

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Griffin, Andrew. Untimely Deaths in Renaissance Drama: Biography, History, Catastrophe

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Volume 43, numéro 1, hiver 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070200ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34120>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Jaster, M. (2020). Compte rendu de [Griffin, Andrew. Untimely Deaths in Renaissance Drama: Biography, History, Catastrophe]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(1), 240-242.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34120>

also contemporary Europe. Four centuries later, France yet again struggles to cope with an increasing sentiment of religious and ethnic antagonism and social exclusion within its borders. Perhaps narratives such as these told by the Huguenot women offer a lesson about the values of civic liberty and freedom of religious practices as essential elements of cultural diversity and socio-political stability.

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Griffin, Andrew.

Untimely Deaths in Renaissance Drama: Biography, History, Catastrophe.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. Pp. ix, 197. ISBN 978-1-4875-0348-2 (hardcover) \$60.

It is an axiom of this stimulating and provocative book that in the decades before history was recognized as a scholarly endeavour, it was variously practised by poets, lawyers, record-keepers, playwrights, and others. For Andrew Griffin, English Renaissance drama provided the contemporary audience with a site wherein claims about historical change (caused by the various interpreters of history) were treated in a frequently conflicting manner. Griffin finds that it is in the narrative abruptions—or disruptions—in several plays that we can discover the strategies through which early modern culture made narrative sense of biography and fatality.

In his Introduction, Griffin defines an “untimely death” to be a death “which arrives before it should” according to available forms of narrative explanation. In contrast, a “timely” death occurs when it “seems to follow naturally from the pattern of life that came before it” (5). Scholars today must heed the forms of historical writing if we are to understand the historiographical *mentalité* of the early modern period. For example, he opines that a comparison of the deaths of Shakespeare’s Richard II and Henry V illustrates the relationship among the conflicted ideas that might characterize the early modern historical imagination. Richard II’s death is foretold by John of Gaunt whose early remark “More are men’s ends marked than their lives before” (2.1.1) captures the essence of Richard’s life: his poetic comments on himself and on kingship

memorialize his failures in life which render his sad death a timely one. Henry V's death, on the other hand, is untimely, a fact ostensibly borne out by the presence of his coffin onstage in the opening scene of *Henry VI, Part I*. (Griffin reminds us that there's no stage direction to move the coffin from the stage, thus linking Henry V's successful reign with the tragedy that was Henry VI's.)

In his second chapter, "*Richard II*, Problem Tragedy," Griffin argues that at the end of *Richard II*, when Bolingbroke's efforts to legitimize his own reign by "weeping after [Richard's] *untimely* bier," (5.6.51–52; italics mine), Shakespeare draws attention to the knotty problem of how one can remove an obstacle to the throne, and also grieve for him. In Griffin's reading of Shakespeare's play, the reader will enjoy a kaleidoscopic treatment of historiography of the late sixteenth century, even as we may, like Griffin, decide that for all its brilliance and complexity, *Richard II* is problematic history *and* tragedy.

Griffin's chapter on London's city comedies suggests that as Thomas Middleton's career speaks explicitly to the variety of historical thought in the period, his writings provide an apt crucible for Griffin to further test his theories. Griffin seizes on Middleton's role as city chronologer to demonstrate how significant he is to our understanding of Renaissance thought. He celebrates Middleton as a sophisticated antiquarian, poet, historian, and creator of dramatic sites that illustrate a variety of historical views of London. It follows that unlike previous studies of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Griffin will place the play within the wider context of this period's culture of historical writing, and its treatment of untimely death(s) will be comic because the corpses are still living at the play's end.

Griffin's treatment of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* allows him to query the presence of English universal theories of history as staged for the sixteenth-century audience. Particularly interesting in this chapter is a homage to John Stow whom Griffin finds to be "at the cutting edge" (93) of antiquarian study as he strives to defend the truth of Britain's Trojan roots. Griffin's close examination of Stow's historiographical methods is enacted by his minute scrutiny of Stow's works up to his 1580 *Chronicles* which included universal historians as well as mythographical and classical sources. This delightful investigation allows Griffin to offer a convincing reading of Marlowe's underappreciated play in which its cognominal character's death is effectively arbitrated by historical forms of imagining the past.

In his study of another undervalued play, Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*, Griffin finds that in its depiction of England's recent long war in the Netherlands, the play demonstrates a comingling of biographical (to the English audience) history and conventional tragedy (although the "honest man" in the play's subtitle actually survives the machinations of the "atheist," his uncle). Because the play stages a version of England's military engagement in the Low Countries, it plainly epitomizes history writing. In addition, Griffin finds *The Atheist's Tragedy* to be singular among militaristic dramas of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries because it addresses untimely deaths whenever fatalities occur.

In addition to a reading of *The Magnetic Lady*, Griffin's final chapter situates Ben Jonson as central to a study of untimely deaths because his own death occurred years after the publication of his *Works*, rendering Jonson's final years as "bathetic overliving."

English Renaissance scholars will find Andrew Griffin's book an agreeable re-visioning of some familiar plays, while it brings attention to some neglected plays. It's also an intriguing approach to late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

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Haglund, Timothy.

Rabelais's Contempt of Fortune: Pantagruelism, Politics, and Philosophy.

Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019. Pp. 165. ISBN 978-1-4985-7545-4 (hardcover) US\$90.

In the prologue to *Gargantua*, François Rabelais (1494–1553) says his writing will be about private matters, politics, and religion, as Timothy Haglund argues in chapter 1 of *Rabelais's Contempt of Fortune: Pantagruelism, Politics, and Philosophy* (1, see 2–12). In *Tiers Livre*, Rabelais relates the political state to private and religious spheres, a focus for Haglund, particularly to the marriage problem of Panurge (3). The first translator of Rabelais into English, Sir Thomas Urquhart (1611–60), saw Panurge's problem as one of fortune and not of marriage, thereby drawing on the ancient tradition on fortune as Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) did. Cuckoldry is the motif through which Rabelais