

contributors have reset the terms for Marlowe studies in terms of performance and book history, but the implicit disagreements across the volume about who Marlowe was and what he wrote perhaps also point the way forward for the future of Marlowe scholarship.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2020.203

*Last Acts: The Art of Dying on the Early Modern Stage.* Maggie Vinter.  
New York: Fordham University Press, 2019. viii + 214 pp. \$28.

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*Last Acts* provides an abundance of evidence for the entanglement of secular and religious arts of dying and for drama's engagement with early modern debates about what it means to achieve "a good death." Vinter argues that drama consistently shows us political subjects playing an active role in their own deaths, contradicting the more modern idea that dying entails a loss of agency. Like many scholars of martyrology, she maintains that early modern attitudes toward death did not compartmentalize weakness and strength, action and inaction. Dying is work, she asserts, and sometimes that work looks like passivity, even somnolence, but it always involves choice.

Within this broader framework, Vinter's arguments are both rigorously historical, tracking the struggles within and controversy over various *artes moriendi* (arts of dying) manuals, and densely theoretical, engaging most deeply with the work of Giorgio Agamben and Robert Esposito. She brings all of these materials to bear on new readings of canonical plays, making a compelling case that dramatists were aware of the *artes moriendi* as a genre and were carefully mining it for material. Although her syntax is most often directed at the minutiae that separate her claims from those of other scholars, such as Michael Neill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, it occasionally crystallizes into exceptionally lucid formulations. In her discussion of allusions to Cain and Abel in *Richard II*, for instance, she writes that "death, even from the start, was always mimetic" (116).

In fact, mimesis is perhaps the central term linking her chapters, which are elegantly arranged in a kind of daisy chain. *Doctor Faustus*, she proposes, represents a broader meditation on imitation (both the imitation of Christ and the imitation carried out by professional actors). Her next chapter moves on to *Edward II*; it focuses mainly on the political crisis provoked by the king's abdication, but also engages thoughtfully with the representation of sovereign death. Her reading of *Richard II* brings together her earlier discussion of *imitatio Christi* with the analysis of political action from the Marlowe chapter, arguing that Richard's Christlike posturing "illuminates a range of early modern political institutions that struggle to incorporate individuals into larger communities" (88). Finally, she turns to *Volpone* for a deeper dive into Esposito and Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the unpayable debt at the center of Christian models of *communitas*.

Under the umbrella of this broader structure, each chapter makes several subtle turns that are occasionally hard to track. The clearest and most pointed of these readings, from my perspective, is her meditation on political theology and political imagination in *Edward II*, which also contains some of her most exciting insights about performance. In response to the puzzle of what to do with an absence of information about early modern staging, she offers an intriguing solution—two possible stagings of the hearse supposedly containing Edward’s dead body, including a detailed explanation of the implications of each one. Does the stage object hide the body (the actor feigning death), or should the actor lie on top, as in a tomb effigy? Although performance is, for the most part, not the focus of Vinter’s book, this struck me as a model worth pursuing, and I would have liked to see her treatment of theatrical materiality more fully integrated into the book as a whole.

In keeping with the compendious approach that characterizes the rest of the book, Vinter eschews the typical coda containing a single point of contemporary relevance. Instead, her epilogue tackles a multitude of cultural artifacts: *The Duchess of Malfi*, Elizabeth Jocelin’s 1624 *Mother’s Legacie*, *Clarissa*, a David Bowie video, the famous Droeshout engraving of John Donne in his winding sheet, and photos by Hannah Wilke and David Wojnarowicz. Although Vinter finds several compelling parallels—especially between the visual pieces—on the whole this large assortment of texts does a disservice to her individual readings. It does a particular disservice to the Black Lives Matter movement by including a mere three sentences on activists’ ongoing attempts to give meaning to unbearably brutal deaths.

On the whole, however, this book is deeply researched and skillfully put together. It offers a valuable contribution to the scholarship on death and dying in post-Reformation England.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2020.204

*Unknowing Fanaticism: Reformation Literatures of Self-Annihilation.* Ross Lerner. New York: Fordham University Press, 2019. 232 pp. \$30.

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The title of Ross Lerner’s book captures its intertwined imperatives: we must “unknow” postsecular notions of fanaticism in order to appreciate the “unknowing” or ambiguous quality of fanaticism in Reformation literature. Rejecting the binary of fanatical religion and rational politics, Lerner aims to show how early modern poets “participate in or resist Reformation polemics about religious fanaticism” (2). By distinguishing his key term from *enthusiasm* (the Platonic notion of possession by a God), Lerner is able to analyze fanaticism as a child of the Reformation central to the birth of modern politics, rooted in the thought of Thomas Müntzer and the 1520s German Peasants Revolt.