

Vin Nardizzi, Stephen Guy-Bray, and Will Stockton, eds. *Queer Renaissance Historiography: Backward Gaze*.

Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009. vii + 247 pp. index. illus. \$114.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-7608-0.

Queer Renaissance Historiography aims to find ways to extend queer investigations into early modern English literature, ones not restricted by what the book's editors label the "tyranny of historicism" (especially its supposed

fetishizing of historical accuracy) or limited by their present strategic uses for queer people (1). Nardizzi, Guy-Bray, and Stockton describe the collection's "engagements with Renaissance texts" as "sexual," studies that apprehend Renaissance texts "as both alluring and strange, rather than as objects to be placed in an easily comprehensible narrative of sexual teleology" (4). Indeed, in the series editors' "Preface," Noreen Giffney and Micheal O'Rourke suggest that reading the book is a "sexual" experience that leads to a "momentary" "liberation from discourse" (ix). Be that as it may, the satisfaction I achieved reading the work derived from its essayists' important contributions to understanding how to read Renaissance sex queerly, with (for the most part) eyes focused on historical specifics.

Among issues taken up by the book is the need to forge new historical methodologies for imaging sex or sexual practices, including but not limited to James M. Bromley's call for seeing non-penetrative intimacies as bearing traces of sexual practice in Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*; Stephen Guy-Bray's elaboration of sameness and difference as a way to think sex outside anatomical difference in poems by Andrew Marvell; and Goran Stanivuković's demonstration of "non-sexual intimacies shaped philologically and through the interplay of [Shakespeare's and Marlowe's] literary texts" (46). Other essays, those by Vin Nardizzi (on Shakespeare's second tetralogy), Laurie Shannon (on George Cavendish's *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*), and Will Stockton (on *Paradise Lost*), provide varied models for decentering heterosexuality in Renaissance social and literary texts.

Still others employ historical contextualizations to produce intriguing readings of queer locations in or through early texts: Julie Crawford claims the recognized erotics of secretarial service in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England for women's relationships; Jennifer Drouin recovers early uses of the word *lesbian* to reveal public female erotic spaces around the mythological figure of Diana (although her easy assertions about the overlap between modern and early modern lesbians only dubiously delineate similarities between historical periods); and Graham Hammill places the same-sex erotics of Katherine Philips's poetry into the political discourse of the mid-seventeenth century. Last but not least, in what is indeed the lead essay in the book, Will Fisher shows how the Renaissance was, from its conceptual inception in the nineteenth century, linked to emerging understandings of homosexuality.

Far from providing sexual release from historical discourse, these essays clarify the contours of the queer Renaissance. Each author's signal achievement is to think more self-consciously about the role of queer reading in the apperception of historiography than perhaps some earlier critics. Thus, the essays help reveal the effects queer-identified readings have upon Renaissance texts and vice versa, effects achieved outside overly-narrow concepts of historical difference.

Somewhat predictably, however, the metacritical apparatus of the anthology inscribes the presentist place of queer reading in absolute difference from history-of-sexuality studies in ways not always supported by the essays themselves (or a larger critical discourse). Although Madhavi Menon argues usefully in the afterword that

obsession with chronology, dates, and simple historical difference may transform queer scholars into positivist historians, she and the authors of the introduction construct a simplistic binary relationship between queer theorizing and its supposedly identitarian others.

The introduction to *Queer Renaissance Historiography* fashions a rather solipsistic history that begins with Jonathan Goldberg's *Queering the Renaissance* (1994) and then discusses three fine books by some of its own contributors, Guy-Bray, Hammill, and Menon — books that, despite their importance in other contexts, are never cited by contributors to this collection other than their own authors. Yet the introduction excludes detailed consideration of early work in Renaissance historiography by Alan Bray, Gregory W. Bredbeck, Bruce Smith, and Valerie Traub. Possibly more identitarian than queer theory demands, these groundbreaking scholars nevertheless helped unsettle then-current identities and histories of difference in ways that surely still qualify as queer. Indeed, that some of their works return (like the repressed) to the footnotes of individual essays in *Queer Renaissance Historiography* suggests that the absolute distinction between identitarian and non-identitarian configurations of queer Renaissance scholarship may itself be a type of heteronormalizing difference — especially when the figures excluded are predominantly gay-identified men and lesbians. At least one sexual liberation the collection imagines comes, then, at great cost, perhaps too great for the gay- and lesbian-identified queers who, silenced, slip from view.

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