Daisy Black. *Play Time: Gender, Anti-Semitism and Temporality in Medieval Biblical Drama*.
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Daisy Black's *Play Time: Gender, Anti-Semitism and Temporality in Medieval Biblical Drama*
explores the marginalized, oppressed, and often dismissed voices in medieval biblical
drama. Black deftly unravels the complex discourses at play in early theater's gendered and
anti-Semitic episodes by considering moments of conflict from the perspective of individual
characters' subjective experiences of time. Black's approach is wide-ranging and
critically adventurous; she makes important interventions in the study of medieval theater
and demonstrates the importance of early biblical drama for scholars of medieval literature
and culture.

In her introduction, Black urges the reader to confront the possibilities of sophisticated lay
engagement with complex theological concepts, such as addressing disparities between human
and divine experiences of time. She does this primarily through careful analysis of the practi-
calities of staging medieval biblical drama. For example, as Black outlines, the actor playing
God in *The Fall of the Angels*, the first play of the York Corpus Christi pageants, must first
create and manage the pageant's playing space on the streets of York before delivering his
opening lines on divine, "eternal time" at the moment of creation (7). In chapter 1, Black inter-
rogates narratives of linear time that saw Christianity as superseding Judaism and Hebrew
scripture using Christian typologies; Black argues for the importance of Joseph's doubt and
questions the efficacy of his conversion, analyzing moments of conflict between Mary and
Joseph in the N-Town manuscript's Marian pageants. Black explores the characters' differing
understandings of their present moment(s), and argues that the plays disrupt the idea of a
smooth transition from the old to the new. In chapter 2, she focuses on the York and
Chester cycle Flood plays, arguing for the disruptive role of female remembering in an
episode that might otherwise appear to represent a clean break between past and future.
Black argues that the York Noah's wife's memory of the drowned world and the presence of
the Chester Gossips function as feminine counternarratives to Noah's discourse of superses-
sionary linearity. In chapter 3, Black brings early theater into dialogue with "'queer' models
of time" (116) and sees Mak and Gyll's sheep-baby plot in the Towneley *Second Shepherds'
Play* as a challenge to what Lee Edelman has called the "reproductive futurism" of heteronor-
mative relationships (118). Black pays close attention to aspects of staging, such as disguise,
impersonation, and parody, to argue that Mak and Gyll's plot "scrambles the predictability
of the Nativity narrative in a moment of queer play" (144). For chapter 4, Michel Serres's
"'crumpled handkerchief' model of folded, topological time" (29) is productively applied to
what Black describes as the "temporal origami" of the Towneley *Herod the Great* pageant
(155). Black explores Herod's violence and the acts of resistance on the part of the mothers
at the massacre of the Innocents, viewing this episode as occupying " the flexible space
between Jewish and Christian theologies" (154). Powerfully stressing the importance of
restoring distance between temporally distinct moments that might be momentarily bought
together by folding the handkerchief, Black argues that the mothers of the Innocents are
"left in the uncomfortable troughs folded between Passover and Crucifixion" (175). The
book's conclusion returns to a rereading of the York *Fall of the Angels* to consider the play as
offering the spectator a "God's-eye view" of time (186).

Play Time's strengths lie in its attentiveness to the practical aspects of medieval theater and its
consideration of many different models of temporal subjectivity. Black analyzes the potential
emotional worlds of the characters themselves and the ways in which their dialogue, stage
presence, and use of props, dress, and iconography might have provoked multiple possible
reactions in a medieval audience. Bringing different temporal models into dialogue with

one another allows Black to argue that multiple subjective experiences of time coexisted simultaneously for medieval actors, characters, and spectators. For example, Black considers Kathleen Davis's reading of Christ's nativity as a "shattering" of time from the perspective of Joseph in the N-Town manuscript (44). Black argues that Joseph's doubts and conversion process complicate Mary's supersessionary narrative arc by creating "playful knots in the gospels' timeline" (66). Jonathan Gil Harris's "explosive" time (92) and Carolyn Dinshaw's "collapsed" time (96) are newly applied to the strategies of drama to tease out the many and varied ways in which acts of remembrance, conflict, and even silence can destabilize biblical beginnings for actors and audiences. Different individual perspectives are explored in turn in a productive departure from the often-invoked idea of medieval civic drama as playing a key role in building communal consensus.

Adopting her own methodological version of Serres's crumpled handkerchief model, Black writes across modern and medieval examples throughout the book. The result is that the conflicts of medieval drama speak with enduring relevance to modern issues without the dialogue between the two eclipsing important temporal distances and differences. In the closing pages of *Play Time*, Black addresses a pressing issue facing the scholarship of early theater: the myth or fantasy of a supersessionary relationship between medieval drama and the early modern playhouses. *Play Time* is a refreshing push back against the kind of periodization that sees medieval drama as the less sophisticated precursor to early modern theatrical practice. Black calls for research in the spirit of early drama itself, which, as she demonstrates, can "defend the right of each individual to experience, resist, complicate and challenge time in their own fashion" (201) even against official theological or historical narratives.

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If a Guinness Book record for most prolific scholar existed, then Jeremy Black of Exeter University might well earn that prize. He is the author of over ninety books and hundreds of scholarly articles and book reviews, most of which explore eighteenth-century Britain, warfare, and diplomacy. His weekly newsletter reveals him also to be a bon vivant, picaresque traveler, and humorist.

Black's latest book, *To Lose an Empire: British Strategy and Foreign Policy, 1758–90*, offers a vital corrective to so-called social scientific studies on that subject by highlighting the vital roles of leadership and chance. Black explains that to understand that or any other swath of history it is essential to emphasize "individuals, their ideas and their experiences, and that these take precedence over alleged structural determinants" (xiii). To do so reveals the complexity, paradox, and even seeming contradictions of what leaders did, why they did so, and the results. Black is making "an argument about the indeterminacy of the past, and therefore of the present and future" (ix).

Specifically, Black seeks "to bridge the Seven Years' War and the War of American Independence" (ix). In the first war, Britain's leaders, policies, and strategies led to a sweeping victory that greatly expanded the empire. Yet, a different postwar set of leaders, policies, and strategies provoked thirteen American colonies to a revolt that resulted in a humiliating defeat as the empire's most dynamic colonies won independence as the United States. One irony was