The long-standing image of the University of Cambridge in the sixteenth century is of a stoutly Protestant and then Puritan bulwark. We often hear tales of the White Horse Inn as a haven for early evangelicals and then the foundation of that Puritan stronghold Emmanuel College in 1584. This account is often juxtaposed with one of conservative Oxford and crypto-Catholicism. While the history of Oxford has received sober amendment, Ceri Law now delivers the much-needed nuance to our narrative of Cambridge. In many ways, in this relatively short and well-written book Law simply employs shifts in historiography familiar to most scholars for the past twenty years or so, applying these new approaches to the University of Cambridge. The revisionists of the 1980s and 1990s effectively swapped out a story of Protestant triumph with one of Catholic resistance. Starting in the late 1990s, however, those revisionist scholars yielded to a post-revisionism, a move away from neat accounts of damascene conversations (people simply receiving or rejecting “the Reformation”) in favor of narratives which highlight negotiation and adaptation. Here we think of Ethan Shagan’s helpful term “spiritual amphibians” (Shagan, Popular Politics and the English Reformation [2002], 25). Law rises to the task and the result is good fruit. Following the lead of others, she offers a longer process of religious change in Cambridge, one that was always contested, contradictory, and involved the fragile dynamic of institutional and individual senses of identity.

Law begins with a helpful introduction that, in addition to outlining this post-revisionist method, also details the way the university operated, describing the offices of chancellor and vice-chancellor and explaining how the college system functioned. She then offers chapters on Henrician, Edwardian, and Marian Cambridge. Coverage of Elizabethan Cambridge, however, involves three chapters. The first of these three contextualizes the expectation of contemporaries that Elizabeth’s reign could have been as brief as those of her brother and sister and how that sensibility shaped engagements with religious change (for example, simply hiding Catholic ornaments for their possible return). Law is quite right to highlight the difficulty with (perhaps impossibility of) distinguishing Catholic resistance from simple pragmatism. We have in this volume not only a discussion of ideas but also a careful examination of the role of physical space, how certain colleges sold off or hid vestments and tabernacles and the nuanced way chapels were altered. This is the kind of broad use of sources that historians have come to expect.

Law’s book, however, is hardly iconoclastic. She rightly draws on standard treatments of Cambridge: Victor Morgan, and Christopher Brooke’s multivolume History of the University of Cambridge (1988–2004), H. C. Porter’s Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge (2015), Winthrop Still Hudson’s Cambridge Connection and the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559 (1980), and studies of the colleges like John Twigg’s History of the Queen’s College, Cambridge, 1448–1986 (1987) and Christopher Brooke’s History of Gonville and Caius College (1985). She also delivers on expected topics: the mythic White Horse Inn circle and the “Cambridge connection”; the parade of high-profile chancellors like John Fisher, Stephen Gardiner, and William Cecil; the burning of Bucer’s bones; and the re-foundation of Gonville and Caius and the foundation of Emmanuel. She also does not deny a strong Puritan presence in Elizabethan Cambridge or that Oxford outpaced Cambridge in producing men who were later Catholic “seminary priests.” Rather, Law nuances the story by finding that at Cambridge the notable presence of Puritans was accompanied by a significant degree of conservative non-conformity. Likewise, she resists any singular religious identity for such a complicated institution: just as Campion was not Oxford, she writes, Cartwright was not Cambridge. In short, as Law puts it, religious unity and confessional identity was beyond the power of those who sought to control the university from both within and without.
A strength of this volume is the lens of community, a topic that has received a good deal of attention in recent years among early modern historians. This works well in tandem with Law’s focus on adaption and negotiation. Communities, she writes, are both real and imagined and they experience forces that shape them from both within and without. Cambridge, then, was simultaneously one community (as the university) and a gathering of multiple communities (the colleges). And even then, communities could expand beyond geography and involve imagined religious identities like “the Godly” or Catholics. She highlights, too, how the university, with a revolving door of students and fellows, was always in flux, how it was youthful and all male, and how its culture encouraged not only argumentation but argumentativeness. Further, Law tells us how the boundaries of these communities were porous, both among the colleges and between the university and the drivers of national concern. People both within the university and without would implore the chancellor, a nonresidential political figure at court, to intervene when things were not to their liking. Likewise, outside authorities might initiate visitations, as in 1559. The results of such interventions were never straightforward. The communities that welcomed the appointment of Martin Bucer in Edwardian Cambridge likewise exhumed his corpse and burned it during the reign of Mary. Andrew Perne of Peterhouse, who famously preached at the burning, was later a faithful conformist in the reign of Elizabeth, although he was often suspected of crypto-Catholicism by colleagues.

Law shows us a Cambridge in which many also simply “lived through” religious change, arguing that the loudest voices ought not to monopolize our attention. Likewise, we should not be surprised that certain colleges, even at Cambridge, had links to Catholic seminary priests or that many within the university through the reign of Elizabeth found ways to live out a quiet non-conformity. While there were clear signs of Puritanism such as the mass refusal of the fellows of St. John’s to wear the surplice and Walter Mildmay’s foundation of Emmanuel with Laurence Chadderton as the first master, Cambridge also witnessed the attack on Calvinism in the famous sermon of William Barrett in 1595. Law argues that Barrett’s sermon was not an aberration but rather underlines that religious conservatism, even Catholicism, within Cambridge has been underestimated. Law’s work is a welcome entry in the historiography of the English reformation, a solid addition to studies of the way communities engaged religious change in the sixteenth century, and it certainly expands the history of Cambridge more broadly.

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The subject of addiction is a fertile field of philosophical debate because of the problems it poses to ordinary notions of volition and responsibility. A largely unquestioned consensus prevails, however, regarding the concept’s history, as Rebecca Lemon points out in her erudite and engaging new book. According to the standard picture, the modern concept of addiction as a disease characterized by the submergence of the addict’s capacity for choice did not exist until just before 1800, when it was simultaneously invented by Thomas Trotter in Britain and Benjamin Rush in the United States. Before that time, the discourse on habitual drinking was