

*Queer Milton*. David L. Orvis, ed.

Early Modern Cultural Studies 1500-1700. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. xxxiv + 314 pp. \$119.99.

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As Erin Murphy explains, a queer Milton studies never materialized alongside queer theory in the 1990s. How fitting, then, that the scholarly marriage of Milton and queer studies would be belated, especially considering Milton's preoccupation with his own belatedness. Whether it is the twenty-three-year-old speaker of sonnet 7 worrying that his "late spring no bud or blossom showeth" or the mature poet of *Paradise Lost* speculating that his epic arrives "an age too late" in Restoration England, Milton persistently aestheticizes his fear of being behind the times. The belated mode, as Murphy points out, animates much queer Renaissance historiography, thus suggesting that the value of a collection titled *Queer Milton* in 2018 resides not just in its ability to bring the field up to speed but to leverage its belatedness into critical reflection upon the presence of queer theory in early modern scholarship.

*Queer Milton* (as well as the special issue of *Early Modern Culture* from which it emerged) indeed finds inspiration from the now long-standing debate concerning historicism in early modern queer studies. But, as Will Stockton suggests in his afterword, this debate has grown somewhat stale, largely due to its focus on Shakespeare. Rather than bemoan the author-centric status of early modern queer studies, Stockton and David Orvis (coeditors of the special issue) realized that bringing queer methodologies to Milton provided the opportunity to interrogate, rather than repudiate, the affective attachments scholars still bear toward individual authors. In expanding the special issue into a collection, Orvis faces the challenge of presenting a queer Milton exigent in his own right, without the sneaking suspicion that he is ultimately a function of the neo-liberalizing university, promoting the progressive force of queering the past while consolidating it around canonical authors.

The essays which originally appeared in the special issue demonstrate both historicist and theoretical approaches to queering Milton. Prioritizing the historicist approach is Orvis himself, who contributes a reading of perhaps the oddest moment in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*: the Eros-Anteros myth. Milton "exploits the slew of contradictions and controversies attached to the story . . . in order to articulate a hitherto infelicitous mutual love," which Orvis dubs "queer mutuality" (120–21). Joining Orvis is Stephen Guy-Bray, who argues that angelic union in *Paradise Lost* privileges "a non-reproductive and ultimately ungendered sexuality that we can only call queer" (140). Prioritizing the theoretical approach are Melissa Sanchez—who martial Jack Halberstam, Elizabeth Freeman, and Lee Edelman to locate in *A Mask* a queer theory of sex dependent on faith—and Drew Daniel—who applies Jasbir Puar's concept of "queer assemblage" to Dagon, the Philistine deity of *Samson Agonistes*, to measure the traffic between terror and effeminacy. While the historicist work tends to invoke

the term *queer* to articulate seemingly inarticulable Miltonic moments, the theoretical work tends to mobilize queer methodologies to reinvigorate established Miltonic keywords.

In its expansion into a collection, *Queer Milton* abounds with essays fluidly engaging historicist and theoretical approaches that enlarge the queer Milton studies archive. Thomas Luxon locates the queerness of *Paradise Lost* in its insistence on “proving the unprovable and trying to render the paradoxical rough places plain” (48). John Garrison opens the queer Milton canon to include the Latin elegies, which evince a form of desire propelled by lack. Lara Dodds argues that Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* and Raphael Carter’s *The Fortunate Fall* are queer adaptations of Adam and Raphael’s colloquy in *Paradise Lost*, exemplifying and challenging the presumptive logic undergirding epistemologies of sex. Happily, these essays are often impelled—but not constrained—by the central tensions animating early modern queer studies.

Milton may be arriving late to the queer academic conversation, but he is accompanied by a host of critics sensitive to nearly all that is implied by the rubric of queerness. Stimulating essays on shame (Pivetti) and geology (Swarbrick) demonstrate awareness of conversations both foundational and contemporary in queer theory, and they utilize Milton to push said conversations forward. This reader, however, would have appreciated more attention to the early modern philology of queerness, in the vein of Jeffrey Masten’s *Queer Philologies*. In this regard, Corey McEleney’s essay deserves attention. Confronting Sharon Marcus’s concern that queerness serves as “a neologism for the transgression of any norm,” McEleney builds off the early modern etymology of *queer*—that which is peculiar, eccentric, suspicious—to investigate the confluence between extravagant rhetoric and perverse sexuality in Satan’s encounter with Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost* (87n6). Along these lines, promising vistas reside in syntheses of presentist paradigms and historicist philologies that reject strands of historicism allergic to anachronism but that also avoid invoking queerness as an artificial appeal to exigency. Surely, Milton must continue to be queered to ensure his academic vitality; to this end, *Queer Milton* will prove timeless.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.490