

alternatives to the King's will as law in maintaining order" (199). The analysis of each play could also benefit from a fuller critical apparatus, and, though Dyson omits depictions of republics and republicans "to avoid temptation or accusation of reading with hindsight" (7), future work on this topic will hopefully interpret representations of these more radical political theories. Nonetheless, this study will be of interest to scholars of seventeenth-century drama, legal history, and the intellectual history of England's evolution toward royalist and parliamentary polarization.

Adrian Wilson. *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. vii + 261 pp. \$124.95. Review by KAROL KOVALOVICH WEAVER, SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY.

Adrian Wilson's *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* considers the social networks that shaped childbirth in seventeenth-century England. Wilson looks at the "relationships, institutions, and customs" that dealt with childbirth. The author investigates illegitimacy, marriage, and the ceremony of childbirth, applying a method derived from Michel Foucault that looks at occasions when women worked with or against the prevailing gender order. Wilson's work is noteworthy because of its strong and clear analysis and its use of fascinating and intriguing case studies.

Wilson starts out his text by focusing on illegitimacy. He does so for three main reasons: to contrast it with marriage (the topic he addresses in the second section of the book); to show its connections to the church and state, institutions or social networks that had profound influences on childbearing; and to highlight how bastard-bearing was a circumstance that many women of the seventeenth century might find themselves dealing with. The author demonstrates that rituals affected illegitimacy. Due to social customs that sanctioned premarital sex, many couples found that they were expecting babies before their vows were exchanged. Regional practices like spousals, "contracts of marriage...lacking force in law (14)," for example, allowed for premarital sex and resulted in expectant mothers. Wilson also shows that conflict

also influenced bastard bearing. Differences in power between servant women and their male employers led to sexual harassment, forced sexual relations, and illegitimate births. Local, state, and ecclesiastical authorities opposed bastard-bearers, in large part because of the financial costs that would accrue to communities forced to support single mothers and their fatherless children. In some cases, women were forcibly removed from the town in which they lived. Mothers dealt with the prevailing gender order surrounding illegitimacy in a variety of ways: they accepted the punishments given them by the church and state, they relied on the kindness and generosity of their parents, they aborted their fetuses, and they abandoned their infants. Wilson thus demonstrates that illegitimacy forced women to work with or against the prevailing gender order.

Marriage is the second topic that Wilson addresses. Wilson assesses the ways by which marriage functioned as a reciprocal, symmetrical, and asymmetrical arrangement between the husband and the wife. He looks at these three characteristics in order to gauge the distribution of power in the marital relationship. He shows how the marriage ceremony in the *Book of Common Prayer* affirmed these three qualities and then analyzes how they played out in theory and in practice. Religious tradition, common law, and philosophical works all preached masculine dominance within marriage, but popular cultural traditions clearly indicate that the marriage relationship was characterized by conflict, cooperation, and contest. Wilson points out women were sometimes “on top” (193).

The author’s analysis of the marital relationship is well-written and engaging. For example, his discussion of the Skimmington ritual is a fine example of how he uses case studies to explain his argument. However, the two chapters (2 & 3) devoted to the topic of marriage make little reference to childbirth. The reader should not be discouraged by this lack of reference to the book’s main theme because Wilson skillfully weaves his strands of thought together and produces a rich and creative tapestry of ideas concerning childbirth in chapter 4.

The final full chapter of Wilson’s book concerns the ceremony of childbirth. Wilson shows how the rituals surrounding childbirth depended on social networks that tied the pregnant woman to her midwife and her gossips. He also highlights how these same customs

separated the new mother from her husband physically, sexually, and socially and that they demanded from the husband an outlay of resources and economic support; the husband endured “the gander month” (175). Women’s shaping of religious traditions, like churching and baptism, also points to the power that they wielded as a result of childbirth. Wilson concludes, “The underlying conflict [around childbirth] appears as a social one...as arising from the structural inequalities of the conjugal state” and “women’s collective practices actually abolished, male conjugal authority, albeit temporarily” (212). Wilson explains that, although women depended on and helped other women during childbirth, they also, at times, stood in conflict with these same women. An individual mother, for instance, might reject the midwife who served her at her previous birth, and, instead, opt for the services of another midwife, a decision she might make in concert with her husband. Wilson once again illustrates that women worked with or against the prevailing gender order.

Wilson’s book is an excellent read and a variety of scholars will be interested in his work. Gender historians will appreciate his skillful and nuanced analysis of illegitimacy, marriage, and childbirth. Historians of medicine, specifically scholars who specialize in the history of obstetrics, might heed his call that they pay greater attention to the social parameters of medical practice and care. Finally, historians in general will be inspired by his creative use of both primary and secondary sources.

William Kuskin. *Recursive Origins: Writing at the Transition to Modernity*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. xv + 278 pp. \$35.00. Review by THOMAS P. ANDERSON, MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY.

Recursive Origins is an innovative account of literary influence between fifteenth-century English literature and Renaissance texts generally perceived to share a literary inheritance with classical sources and not the literature from Late Middle Ages. Shakespeare and Spenser figure prominently in this thought-provoking study, as William Kuskin connects their writing to late-medieval authors such as Caxton, Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Chaucer. As a case study in