

Jesse M. Lander. *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. x + 324 pp. + 20 illus. \$85.00. Review by IRA CLARK, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA.

Jesse M. Lander begins *Inventing Polemic* by recounting Swift's satiric literary allegory *The Battle of the Books*, in which "ancients" and "modems" wage war by way of personified volumes attacking and counterattacking each other on the field of King's Library, offering the early eighteenth century a retrospective on the futility of controversy fueled by "enthusiasm," excessive inspiration. He ends it with the history of the rise and fall of Chelsea College: it was founded in the context of the Gunpowder Plot and the Oath of Allegiance controversy so as to champion James I's religious position through contentions over doctrine and discipline; by the Revolution it had fallen into disuse and abuse; finally its assets and properties were granted to the Royal Society by Charles II; polemic had been displaced to the margins of literature. In between "The disorder of books" and "Institutionalizing polemic," Lander pursues the active cycle of a once potent genre. "The volatile mixture of religious controversy and print technology introduced a new polemical element into the literary culture of early modern England, and the invention of polemic in turn produced a reaction in the form of polite learning" (230-31), he summarizes. In outline, polemic was born with "Foxe's Books of Martyrs: printing and popularizing the *Actes and Monuments*," grew turbulent in its early years of "Martin Marprelate and the fugitive text," gained definition in contrast to literature in "Printing Donne: poetry [*An Anatomy of the World*] and polemic [*Pseudo-Martyr*] in the early seventeenth century," and achieved a maturity that simultaneously marked a decline in Milton's defense of the form itself in "*Areopagitica* and 'The True Warfaring Christian.'"

Omitted in my reiteration of the contents of this book subtitled *Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England* is "Whole Hamlets: Q1, Q2, and the work of distinction," because in my judgement this middle chapter does not advance Lander's argument. Instead it exemplifies and confirms Lander's major premise that religious controversy provided both an encompassing context as well as an overlooked and once important genre among all kinds of writing from the Elizabethan period until the Restoration. Polemic then was not subliterary or peripheral but rather central, ultimately contributing to the definition of what was to become considered literary. "Whole

Hamlets” also exhibits Lander’s primary mode of working and his characteristic employment of evidence. In this chapter he focuses on the differences between a script of a revenge tragedy in the earlier quarto and a reading text interrogating religious questions in the later quarto as the two texts suggest different publication goals and audience responses.

For Lander “literary culture” is no mere generalized rubric; it is an essential term. It signals an engagement with the creation of an audience, since polemic ostentatiously splits its audience into for and against, wooing partisans and assailing enemies. Consequently he examines a work’s publication history and its rhetoric of presentation, elements central to engaging a public audience as well as an opponent. So his evidence consists of more than the accounts of literary and theological controversies that raged throughout the period, or the literary biographies of Donne or Milton, or even the cultural and social history of the process of defining literature, though he uses these. It includes as well the production and publication history of six English editions of Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* and its primary printer Richard Day and dwells on the public sensation and intrigue of the appearance of Martin Marprelate. Lander takes into account in his analyses not merely the arguments of various tracts with their diction and tone and dialogical restatements and rebuttals, but he includes as well evidence of the material presentation, the black letter versus roman type faces of the Marprelate pamphlets and the differences in title pages between Donne’s polemic and his poem, and the polemic’s table of contents versus the commendatory poems ushering us into and out of the elegy. Moreover, he includes speculation about audience response based on commendatory comments and opponents’ counterarguments, written reactions plus data such as the abridgments, imitations, and appropriations of an *Actes and Monuments* or an *Areopagitica*. Lander’s very notes provide a useful bibliographical commentary about histories of religious controversies, histories of book making, histories of individual writers, and theoretical backgrounds for all these concerns, especially the idea of public discourse, in England from about 1550 until the late 1600s.

In “Epilogue: Polite learning,” Lander reiterates his opening from a new point of view. He recounts the story of the rise of Jacob Tonson, the first publisher to found a firm on the elaborate production of literary works that have come to be regarded as canonical, of Spenser and Donne and Waller and Shakespeare, far removed from the strikingly opposed anonymous, fu-

gitive production of the Marprelate polemics. The most interesting exhibit is the pomp and luxury of Tonson's publication of *Paradise Lost*, a volume that effaces Milton's authorship as a Puritan polemicist and exalts a new commitment to a universalized and aestheticized "polite learning" as the sphere all came to regard as literature.

Jesse M. Lander makes a learned and significant contribution to an emerging history of literary culture that helps us understand some of the determinants that characteristically emerge from print and manuscript cultures and some of the social determinations of what and how literature is constituted. It is a literary history that characterizes a genre in the context of religious and hence political controversy wherein authors, printers, and publishers sought to define and win over one audience and anathematize another. It is a literary history that interprets evidence from printing history, material conditions of presentation as part of its rhetoric, audience response, theological and social and cultural history. It is a history of literary culture that calls other scholars to help give us more insight into literature from a fuller, more complex perspective.