

DOMINIC JANES. *Visions of Queer Martyrdom from John Henry Newman to Derek Jarman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pp. x + 257. \$50.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2016.84

Early on in his ambitious study, *Visions of Queer Martyrdom from John Henry Newman to Derek Jarman*, Dominic Janes notes that only in the 1860s did “pervert”—originally used by anti-Catholics to describe conversion to Rome—begin to connote *sexual* perversion. Thus, religion was “becoming a site for the construction of concepts of sexual deviance” (3–4). Exploring religion as a “queer” cultural formation in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain, Janes develops a provocative defense of “ecclesiastical camp,” arguing for a new history of what came to be known as “gay liberation” that repositions the later movement as a self-consciously secular alternative to the “ecclesiastical closet” (205–6).

Janes’s excavation of religion as a queer space is well illustrated in his exploration of William Benet’s sacramental theology (1804–1886). Placing the ritualist Bennett’s emphasis on Christ’s visible presence in the Mass alongside his aesthetic apprehension of Christ as a perfect man exposes, Janes argues, the ways that taking the sacrament could be reenvisioned as a form of physical intimacy, in which Christ’s perfect body “enter[ed] the lips of the kneeling devotee” (38–39). Exploring the “erotic affect” of ecclesiastical objects and images, Janes remains cognizant of the risks of finding “sexual meanings ... [in] religious materials that are not straightforwardly explicit” (95–96), holding this reading in tension with a recognition that many men were drawn to these practices precisely because they represented an idealized or purified desire (50).

That tension is further developed in the chapter on Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo, 1860–1913), whose creative play with religion and queer desire Janes reads as an “attempt to overcome the deeply entrenched boundaries that centuries of Christian tradition had set up between moral purity and *openly* queer self-expression” (125–26). These devotions, like those of other figures in Janes’s study, blurred the boundaries between the devout and the ironic, and between pleasure and critique (101), to “create a sort of alternative, one might almost say queer, cultural formation in which perverse religiosity was promoted by unusual sex constraints and vice versa” (104). This fetishized version of Catholicism functioned in part as Protestant fantasy, but it was also partially realized within the Anglican Church. The ecclesiastical closet, Janes suggests, was a place of constrained desire in which a queer sexual radicalism was embedded within a conservative and patriarchal religiosity; the continuing emphasis on the sinfulness of sex produced “a determined insistence on the purifactory effect of queer ecclesiastical privations” (176). Occupied by the dutiful and penitent, “respectably queer but not publicly homosexual” (174), the ecclesiastical closet institutionalized a glorification of aestheticized suffering that was also “productive of queer forms of masochistic pleasure” (140).

Janes identifies the late nineteenth century as a key moment in this history. His chapter on “Saint Oscar” delineates Wilde’s equivocal relationship to religion, in which he “flirted with the strange pleasures of the ecclesiastical closet” but also reacted against it (140–42). Wilde’s transformation from queer martyr to queer saint involved a recognition of the limitations of that particular closet, and a recognition that the future of what came to be called “gay liberation” lay elsewhere (146). We see that future, for example, in the work of the reformer Edward Carpenter, who broke with Anglicanism to develop “a spiritual framework that was compatible with the open display of erotic same-sex desire” (149). Carpenter’s embrace of sexuality allowed him to reframe queer martyrdom as “both an act of heroism and as a site of masochistic pleasure” (149–50), and he increasingly turned toward science and socialism, both of which were for Carpenter—though Janes does not particularly stress this—spiritualized and eroticized (151).

Janes’s discussion of Wilde and Carpenter is also an opportunity for him to articulate his broader sense of the relationship of this “queer martyrdom” to “gay liberation” in the

second half of the twentieth century. Because gay liberation was, Janes argues, premised on a break with and rejection of precisely these aspects of queer religious culture, they have remained invisible to historians of sexuality (5):

Queer cultural creativity after Wilde continued to have a relationship to religion, but that relationship was to become increasingly attenuated—so much so that the intensity of Catholicism as a one-time site of queer innovation vanished from the awareness of that large proportion of early homosexual rights activists who increasingly saw Christianity as inherently conservative. (145)

The result was to split gay liberation from its own complicated cultural history, “weaken[ing] the aesthetic resources of gay men by reducing complex artistic traditions to camp masquerades” while allowing the church to deny its own queer past (183–84).

The book’s final chapter, on Derek Jarman’s ambivalent response to queer martyrdom, allows Janes to open a larger critique of the secularizing assumptions embedded in gay liberation and its successors. The religious queerness of men like J. H. Newman was redefined as a form of sexual repression in the work of self-consciously modernist figures such as Lytton Strachey in his 1918 *Eminent Victorians* (1–2); Janes sees Jarman—for example in his 1989 version of Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*—as excavating this buried tradition (196, 206). In contrast to those activists who reject ecclesiastical camp because of its incompatibility with secular political frameworks, Janes looks to “the history of religious visual culture and performance as a source of queer potential” (205–6). While one might argue with a number of Janes’s points—his decision to omit the exploration of female same-sex desire, for example, is unfortunate, and the defense of that decision relatively undeveloped (12–13)—his argument about the need to rethink the history of religion and sexuality is crucial. Simply dismissing the forms of modern sexual subjectivity as they emerged within the ecclesiastical closet as “repressed” reinscribes not only an impoverished understanding of desire and sexual subjectivity, but also a simplistic and teleological history of movement from religious repression to secular liberation.

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STEPHEN L. KECK. *British Burma in the New Century, 1895–1918*. Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015. Pp. x + 230. \$79.99 (cloth).
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Stephen Keck, professor of history at Emirates Diplomatic Academy in the United Arab Emirates, is an old hand at colonial Burma (today Myanmar) and has traveled both the country and the main archives related to his period of specialization in Britain, Singapore, and the country itself. The extent of his research is revealed in *British Burma in the New Century, 1895–1918*, one of the best books on the country this year and one of the only books on this particular topic in Burma’s history. Many of Burma’s colonial scholars tend to focus on the interwar era or, to a lesser extent, on the period prior to the British conquest of Mandalay in the 1880s. Historians have often been drawn to the attractive story of anticolonialism, armed resistance, and full-fledged nationalism from the 1920s, and their own accounts often begin there. As a result, colonial Burma’s history is just as often misunderstood as a story only of nationalism and resistance and not one that was also rich with engagement, learning (by British and Burmese alike), and change. Perhaps this is why the period between the conquest and