# Eamon Duffy. A People's Tragedy: Studies in Reformation

## London: Bloomsbury, 2020. Pp. 272. $28.00 (cloth).

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(Received 23 March 2023; accepted 19 February 2024)

In this collection of learned and highly readable essays, Eamon Duffy displays the range and depth of his expertise and illuminates some fascinating examples—some more well known, some relatively overlooked—of the complex relationship between past and present. From medieval abbeys to Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* trilogy, via the complexities of nineteenth-century pilgrimage in the Anglo-Catholic context, Duffy spans material central to Catholic and Protestant history from before the Reformation to the present day. As a whole, the collection enriches our understanding not only of the past, but of the myriad ways in which past and present inform each other, including, amongst other issues, the extent to which key nineteenth-century historians were deeply informed by their own presents, and the ways in which Tudor fiction and history writing sit in (according to Duffy) an uneasy relationship in the twenty-first century. If ever proof was needed that the past helps us understand the present, and the present informs our understanding of the past, this collection fulfils this need.

Part 1, "Studies in the Reformation," stretches chronologically from medieval cathedral pilgrimages to the autobiographical writings of Richard Baxter in the seventeenth century. Duffy opens by revealing the intensity of devotion at sites of medieval pilgrimages, as well as the efforts of cathedral authorities to boost the reputation of their own shrines and to educate visitors. He notes both the "tawdry, exploitative and bogus" elements, and the vitality and persistence of these devotions in late medieval Christianity (30). His chapter on the experience of dissolution at Ely Cathedral reminds us that while shrines could be destroyed, the constructive growth and cultivation of a Protestant institution was not a done deal, and marked in complicated ways by the change or continuity of personnel on the ground. Then, the chapter which gives the book its title, "the People's Tragedy," explores the 1569 rebellion, reiterating Krista Kesselring's argument about the significance of popular sympathy in the north for rebellion, and illuminating the local context in the city of Durham in particular. Duffy observes that at the time of the revolt, known reformers who had initiated previous conflict over religious issues were targeted by the rebels. Continuing the focus on Catholicism in Elizabeth's reign, Duffy reopens the history of the English College at Douai, highlighting the new ground it broke in its methods of education, and shedding light on English clerical intellectuals and the wider reach of their thinking, including figures such as Thomas Stapleton. The Catholic engagement with biblical scholarship and the significance of the Douai-Rheims bible is addressed. This provides a useful bridge to Duffy's next subject—the place of the King James Bible in the English imagination. Duffy sheds light on how this large-scale project was achieved, while also reminding us that it was not the most significant bible for many early modern Protestants. He considers that, although twentieth and twenty-first century commentators may rate the bible in terms of its literary flair and place in the story of the English language, this outcome was quite far removed from what drove its creators, concerned as they were to produce a version as truthful as possible to the Hebrew and Greek originals. The final chapter of the first section offers an examination of a key figure in Protestant histories of the English reformation, Richard Baxter, and sheds light on the distinctiveness and significance of his autobiographical writings.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2024.12 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In part 2, "Writing About the Reformation," Duffy first tracks the changing ways in which Martin Luther has been viewed in the Catholic tradition, from early vituperation to the ecumenical efforts of the early twenty-first century, while also exploring the more trenchant views of the then Cardinal Ratzinger in the 1980s. The next two chapters, on J. A. Froude and A. G. Dickens, are brilliant historiographical essays, suggesting just how much some historians of the Reformation were impacted by their own life experiences, while allowing room for complexity in approach. These are witty and erudite chapters, which prompt historians writing today to consider their own positionality, too. Duffy then returns to pilgrimage, this time taking the story into the present day, through a fascinating case study of sites in and around Walsingham. He explores the ways in which plans and projects for these sites became both markers of identity and difference in the context of Catholic/Anglo-Catholic/Anglican divisions in the nineteenth century, and how their meaning was in part remade again in the ecumenical context of the twentieth century, and in the context of global religion, with the presence and piety of Syro-Malibar and Filipino Catholics, and of Hindu pilgrims at Walsingham sites. The final chapter provides an examination of the changing and contested reputations of two key early Tudor figures—Thomas Cromwell and Thomas More, with particular reference to public understandings of their actions and motivations. While acknowledging the anachronisms of Robert Bolt's More in *A Man For All Seasons*—an individual standing up for individual conscience—Duffy outlines what he sees as the problems of Hilary Mantel's redrawing of who More was, acknowledging the huge impact of Mantel's work. He takes issue with Mantel's argument that the gullibility/credulousness of readers should not be assumed—to Mantel's view that readers can be critical and know they are reading fiction, Duffy suggests that the risk of misunderstanding or misinterpretation remains.

This is an absorbing and engaging collection of essays written with characteristic deftness and readability. For both a general reader and for those with a greater expertise, there is much to learn from these essays and much to ponder. Duffy does not shy away from presenting a clear position, or raising some big questions about what we know about the past, how we know it, and who is involved in shaping our understandings of the past in the present.

doi:10.1017/jbr.2024.12

# Christopher Dyer. Peasants Making History: Living in an English Region 1200–1540

## Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 396. $105.00 (cloth).

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(Received 25 March 2023; accepted 19 February 2024)

Through published work spanning more than four decades, Christopher Dyer has made an unparalleled contribution to the study of the economy and society of the Middle Ages. It is very difficult to think of a significant topic within the field as a whole on which Dyer has not made a seminal intervention somewhere in his six single-authored books and countless occasional papers, articles, and chapters, and he has himself helped to pioneer several whole areas of flourishing research. *Peasants Making History* can be seen as the culmination of two important dimensions of Dyer's wider scholarly achievement. The first is his