

Literature in the Age of Celestial Discovery: From Copernicus to Flamsteed.

Judy A. Hayden, ed.

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This collection of essays had its genesis in a panel at the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies conference with the goal of “stimulating further research on this topic” (i). The collection does succeed in this sense, calling attention as it does to a range of less canonical works (poetry, drama, and prose) from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dealing with new ideas about the moon and the heliocentric model of the universe. Like most collections based on conference panels, the essays here are uneven, differing in the depth of their engagement with early modern science and with recent work in the history of science. The volume as a whole does make an important contribution to the study of literature and science in the period in its emphasis on registering the confused, ambivalent, and sometimes surprising reactions of nonspecialists to the new ideas that were emerging. Rather than looking, as scholars often did in the past, for people who “got it right” and embraced new ideas, these essays fruitfully explore the wide range of different imaginative responses to celestial discoveries in the period.

The introduction to the volume usefully sets out the debates and uncertainty surrounding the theories of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo that extended well into the eighteenth century. It outlines two topics that the essays will consider: the ways in which “early modern literary discourse interrogated astronomy and engaged in debate on a number of Copernican theories” (2) on the one hand, and, on the other, discussions of works from the period that present imagined voyages to the moon, especially as they provide opportunities for social and political commentary. These are two quite different topics, and the introduction does not do much to connect them beyond observing that both involved an imaginative approach to questions of “humankind’s place within the context of a changing universe” (15).

In fact, there are only two essays here that deal primarily with a literary response to Copernican theory, while seven of them focus on fictional moon voyages. The first essay by Pietro Daniel Omodeo discusses two very different early Italian responses to Copernicus. Omodeo pays careful attention to generic, philosophical, and religious contexts to provide a convincing account of the similarities and differences between the two works. The other essay on Copernicanism, “An English Renaissance Astronomy Club: Shakespeare, Observation, and the Cosmos,” is by David H. Levy, an astronomer rather than a literary critic, with Judy Hayden. It summarizes a number of arguments that other scholars have made attempting to argue that

Shakespeare was well-versed in various aspects of the new astronomy, some of which are more convincing than others.

The remaining essays trace the representation of imagined voyages to the moon (in the wake of Galileo's account of his telescopic observation of the moon) in a number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works. Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638) and John Wilkins's *The Discoverie of a World in the Moone* (1638) are mentioned in most of them, and the essays provide a wide range of contexts for these two works. David Cressy approaches this "lunar moment" of the 1630s from a religious perspective, illuminating our understanding of early modern attitudes toward the cosmos. Gabrielle Sugar begins with Wilkins and then moves on to argue that several plays, including Ben Jonson's *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* (1641) and *Staple of News* (1631) were part of a tradition of purely comic representations of moon travel. Catherine Gimelli Martin argues that Godwin's work can be recognized as the first work of science fiction while Brycchan Carey suggests that several fictional moon voyages (including Godwin and Wilkins) offer critiques of colonial practices in the New World. Judy Hayden traces "a demonstrated wariness" (161) about the new astronomy in Restoration drama depicting moon voyages. Essays by J. Ereck Jarvis and Daniel Worden work, in different ways, to unify the two disparate strands of the volume. Although both do focus on moon voyage narratives, they read them as commenting on epistemological problems raised by the new astronomy more generally, bringing recent work in the history of science to bear in very productive ways.

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