to childbed suffering "invites us to see the suffering that attends the process of reproduction in the wake of original sin as a circumscribed, through terrifying, realm of disorder over which God gave the human mind and spirit dominion" (260). In addition to being a formidable scholarly study that every academic library should purchase, *Milton and Maternal Mortality*, featuring Schwartz's personable voice, makes suitable reading for advanced undergraduates interested in women's studies, early modern studies, or Milton's poetry. Feminists and Miltonists (and especially those of us who are both) should welcome his sweeping survey of how Milton the man lived and Milton the poet created in a world quietly suffused with respect for women's sacrifice.

Kevin Curran. *Marriage, Performance, and Politics at the Jacobean Court*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. ix + 187 pp. $99.95. Review by M. L. STAPLETON, INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE UNIVERSITY, FORT WAYNE.

This study analyzes the six wedding masques written by Jonson, Campion, Chapman, and Beaumont and performed at court during the first decade of the reign of James I. This somewhat new genre flourished as a type of Jacobean royal entertainment as it had not during Elizabeth's time because marriage was, for her, an uncomfortable subject for somewhat obvious reasons, as it would not be for her successor for causes less apparent to us. The king was at some times happily married to his Danish queen, Anna, and thus clearly not opposed to the institution itself. He also saw that such masques were a medium through which he could express the idea of union, political as well as social and marital. Curran contends that since these pageants were hardly dull, insipid affairs and seem to have enacted some of the very conflicts that must have riled the court, they should "encourage us to think about monarchical rhetoric as a system of representation that was changeable, invented, and very often contested, not as something static, inherited, and reproduced" (5). Here, his focus is on "verbal rhetoric," an exploration of the diction and ideas embedded in the texts that can be linked to concrete political ideas, in opposition to new historicist readings of ideologies allegedly underlying them.

Curran's Introduction provides the requisite critical background for the nonspecialist reader as well as the necessary reasons for pursuing the subject in monograph form. The first chapter explores the ways that marriage entertainments such as *The Masque of Blackness* helped James create a rhetoric of national union, since there was no pre-established model. Jonson's first three court masques, perhaps even more than the expected proclamations and speeches, reflect the "representational challenges" that the king and his faction faced in their quest for legitimacy. Chapter 2, "Erotic Policy," discusses the two Anglo-Scottish marriage celebrations in 1607-08, especially how "eroticism emerges as a key concept within the language of union" (58) in the masques by Jonson and Campion for these occasions that actually reinforced a positive image of British nationhood associated with James. Curran also speculates that this frank language of marital sexuality called attention to the rift between king and queen, since they had ceased to co-habit as man and wife during this time. The third chapter, devoted to the wedding entertainments for Princess Elizabeth and Frederick, the Elector Palatine, is potentially the most important, since this would be closest to the king himself, and the representational machinery would naturally connect the emerging idea of Britishness to the role of the new kingdom in the larger arena of European affairs, the Thirty Years' War on the horizon at decade's end. The concluding section of *Marriage, Performance, and Politics*, "Relocating Monarchical Rhetoric: The Entertainments for Robert Carr and Frances Howard," touches on the material that would probably be most familiar to those with some knowledge of Jacobean political and social intrigue, yet studiously avoids engaging in it, namely, the couple's role in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, their nine public trials (without convictions), and their eventual loss of royal favor and subsequent financial ruin. The rather imposing monument in the background is David Lindley's excellent *The Trials of Frances Howard* (1993), which expertly situates the alleged murderess in her social, religious, sexual, and literary milieux and deconstructs her archetypal role as femme fatale.

The book is handsomely researched, written, documented, and organized, so there is not much to complain about. The curmudgeonly reader may wonder why James's bisexuality receives little or no men-

tion, since it was hardly a secret to his courtiers or the dramatists who made the pageants to entertain them that are so nicely analyzed in these pages. Also, the comment in the brief Afterword, that there are no "fully satisfactory explanations" (161) for the disappearance of the court wedding masque after the elaborate entertainments for the Howard-Carr marriage, is certainly a sound one, but another line of inquiry might have proven useful. Though Curran rightly wishes to avoid his predecessors' sometimes facile tendency to read these pieces as prologue to the Overbury poisoning, is it not possible that the decline of this type of multiplex performance was somewhat related to this scandalous crime, the genre tainted as it were by association? The medium by which a monarch had so elaborately feted a favorite and his bride, who then in turn embarrassed him by their involvement in premeditated murder of one of his courtiers, could not have been one that he would have happily or willingly resurrected for future nuptials. Although this is not an exact analogy, the violent Hollywood action movie, with its exploding buildings, demonic terrorists, and graphic mayhem, disappeared almost completely as a genre for two years or so after the events of 11 September 2001. No one wanted to see violent death onscreen and several productions were brought to a halt for this reason, albeit the resurgence of this type of film was inevitable. The prospect of further elaborate wedding masques, even for his last favorite, George Villiers, eventually Duke of Buckingham, may have seemed distasteful indeed to an insecure and brokenhearted king, perhaps reminding him of time, money, and love lost on a dimwitted protégé and his perfidious spouse who repaid his generosity with monstrous ingratitude. Still, Curran negotiates the uneven terrain comprising literary analysis, social history, and theater-performance studies very well, sensibly focusing on the masques themselves in his attempt to make them living texts for us.