Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare’s Festive World examines the relationship between traditional festive pastimes – such as Midsummer pageants, May games, and Whitsuntide celebrations – and Shakespeare’s plays. Beginning with C. L. Barber’s Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy, work on this topic has stressed the political and social meanings of early modern festivity; in contrast, this study seeks to restore a sense of the devotional issues surrounding festivity to our understanding of early modern cultural representations. After establishing the continued religious controversies surrounding festivity expressed in a range of early modern literature, the book argues that Shakespeare is a festive traditionalist who not only acknowledges the relationship between traditional pastimes, stage plays, and religious controversy, but also aligns his own work with festive energies identified with the old religion. Religion and Revelry therefore intervenes in recent controversies over the role of religion in Shakespeare’s theater, as well as the particular place of Catholicism in Shakespeare’s work and world.

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For Paul

But shall we make the welkin dance indeed?
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The series has opened up new worlds in the study of early modern revelry, and forthcoming volumes will no doubt yield new treasures, as well as definitive texts for some of the material I less expertly mine here.

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Note on the text

In direct quotations from early modern books and manuscripts original spelling and italics have been retained, with contractions expanded and orthography (long s to s, j to i, u to v) silently modernized. Capitalization in early modern book titles (though not text) has also been standardized.