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Stockton, Will. Members of His Body: Shakespeare, Paul, and a Theology of Nonmonogamy

Kuzner, James. Shakespeare as a Way of Life: Skeptical Practice and the Politics of Weakness

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in his time, flopped with his *Elementa* because he created so many fantastic new words for allegedly new geometrical shapes; yet in this case, Saiber argues, Della Porta's inventiveness was geared to his predilection for the marvellous, which characterizes his entire literary production (164–65). In this chapter, one would have wished for a more detailed exposition of Saiber's comparison of a long passage from Della Porta's comedy *La trappolaria* (1596) with the linguistic inventiveness in the *Elementa* (165–70).

A few other critical remarks are apposite. One is that Saiber sometimes tends to lose track of her topic and to get lost in biographic detail (for instance, 40–48, on Alberti's tortuous biography); another is that sometimes there are repetitions (see 142 and 154, on the lack of interest in Della Porta's *Elementa*). Moreover, one would have wished for a cumulative bibliography instead of a listing under five different headings. The index is helpful, but fails to mention Baldi, for example, on page 101. These are, however, minor issues indeed when compared to the fascinating insights that this great book offers to a wide range of readers. Saiber is to be congratulated for her ground-breaking, shrewd endeavour and for her incomparably lively capacity to write on the difficult topic of *computus*.

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Stockton, Will.

Members of His Body: Shakespeare, Paul, and a Theology of Nonmonogamy.

New York: Fordham University Press, 2017. Pp. vii, 178. ISBN 978-0-8232-7550-2 (hardcover) US\$90.

Kuzner, James.

Shakespeare as a Way of Life: Skeptical Practice and the Politics of Weakness.

New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. Pp. 232. ISBN 978-0-8232-6993-8 (hardcover) US\$85.

Much has been written about different forms and manifestations of power in Shakespeare's works, and about marriage, in Shakespeare. Yet weakness, as an

epistemological and existential problem, and marriage as the sanctioning of same-sex bodies represent fresh and, in the case of these two books, persuasively argued and cogently researched new topics. Each book is a collection of case studies of the plays from Shakespeare's canon of drama, read through a broadly conceptualized epistemology of uncertainty (Kuzner) and queer embodiment (Stockton).

William Stockton's new book looks at early modern marriage in the English Renaissance and Shakespeare as an instance of bodily "plurality" (5), that is, the idea based on the idea of matrimony as a union between a man and woman with Christ's body. Understood in this way, matrimonial plurality represents a kind of perversion (11); the triangular embodiment that such a marriage entails is produced by desires that run counter to the heteronormative dyad. The corporeal plurality, in turn, invites a radically new critical interpretation and historical unpacking of the early modern marriage as not so much a queer union but a union involving different levels of sexual agency and differently gendered bodies engaged in the act of sex, and in fantasies about it. Stockton's careful, probing, and throughout illuminating analyses and close readings, in which an individual approach is most evident but also most problematic because of the occasional opacity in the texts themselves, reveal the Shakespearean marriage as not a "straight institution" (5) but an unorthodox space of pleasure and sex, fragile and defying monogamy. In a series of original interpretations of the body within Christian matrimony, or "biblical marriage" (10) rooted in Ephesians 5, Stockton's book shows that often in Shakespeare three is a couple. Throughout this book, based on a reading of four plays, a book which brims with critical surprises about how to read the biblical marriage in the Renaissance, Stockton proves to be a consistently sensitive interpreter of Shakespeare's text and a lucid and original queer critic.

The Introduction sets the theoretical, historical, and methodological foundation for an understanding of the notion of the plurality of embodiment within a biblical marriage. It begins, in the first two chapters, with an exploration of "the sex of the savior" (13), moving onto, in the second two chapters, an analysis of "the marital consequences of the Pauline regard for the flesh as inherently corrupt or mired in sin" (13). It ends with an interpretation of infidelity in *The Winter's Tale*, as a way of unravelling the marriage against the background of the discourse of redemption.

In the first analytical chapter of a book about sex and sexual acts, a chapter devoted to exploring selfhood and sexual difference in *The Comedy of Errors*, Stockton engages with the one-sex model of the body (a problematic proposition that has been questioned on both sides of the argument by a number of scholars), takes up the body of Christ to interpret the “differences” (19) in social rank and sex, and contests some totalizing critical renderings of this comedy as manifestly about “the repentant Renaissance” (20) in order to open up an altogether new, flexible, and refreshingly authentic critical space for the reading of the self via “Paul of Ephesus’s theology” (27). The argument about the consonance of the marital body with Christ’s body and the Pauline import of the theological subtext of the complicated comedic sexual politics is unpacked in a probing reading of the sexual politics of adultery that defies the marital binary.

The next chapter, on *The Merchant of Venice*, continues the process of deconstruction of the theological argument against sex as perversion (and thus against modern-day evangelical denunciation of sexual acts) by looking at the “potentially sodomitical erotics of Christ’s crucifixion” (44) that underpins sex and the body in *The Merchant*. This is a dense, compact, and exceptionally rewarding chapter that approaches sodomy through the theological argument within the discourse of Christian citizenship. Moving from examining the “idealization of marital monogamy” (65) in the first two analytical chapters in which “group embodiment” (65) is the locus of sexual activity, in the chapter on *Othello* the critical lens is on individuation, defined as “the persistence of difference between two or more people joined as one flesh” (65). Having addressed much feminist criticism that argues for Desdemona’s chastity, Stockton gives her sexual autonomy and agency, and argues boldly that she has committed adultery (71), existing separately from her marriage with Othello, in her “thoughts and actions” (71). By way of extending Stockton’s careful unpacking of the problem, a particularly striking illustration of the argument of Desdemona’s embodied individuality is her curious exchange with Emilia, conducted in the privacy of Desdemona’s bedroom (4.3.32–35). Desdemona and Emilia exchange a few lines about the properness and handsomeness of the well-spoken Venetian noble Lodovico—just as Emilia is about to unpin Desdemona’s dress. This moment provides access not to the marital oneness involving Othello, but perhaps to a desired dyad involving another man, the man who’s evidently in her (unchaste) thoughts, and so also in her flesh, just as

she is about to be strangled by her husband. Her adultery is in this articulated agency of her desiring mind and body. Emilia's description of Lodovico—"I know a lady in Venice would have walked / barefoot to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip" (35) extends Desdemona's thought about Lodovico into a hyperbole of desire, individual erotic agency, and potentially adultery as well.

The last chapter takes up an ecocritical interpretation of the "sexual liabilities" (84) at play in Hermione's "Christ-like" resurrection from a statue into flesh. Stockton's book is timely because queer early modern historiography has long waited for an extensive analysis of the complex and artistically prevalent intersection of companionate marriage and theological argument about it, reading the former against the grain of the latter paradigm.

Theoretically sharp and wide ranging, James Kuzner's book is, like Stockton's, about the investment of Shakespeare's humans in freedom. It is also about skepticism as a way of being a character in Shakespeare's work. While Stockton's theoretical frame is biblical theology, Kuzner's jumping point is philosophy; while Stockton's book is about sexual embodiment, Kuzner's is about the embodiment of cognitive categories. Kuzner takes up Pierre Hadot's idea of philosophy as a way of life and extends it to capture Shakespeare's work. Weakness, understood to mean, in Kuzner's philosophical-theoretical paradigm, skepticism and uncertainty (or incertitude), is part of experiencing Shakespeare as a way of life.

Kuzner's book belongs to the genre of philosophical criticism of Shakespeare, and he is also a very good close reader of Shakespeare's text itself. In fact, it is close readings that sometimes keep the philosophical feet of the author on the ground by the text. One sentence sums up the book's critical direction and illustrates the point clearly: "One of Shakespeare's central preoccupations, and my central preoccupation here, is with this: whether the serious doubt of skepticism can become a means for control, for negotiating our selves and out worlds with greater mastery and proficiency" (5). Kuzner tests his thesis about "epistemological humility" (6) on five case studies—*The Rape of Lucrece*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*, and *Timon of Athens*—featuring Shakespeare's creative art, his strategy of handling the language (especially the metaphor), narrative, and plot. Writer's intentionality may not be what Kuzner intended to base his claims on, but the points he makes about the habitual ways of handling these properties of texts suggest that Shakespeare brings into the way he composes plays a kind of wish that directs the course of action, rather

than the action itself acting as a happening on stage. Shakespeare is taken to wishing that certain skeptical actions and practices enable a specific state of being or acting, like self-control, self-creation, “empowerment and confidence.”

Regardless of whether, as in the first chapter (*Lucrece*), the “mind-body problem” (21) is interpreted in the light of Cicero’s philosophy of skepticism, or, as in the second chapter (devoted to *Othello*), skepticism is connected with self-control, and projected onto love, weakness is the umbrella concept that determines the quality of the cognitive principle that governs the text. Moments of doubt and uncertainty, of scarcity (as in *Timon*), freedom, and self-mastery (as in *The Tempest*) are moments of “discomfort” (23) that are also sources of pleasure for the reader. Living with Shakespeare and taking up Shakespeare (that is, his texts) as a way of life means, of course, not living the Shakespearean plot but using those texts to experience new cognitive realities: what does “rational control” (22) mean as a “cognitive value” (23) that permeates this text and that resonates with the reader beyond the text itself? Moving fluently between philosophy, gender, and sexuality criticism (as when Kuzner draws on Laurent Berlant’s work), Foucault and Badio, to name a few, but also classical writers and their neoclassical followers, like Cicero, and Montaigne and Descartes, respectively, Kuzner has given us a book full of critical discomforts to be registered by those who wish for an approach to the texts’ materiality from a historicist angle; but the book is full of speculative criticism that will delight those who enjoy theory and philosophy. The effect of reading this book is of never being allowed to be completely in agreement or disagreement with the author; one is always tempted to think in more directions than one to grasp the full, composite meaning that is proposed.

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