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James, Anne. Poets, Players, and Preachers: Remembering the Gunpowder Plot in Seventeenth-Century England

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discipline was a "vital concern" (38) for Herbert and Milton, and valuable for understanding their poetry.

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James, Anne.
Poets, Players, and Preachers: Remembering the Gunpowder Plot in Seventeenth-Century England.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. Pp. 412 + 8 ill. ISBN 978-1-4426-4937-8 (hardcover) $85.

The University of Toronto Press has in its wisdom published over four hundred densely-printed pages (250 of prose, 100 of notes, and 50 of bibliography) about something that never happened: the explosion of the English Houses of Parliament, plotted for November 5, 1605, a date memorialized in Britain as Guy Fawkes Day. Most non-events do not leave much of a paper trail, but this one, as Anne James catalogues, yielded a remarkable harvest of pamphlets, liturgies, sermons, plays, histories, polemics, romances, epigrams, satires, cartoons, and epics, both in its immediate aftermath and generations after. The author demonstrates that the meaning of the anchoring event in these texts altered with the desires and needs of their authors and audiences, as with political and religious tides, such that "conflicting narratives quickly became weapons in confessional warfare" (5), among other battles. The nebulous quality of the evidence for the event itself only allowed more leeway to those appropriating the Gunpowder Plot to their interests. By working with a selection of otherwise dispersed and often neglected texts in her deeply and widely informed work—one oriented at the nexus of reception studies and New Historicism—James persuasively and thoroughly shows the intricate interplay between literature and public events of this kind.

King James, for instance, promptly instituted memorial liturgies and sermons—the latter delivered at court each Tuesday—in order to ensure that the plot was remembered as part of a larger Protestant providentialist history, one that endorsed his family's succession to the Tudor throne and his unpopular unification of Scotland and England (chapter 2). While the king was

not slow to propagandize the plot, however, his (sometimes reluctant) subjects were equally eager participants in the revision of official narratives. Anne James orients such texts not only to the originating plot, but to their own historical sub-plots: that is, the events and circumstances unfolding around these texts throughout the century (up to about 1688). The resulting study is remarkably thick with detail about far more than the fifth of November.

While chapter 2 concentrates on official narrative pamphlets as well as liturgies and sermons commemorating the plot and celebrating deliverance from it, chapter 3 turns to plays alluding to the plot in its aftermath (Day's *Isle of Gulls*, Jonson's *Volpone* and *Catiline*, and Dekker's *Whore of Babylon*), as well as the derivative but novel genre of the satirical ghost poem dating from the time of the Popish Plot. The next two chapters turn to both verse and prose inspired by the event of the plot, and especially to changing versions of epic: from a host of manuscript and printed Anglo-Latin courtly panegyrics (and their offshoots) proffering James, then Charles, praise mixed with canny criticism (in chapter 4), to a line of romance-inflected English texts that were more populist, overtly anti-monarchical (as well as anti-Catholic), and sometimes puritanical or apocalyptic in orientation (in chapter 5). Despite the author's declared focus in both chapters on epic, the branching of chapter 4 into epigram, satire, and pamphlets at times threatens this generic grounding, even as it ensures that no manifestation of plot literature, however minor, escapes at least brief treatment here. The insightful treatment of *Paradise Lost* in chapter 5 is a welcome respite from the earlier flurry of less canonical and perhaps less consequential material.

The final chapter revisits what James treats as a new genre devised in response to the plot, the anniversary sermon—which perhaps provides the best evidence for her potentially most controversial contention: that plot narratives iteratively transformed their genres in significant ways. In some ways, this is an uncontroversial claim, since any instance of a phenomenon, being necessarily different from its precedents, alters the phenomenon overall. But James shows how such transformations arose at the behest not only of writers but of readers (or listeners, with sermons) through their responses to and uptake of new and diverse modes and manners of interpretation and disputation. This aspect of her argument thus contributes to genre studies as well as reception studies.

James modestly figures her masterful, nuanced, and at times almost overwhelming treatment of Gunpowder Plot texts as a mere "case study" (8) in order to suggest that her method might be reproduced by other scholars

in relation to other public events remembered and dismembered through a network of often incompatible narratives. Indeed, James's demonstration of the protean flexibility of the Gunpowder Plot as a premise for later seventeenth-century anti-terrorist narratives of all stripes—anti-Catholic, -puritan, -Laudian, -Spanish, -Irish; anti-monarchist and *anti*-anti-monarchist—offers a salutary warning against our own tendency to narrate our age as "post-9/11": always-already inflected by a supposedly, yet debatably, singular event and the endless episodes of the War on Terror since framed and reframed by it.

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Kahn, Didier, ed.
La Messe Alchimique attribuée à Melchior de Sibiu.
Textes de la Renaissance 197, Série Alchmie 1. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015. Pp. 149. ISBN 978-2-8124-3274-3 (paperback) €29.

This small volume by Didier Kahn is the first in a new series by Classiques Garnier dedicated to alchemy that is also coincidentally directed by the author. *La Messe alchimique* has long been considered by most scholars in the field as an object of curiosity resisting clear genre categorization and not exactly worthy of serious scholarly consideration—like many other alchemical texts dating from the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries.

With this offering, Kahn's goal is twofold. First, he clearly aims at giving legitimacy to a unique text that has long been relegated to the margins of the textual canon: thus, the impressive editorial apparatus displayed for a text of only five pages in its Latin version, and four pages in its French translation. Second, Kahn explicitly states that he wishes to use *La Messe alchimique* as a pretext to formulate a historical synthesis of the relationship between alchemy and religion based on the study of textual sources taken from both religious and alchemical literatures from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century. With the very first words of his edition, Kahn rightfully warns his readers about the problematic relationship between alchemy and religion, and the too often automatic categorization of texts linked to the alchemical discipline as heresy. Kahn suggests that *La Messe alchimique*, in spite of the potentially controversial