

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

intertextuality and influence, Kuskin's book is provocative and directs a colder eye to assumptions about early modernity's indebtedness to heretofore under-studied English authors; Kuskin, however, sets out to accomplish more than a study in literary influence. Indeed, the more ambitious aim of *Recursive Origins* is to unsettle assumptions about periodization as it theorizes a concept of literary history that, as Kuskin writes, seeks to redefine "the relationship between literature, period, and time" (13).

Kuskin's cogent seventeen-page introduction offers a clearly elaborated account of the concept of recursion as a form of literary history. He clarifies his philosophical understanding of time and literary history, informed by theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guatari, Marshall McLuhan, and John Guillory, through associations with cultural icons as disparate as Keith Richards of *The Rolling Stones* and M.C. Escher. For Kuskin, Richards and Escher are linked in that they intuit the power of recursion as a "trope of return that produces representation through embedded self-reference" (9)—a trope evident in acts of writing and reading that, for Kuskin, allows us to understand "connections in a non-linear pattern of association" (13). This insight is perhaps the book's most urgent for its humanist audience: the nonlinear pattern of association generates "unbounded movement" (13) that makes us "more capable of finding who we once were and who we might still be" (13). In emphasizing multiple temporalities over forms of time characterized by chronology or segmented history, Kuskin aligns his methodology with recent important work from Kathleen Davis and Jonathan Gil Harris. Like those critics, Kuskin seeks to escape the regulatory force of linear history to demonstrate that "[n]o longer constrained by period, we can move across literary time more fluidly" (14).

The book's five chapters demonstrate the value of this approach to literary history. The first chapter on Martial's epigram on authorship—"Qui tecum cupis esse meos ubicumque libellos"—establishes Kuskin's application of the concept of recursive origins as a form of literary history. His argument hinges on the idea that late medieval writers such as Lydgate or Caxton are rendered invisible, "barely an author" (46), yet their literary voices are present in the "spiraling references within the codes of literary production" (46) in the early modern pe-

riod and come to define the advent of modernity. The following four chapters—one on Spenser and the other three on Shakespeare—establish recursion as central to important originary moments for early modern literature, specifically the birth of the modern poet and the first emergence of dramatic literature in print. According to Kuskin, these moments thought to be singular expressions of modernity “are recursively interconnected with the literature of the previous century, demonstrably contingent upon and subordinating the literary culture of John Lydgate and William Caxton” (16).

Kuskin’s second chapter on Spenser clearly demonstrates the potential of a recursive literary history explored chapter one. Looking closely at the paratextual and intertextual traces of Chaucerian literary form in Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calendar*, Kuskin shows how Spenser and his contemporaries acknowledge the influence but alienate it into history “so as to write themselves modern while simultaneously reading deeply into the past’s rhetoric” (54). In the *Calendar*, according to Kuskin, multiple authorizing voices emerge to seemingly challenge the possibility of a unified poetic voice while also, in the end, speaking “as one, as Spenser” (60). In the transmission of literary authority from Chaucer to Spenser, Lydgate is an essential intermediary: “Lydgate represents himself as a poet by embedding the representation of Chaucer as a poet within his poetry, and, in turn, Spenser does the same to Lydgate” (61). Central to this argument is what Kuskin calls the lasting presence of books that complicate any “reckoning of time” (84) by allowing the literary past to intrude anachronistically into the present.

It is Kuskin’s insistence on including the technology of print culture in questions about the form and content of literary history that sets *Recursive Origins* apart from other accounts of textual transmission. Kuskin’s three chapters on Shakespeare offer exciting readings of the playwright and poet within this context; specifically, he examines the dramatic quarto of *2 Henry VI*, the intertextual and formal relationship between Caxton’s *Recuyell* and *Troilus and Cressida*, and the Pavier Quartos, a collection of ten plays published by a group of men who went on to publish the First Folio. Taken together, the three chapters on Shakespeare’s recursion establish the early modern playwright as the central figure in the type of literary history traced by Kuskin. Ac-

ording to Kuskin, as an “icon to modernity” (7), Shakespeare’s debt to a more local and immediate past is often overshadowed by the critical desire to trace his allegiance to a more refined classical literary history. What *Recursive Origins* seeks to prove is that Shakespeare and his editors were reliant on what are now non-canonical texts from late-medieval writers such as Hoccleve, Lydgate, Caxton, and the anonymous chroniclers of the mid-fifteenth century. For Kuskin, Shakespeare’s long shadow of modernity, embodied in *The Folio* that proclaims the author dead, effectively “seals the past away from the reader, closing it off as a period that cannot be accessed directly and, paradoxically, resurrecting him as immortal in its place” (205). It is this alienation from history—a history that, according to Kuskin, is made immediate in the act of producing and reading books—which he seeks to redress in his study.

Some readers may fairly come away from Kuskin’s book feeling uneasy about how it characterizes recent scholarly accounts of literary history as “totalizing divisions that insist that things come from themselves” (5); others may think that Kuskin’s insights about the literary impact of the Late Middle Ages on the early modern period might have more in common with Harold Bloom’s anxiety of influence than the book admits. I think this would be a misreading of Kuskin’s original argument. In the end, Bloom understands supersession as the goal of literary achievement: the clineman, or swerve, a great poet takes to surpass a precursor poet. Kuskin refuses this premise, instead focusing on how literature from the fifteenth century is embedded in the greatest early modern literary achievements and actively disavowed in order to establish the impression of a break in time signaling the advent of modernity. Kuskin’s discovery that intertextuality and influence are, in fact, literary tropes that link past and present to a future reader is one more reminder, pace Bruno Latour, that we have never been modern.