly versed in the history of European religions early modern period presents itself as an era of social and political turmoil propelled by religious conflicts. Reformation hovers over the cultural history of the era, and yet for quite a long time religion itself has been shunned in the materialistically-oriented studies of Tudor and Stuart times. It is only after the famous publication of Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicist works on Purgatory and Eucharist controversies that critical work on the early modern English culture has started to perceive and address religion in its own terms: not in a presentist fashion, as a mi-

nor facet of political and social life, but as an all-encompassing habit of thought that the post-Enlightenment Western mind finds difficult to understand. Religion permeating every aspect of daily life and providing steady patterns of thought, aesthetic endeavour and social behaviour is an idea that becomes almost incomprehensible to the children of Locke, Darwin and Marx. For this reason the link between religion and early modern drama remained unnoticed or was handled ideologically: in the bulk of the pre-2000's studies on Tudor and Stuart theatre Protestantism was treated as the dominant religion already after Elizabeth's ascension to the throne and Catholicism became an underground denomination of a few desperate radicals, whereas Judaism and Islam were either altogether absent from the discussion of the field or were treated as marginal exotica. Degenhardt and Williamson's contribution is motivated by a different impulse and evidences a surge of interest into the inter-relationships between different religions and the Tudor and Stuart drama. It is a rich collection that adds new strength to the religious turn within the cultural studies of the period by providing a detailed and nuanced reading of the influence of religion on dramatic practice both in public and private theatres.

The collection is divided into three parts. Part I "Theatrical Materiality and Religious Effects" concerns the olfactory and aural qualities of both theatrical performance and popular worship, the visual importance of "Jewish" characterization on the stage, and the significance of clothing in dramatic representations of apostasy. Part II "Intersections of Popular Theatre and Religious Culture" discusses the issues of popular worship and belief in the plays of the time, but also the hugely disregarded influence of theatre over the spectacle of worship within and outside theatrical performance. Part III "Beyond Allusion and Ideology" addresses more theoretical concerns, such as the theological context of Shakespeare's works as well as the discussion of doubt and unbelief. Even though the division lines between the essays are slightly misleading, as they all touch upon a variety of issues that escape the categorization provided by the editors, the articles fulfill the basic goal set for the volume which aims to reach beyond the surface analysis of religious allusions in the plays and

plumb the unfathomable depths of the interplay between religious and theatrical signifiers.

The collection examines the material aspects of dramatic performance and religious ceremony in order to 'complicate our understanding of how references to contemporary religion function within the theatre by attending to the representational gaps created by theatrical materiality and performance'. It opens up new interpretive venues and does justice to the complex functioning of early modern religious life both on stage and beyond it. *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England* creates a historical narrative about a world that is different from ours, addressing the radical alterity of the past, without leaving us behind. Be cautioned, however: it is not a read for the faint-hearted novices in the realm of the dramatic.

ABSTRACT

POPULAR THEATRE AND RELIGIOUS CEREMONY IN TIMES OF SHAKESPEARE: *RELIGION AND DRAMA IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND: THE PERFORMANCE OF RELIGION ON THE RENAISSANCE STAGE*

This review aims to present the book *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage* (Aldershot 2011) as a comprehensive guide to the topic of religious influences in the early modern English theatre. Numerous aspects of both religious and theatrical dramas are analysed in the book in order to present the reader with an opportunity to see the culture of the early modern as it really was: with religion as the core component.

Keywords:

religion, drama, performance, religious ceremony, theatricality, Shakespeare, religious turn in early modern studies