

sense of the way that the Order for the Burial of the Dead failed to create necessary conditions for mourning and consolation. Gibbons argues that Spenser ultimately sees poetry as a communal and “para-liturgical” way to engage in communal forms of mourning and consolation that were no longer provided by liturgy itself (120). Chapter 3 suggests that Southwell’s poetry covertly undermines the attitudes toward predestination and salvation inherent in the Order for the Burial of the Dead that provided the foundation for the rhetoric of exclusion. Like Spenser, Southwell’s poetry provides an alternative to the now proscribed acts of mourning, but Southwell subversively points readers back to the affective practices of mourning and intercessory prayer rather than substituting for them.

The third section takes up the rhetoric of accommodation in Donne, Herbert, and Crashaw. Chapter 4 suggests that Donne imagines poetry as a way to create a mystical communion that can bridge the divide between Catholic and Reformed communities; his ambiguities and semantic excess function as a *via negativa* with the potential to lead to each reader’s “communal participation in the divine,” parallel or similar to the work of the Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper (201). In chapter 5, Gibbons identifies in Herbert’s poetry a desire to maintain clear boundaries between the British church and other groups, defined especially by adherence to the Book of Common Prayer. However, Herbert also offers a form of pastoral accommodation for the sake of spiritual community within those boundaries. Chapter 6 describes the great optimism of Crashaw’s poetry, “a hope for poetic reunification of Christian worship,” though that hope would be ultimately overshadowed by the social and religious forces at work in the Civil Wars (249).

Over the course of the book, Gibbons intervenes in numerous important debates: the relationship between Protestant and Catholic poetics, the role of mysticism in early modern religion, the effects of liturgy on early modern culture, and the cultural responses to ongoing social and religious fractures. *Conflicts of Devotion* should be a welcome addition to the religious turn in Renaissance studies, for it offers a generous yet critical examination of the spiritual and literary goals that linked liturgy, poetics, and community from Cranmer to Crashaw.

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*Edmund Spenser in Context*. Andrew Escobedo, ed.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xx + 384 pp. \$120.

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Edmund Spenser has been well served by the age of handbooks. *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (1990), now almost thirty years old, is still an excellent resource for the poet and the literary culture of the period; there is a fine *Cambridge Companion*

(2001), edited by Andrew Hadfield, and more recently, Richard McCabe's *Oxford Handbook* (2010). Now Andrew Escobedo has edited a volume of thirty-seven short essays with the title *Spenser in Context*. Its claim to shelf space in such good company rests of course on the individual essays, assembled from a distinguished collection of scholars and critics, but also on their distinctive genre. Each runs to about ten pages, longer than the typical encyclopedia entry, shorter than the full-dress, journal- or chapter-length contributions to the *Oxford Handbook*. Most have a little more of the essay about them, an improvisatory, sometimes idiosyncratic attempt at a big question. When the form works best, its economy provokes the authors to use ingenious, sometimes polemical examples—the necessary generalizations are made swiftly, and the cases, which cannot hope to be comprehensive, surprise. The result in aggregate is unusually lively reading.

A good example is Gordon Teskey's essay on "Renaissance Literary Theory." He offers a useful summary of the classical and Italian backgrounds, but the middle of the essay is a polemical promotion of the "Letter to Raleigh," which he takes to be second only to Sidney's *Defense* as a specimen of English theorizing. The comparisons between the two (especially between Sidney's "mimetic enhancement" and Spenser's allegory) are illuminating. Another example, of a different kind, is Andrew Zurcher's treatment of "Publication and the Print Marketplace." Information about the practicalities of bookmaking and trading is organized around a meditation on the poet's anxieties about the fragility of material texts. John Curran's account of "Poetical History" frames its treatment of *The Faerie Queene* with an account of the period modes that the poem does not engage: historical *ethopoeia*, bardic antiquarianism, and (with the exception of a few discrete episodes) genealogy or chronology.

The collection also benefits from attention to topics that earlier volumes omit. There are separate essays devoted to Plato and Platonism and to Aristotle and the virtues; the editor's philosophical interests are felt not only in his own essay (on literary character), but throughout. Virgil, Ovid, Petrarch, and Chaucer all get treatments of their own, and a useful essay by Mary Ellen Lamb focuses on Spenser's relationship to the Sidney circle. Some of the most idiosyncratic contributions cluster near the end: Susannah Brietz Monta on "Saints, Legends, and Calendars," a topic important in itself and as background for the poem's numerologies (a candidate topic for some future handbook), as well as Ayesha Ramachandran on cosmography and Julian Yates on ideas of ecology.

As a whole, the volume does not have a polemic to prosecute. Its organization—the essays above fall into sections on "Spenser's Environment" (including his schooling, patronage, and time in Ireland), "Genre and Craft" (epic, pastoral, romance, the Bible, rhetoric, satire, allegory), and "Influences and Analogues" (other authors, as well as philosophy, theology, and other topics)—is small-*c* catholic. Still there may be something to be said about the way the collection wears its title. Fifteen years ago, the rubric of context would have implied an emphasis on political and social history. That has changed. Joseph North's recent history of literary studies (*Literary*

*Criticism: A Concise Political History* [2017]) raises important questions about how the contextualist paradigm in scholarship has overshadowed criticism as a potentially radical enterprise. *Spenser in Context* is inevitably, as a handbook, tipped toward scholarship—one would not wish it otherwise—but the varieties of criticism for which it has a place are many. Its idea of context includes not only politics but also ideas and other authors. Throughout, there is something close to a shared assumption that Spenser's imagination is not so much determined by these contexts, as by putting them to use; or at least, dialectically entangled in ways that allow the author a healthy share of creative agency. The title *Spenser's Resources* might have been just as accurate. The short, pointed form of these essays has allowed many of the volume's authors their own imaginative freedom. This gives their work a collective sense of *enargeia*, and makes it especially useful, as resource and example, for the ongoing work of Spenserian criticism.

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*The Oxford Handbook of the Age of Shakespeare*. R. Malcolm Smuts, ed.  
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This latest production from Oxford's valuable handbook series proclaims that it is a collection written primarily by historians to help literature scholars (principally undergraduates) connect recent research on English history to Shakespeare's life, drama, and poetry. Smuts argues in his introduction that history can enrich our understanding of literature not only by providing the data to "contextualise" texts but also, more importantly, by "unearthing features embedded within well-known texts that have gone unrecognized because readers have overlooked ways in which authors incorporated material from their environment into the fabric of their writing" (1).

With this brief in mind, the collection of forty-one essays is divided into five overlapping sections: politics; intellectual culture and political thought; religious culture; social beliefs and practices; and architecture, visual culture, and music. These cover a wide range of subjects; some, perhaps, more inclined toward providing "contextual background," others engaging with issues such as modes of writing practice, performative rituals that loom large in specific plays, and the microworlds of Shakespeare's London: Blackfriars and St. Paul's precinct. Thus there are analyses of major political figures (Burghley by Norman Jones; Robert Cecil by Pauline Croft; the Earl of Essex by Paul Hammer); political and intellectual cultures (including military culture, republicanism, and the public sphere); religious belief and practices; and social practices and problems, from Krista Kesselring and Paul Griffiths on crime to Vanessa Harding on family and household. The section of visual and aural culture ranges from civic art and architecture and gardens to music. Smuts notes that the collection is not comprehensive