

Readers of this journal are however permitted to suspect that, for the English performers c. 1650, a local contemporary political application was very much in mind.

Abraham Stoll. *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. ix + 216 pp. \$99.99. Review by MARGARET J. OAKES, FURMAN UNIVERSITY.

Parsing a term as abstract as “conscience” has obvious limitations and hermeneutic problems, and could cover centuries of thinking and dozens of writers, even if only limited to Western European Christianity. The size of Abraham Stoll’s *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature* immediately indicates that this must be a focused examination; the title does not reflect the analytical scope of the book, and the author struggles to be both sweeping in his conclusions and specific in his examples. Further, a reader should not approach this text as a developmental argument, as it posits itself to be. Stoll arranges the discussion of conscience in roughly chronological terms but then often finds himself redefining phases in an intellectual, theological, and political overhaul of this concept, as the few writers he has selected do not show a movement or consistent avenue of change in their thinking. This attempt to show a progression of thought is flawed; furthermore, it is unfortunate because unnecessary and limits an authentic examination of the subject.

Stoll sets out a hermeneutic based in St. Jerome, threading up through Aquinas and St. German, to set out a distinction that he later wants to dissolve: that of the higher, perfect faculty of *synderesis* (which is discarded by Luther in Stoll’s argument) for a faculty which he terms “destructured,” requiring a constant process of self-reflection. He argues that in William Perkins’ theory of conscience it is a thought process: “Such imperfection cannot be summarized, but must be won anew for each person, and in successive moments of each person’s life” (43). A number of characters in *The Faerie Queene* and *Macbeth* are loosely addressed through this interpretive lens; the somewhat disjointed and tangential feel to these chapters may result from their being portions of separate articles published elsewhere.

The struggles of the Redcrosse Knight and Artegall are bookended to show the struggles of the Protestant conscience to make decisions, first inwardly to relieve despair and later outwardly to administer equitable justice. The Macbeths are the subject of a free-ranging treatment that includes twentieth-century psychoanalysis, not an unlikely locus in which to examine their actions but one which contradictorily removes the theorized Protestant relationship between sinful behavior and the conscience on which the book is based. Stoll's analysis then moves from the literary to the political, an arena in which the creation of conscience as a public activity has a clearer reading. He sets Milton within a context of the Hobbesian awareness of the sovereign, and the limitations on conscience, which may be rightly required to serve "the complexities of communal relations" (187).

In clarifying the fabric of Catholic thinking on conscience, Stoll is useful in outlining the nature of scholastic theology from Aquinas. However, he wants to advance a thread of "destructuring" which is not as successful. This is partly because the very term indicates the possibility that description is not going to be possible, and partly because it seems more to be an inevitable result of the massive theological changes put into motion by Luther, Calvin, and others. When the authority of doctrine and practice of Roman Catholicism in England were removed, new conceptual structures were not developed and ready to be put in place. Henry VIII resisted Lutheran and Calvinist ideas; Edward VI did not; a systematic theology could not have been available in the mid-1500s to replace the magisterial weight and elucidation of centuries of Jerome, Aquinas, or even St. German. Moving away from an institutional authority that defines *synderesis* to tell believers how they should act creates a problem in definition: Stoll admits that "the perfect and nameable conscience of the scholastics disintegrates in the Reformation" (29). For better or worse, part of the nature of Protestantism is the application by some internal process of the individual—whether that be from the soul or the mind, or whether it is considered hermeneutically to be a habit or an act to theological issues. In addition, we know that much of the English populace were either theologically or sentimentally committed to Roman Catholicism right through the sixteenth century into the years of Charles I's reign, and opinions and beliefs varied widely across

and up and down England. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are more much different theologically and politically than Stoll has space to address here; he gestures broadly at “conscience [becoming] an increasingly important political force” in the early 1600s (111) but does not explain why that may be the case.

The problem surfaces as Stoll refers to the thinking about conscience of the post-Reformation decades as “inchoate” but then has difficulty fulfilling the assertion that the inchoate was “perfected” or organized in any of the English texts he discusses. Stoll delves into the various works of William Perkins, whom he argues replaces the *synderesis/consentia* relationship to an internalized process of reflection on one’s own actions: “Conscience enables self-consciousness” (42). But Perkins is not so neat in his thinking, as Stoll later acknowledges that Perkins, as might actually be expected of a thinker developing an emerging theological position, is not clearly outside of the scholastic model. The framework of “destructuring,” followed by his argument that Spenser and Shakespeare make moves to “restructure” conscience within the mind that reflects back on thoughts and actions (both, incidentally, by people who are arguably not even in their right minds), dissolves into a discussion of Judith Butler’s work on subjectivity. While enlightening, this shift seems an enormous conclusory jump, both in size and chronology, from two or three examples.

Stoll turns his attention to politics and the public sphere as he moves into the middle decades of the seventeenth century. The trickling of literary production during the Commonwealth period will create problems for any study purporting to focus on literature. Perhaps for this reason Stoll leaves behind literature for most of the rest of the book and focuses on Milton’s political writings in this interpretive framework. The three particular political events he chooses enable Stoll to hit his interpretive stride, as the liberty and constraint of individual conscience by political and religious authority were repeatedly examined and tested in the decades surrounding the Civil Wars. Stoll is insightful in tying the idea of the “knowing with” of the private conscience to Cromwell and Hobbes’ efforts to untie private decisions of conscience from the public realm, and hence the public good: “In Hobbes’ commonwealth, conscience cannot be private. Private conscience threatens the sovereign precisely because it has

itself become sovereign" (151). As he turns to Milton, the choice of literature is temptingly perfect but also somewhat problematic as a sole example. The discussion of Eve's self-knowledge and reflection, both before and after the fall, casts light on the individual decisions of conscience that have at the same time (in an ultimate way) private and public ramifications.

Stoll's work is not a study, but a case study with highlights. This approach could be a successful approach to this large and abstract topic, but a case study also requires a careful and justified selection of texts, especially the literary ones. Poems and plays other than the ones selected spring immediately to mind. Why not Donne, who engaged in deeply self-aware struggles of conscience in his own life, and whose poetry and prose reflect his awareness of those issues for emerging Protestantism? Why not Marlowe? *Doctor Faustus* seems in some ways the most obvious literary example of this time period. Why not Ford? *Macbeth* is not the most useful choice. While connections can be made to the Gunpowder Plot and equivocations of conscience, and Freudian ideas of the uncanny, the ties to the "Protestant conscience" and the "Protestant understanding" are thin. Why not other Shakespearean plays that seem to deal with the casuistical questions raised by Perkin's theorizing of conscience as Stoll posits it: *The Merchant of Venice*? *Measure for Measure*? Both are set in a context of Catholicism by virtue of their geographical setting, but both also seem to raise clearer questions of Stoll's phrase "knowing with" within Christian thinking: the self knowing that it is doing something and reflecting on it. Limiting the later literature to Milton is again a restrictive choice: *Paradise Lost* was *sui generis* in the Restoration field of satire and domestic comedy. Bunyan would seem to be a clear endpiece to harken back to Spenser, especially if Stoll is interested in exploring whether conscience has indeed become inchoate and something other than a subjective experience.

The book ends abruptly with Milton, and there is almost no reflection or summation of the sweeping scope of the development process suggested by the earlier chapters. The brevity of the book does not allow Stoll to examine the other factors that undoubtedly came into play in addition to the shift from scholastic theology, such as the disputes between the various early denominational splits on English

soil: “Protestant” as an umbrella term does not accurately describe the theological landscape of Britain in any part of the seventeenth century, and this is not a sufficient historical analysis to be drawing the conclusions that he does. However, the very questions that are raised by these gaps can be useful to scholars. While Stoll might have better chosen either to do more or less under this title, the book nevertheless is a fine start to further study.

Thomas Keymer, ed. *Prose Fiction in English from the Origins of Print to 1750*. Vol. 1 of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, general editor Patrick Parrinder. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xxxi + 637 pp. \$125.00. Review by MARGARET J. OAKES, FURMAN UNIVERSITY.

While not the first of the series to be published, the first volume of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* is an exhilarating and potentially seminal work. The series, now completely in print, consists of twelve volumes that extend through contemporary writing and covers Anglophone writings from Europe, Asia and the South Pacific, the Caribbean, Canada, and Africa. This volume has the challenging job of laying the groundwork for those that follow, and the contributors rethink the ways that literature that is not poetry or drama conveys the “full and authentic report of human experience” (xx) that Ian Watt did not include in his own foundational, if contested, work. The volume is divided into three sections. Part I: “Fiction in the Marketplace” includes six chapters, two on authorship, publication, and reception, and four that examine in detail snapshots of five-year periods of literary production. Part II: “Early Modern Fiction—Sources and Modes” expands both backwards and forwards in time to address, in twelve chapters, the collection of historical antecedents that comprise prose fiction in some guise. Characterizing prose fiction as “modes” is a helpful critical tool because it allows the elements that we might see as “novelistic” in writers such as Lyly, Sidney, and Bunyan to be highlighted within the genre in which they are traditionally placed. Part III: “Restoration Fiction and the Rise of the Novel” has sixteen chapters, each addressing some quite different area of prose output. The first three chapters are on narrative form and theory, and eight