

Jeffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time* (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

Print, 353 pp., US \$59.95, ISBN: 9780812247862.



R e v i e w

Jeffrey Masten's *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time* provides example after example of how to work with various early editions and manuscripts not as an antiquarian pursuit or to reconstitute an 'accurate text', but to open our experience to same sex eroticism in early modern literature. While studies in material book culture have come far in using 'paratext' — the visual, material culture in which the text is anchored — to provide new readings of the texts themselves, *Queer Philologies* also navigates between manuscript, published text, and historical anecdote to recreate private 'queer' stories. It does not just speculate about the historical relationships between dramatists such as Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe, but gives us a methodology for accessing them through manuscripts, letters, and published books.

Masten investigates different expressions of male desire and friendship as 'queer activity'. He goes back to the morphology of Q to imagine a queer perspective, 'to investigate moments of early modern skaiography — crooked writing [...] Skaioigraphy comes from Skaio-, "left, left-handed, awkward, crooked", related to the Latin *scaevitas*, "[I]n instinctive choosing of the wrong; perversity"' (p. 7). Following this crooked handwriting will, according to Masten, lead us 'to knowledge before and aft, the tail or queue that introduces us beyond the square' (p. 38). Part of Prof. Masten's methodology is to make this a book that you can enter not just from the beginning, which would follow a heteronormative logic, but that you can pass into at various different points: either browse chronologically through chapters, choose a 'lexicon' to visit, or move around within chapters from one subtitle to another.

We begin with no discernible system of hierarchical or linear arrangement Lexicon 1: Friendship'. Then we go to 'Boy-desire', and 'Sodomy' with a few loose chapters dedicated to 'Editing Sex, Race, Gender, and Affect' and an essay on Thomas More at the end. Each of the lexicons contains two chapters. The order may seem whimsical. Nevertheless, it dovetails with Prof. Masten's goal of shedding light on webs or matrixes of words, images, and physical artifacts to reconstruct literary history and, indeed, even literature itself. It can only happen by entering discourse at unexpected, seemingly undisciplined points of entry.

We learn to read against the grain through a number of methodologically complicated ways. In chapter 1, 'Spelling Shakespeare', which serves as an introduction to the book, Prof. Masten studies Shakespeare by analyzing Eisenhower-era scholarship at the Folger Library. After explaining President Eisenhower's 'loyalty program', which prohibited the 'hiring and retention of federal employees engaged in "sexual perversion"', he demonstrates how the versions of Shakespeare we read correspondingly censor these 'perversions of the wording' (p. 35). As a case study, he concludes the chapter by studying the variant orthographies of the end of *As you Like It*. He shows how the editors who accepted the compositor who preferred 'hir' to 'his', as a printing typo, won out in the Eisenhower Folger version. The existence of variants, however, makes room for a queering of Shakespeare.

In the first chapter of the 'Friendship' lexicon, Masten peeks into the private reading nooks of Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe. During this period of recorded cohabitation, he believes they were sexually involved. The chapter takes a fascinating paleographical turn when it looks at Kyd's complicated relationship to Marlowe, both embroiled and attempting to distance himself from accusations of atheism. The argument is made via examples of secretarial and italic hands Kyd used, and in doing so exploits paleography to penetrate the private friendship of two writers. The latter half of the 'Friendship' lexicon focuses on the idea of

'conversation' in all its etymological complexity. Through the efforts of Marlowe and Kyd to imitate Cicero, they find a place for their own amorous discourse.

The second and third lexicons explore more erotically explicit and taboo areas. 'Boy-desire' probes the erotic context of pre-pubescent boys, who could pass for women in the theatres. There is a particularly interesting reading of *Philaster*, which 'presents and eroticizes a boy who is, throughout a boy' (p. 121). The discussion weaves back and forth between a 'good' and 'bad' quarto (Q 1, 1620). He renames it the 'boy quarto' because this printed copy of the play preserves the idea of the boy remaining a boy, and continuing to exist as a man's object of desire through what were later read as misprints.

'Reading Boys', our first lesson in the boy-desire lexicon, devotes a great deal of space to reproducing and interpreting frontispieces, title pages, margins, and decorated initial letters. The chapter culminates in an example from the Book of Common Prayer in which the decorative letter beginning the verse, 'Christ said, I am the good Shepherd', pictures Ganymede (p. 145). As he demonstrates, naked cherubic figures and lads populate the pages of religious and secular books alike. In a fascinating example of his methodology, Masten then reads the biblical text itself in light of the Ganymede nestled in the decorative letter, suggesting how the Greek concept of an aggressive, erotic spiriting colors the Christian conception of ascent to the divine. The lexicon takes a number of unexpected twists and turns to conclude with a satisfying reading of Edward II, not to 'bring back a homosexual Marlowe in our terms', but examine the complexity of 'boy-desire, friendship, and homosocial affiliation' (p. 173). In this case, the stress is on the 'filius' of filiation in the 'same-sex affection' of the boy heir and dead father.

The 'Sodomy' lexicon brings Leo Bersani's 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' in conversation with early modern literature. Bersani's vision of anality in the twentieth century context correlates with the abject, the unspeakable submissive man who receives anal pleasure. According to Masten, this vision of anality does not

obtain in the early modern period. While anti-sodomite ideas were pervasive, nevertheless Masten contends that the 'fundament' was foundational to ideas of men, just as the womb was for women. Masten ends the chapter pointing out the fundament as a source of intense pleasure in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* enabling Bottom to imagine the 'body in parts set loose from their customary meanings' (p. 190).

The last 'sodometric' chapter moves brings queer philology to bear on definitions of genre — and, especially that genre that dare not speak its name, romance. Relating genre to sexuality is a productive move, especially his exploration of hybridization. Masten pairs illustrations of biological 'species' with analyses of literary genres, 'tragoedia', 'comoedia', and 'tragicomoedia' in the title page of *Ben Jonson's Workes*.

'More or Less Queer: Female "Bumbast" in Sir Thomas More' concludes the book with a climax. The chapter elaborates a reading based on the promiscuity of early modern spellings. Confusion between 'bombast' and 'bumbast' — a spanking that suggests, 'they shit themselves' — appear. Masten explores women who penetrate, and provides another example of how etymology can be mined to produce unusual readings.

The bibliography and Endnotes constitute almost a third of the book, indicating the goal is not just to offer new interpretations and prospective methodological paths. Masten provides scholars with the resources to continue to transform how we read texts, and how we interpret the history of sexuality in the early modern period. Although we may sometimes feel lost by the unanticipated theoretical moves in *Queer Philologies*, the romp through etymologies, images, and texts is always interesting.

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