

Forming Sleep: Representing Consciousness in the English Renaissance.

Nancy L. Simpson-Younger and Margaret Simon, eds.

Cultural Inquiries in English Literature, 1400–1700 2. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020. viii + 238 pp. \$99.95.

This collection of essays offers a series of case studies on sleep—a still-underexamined area of research in scholarship on the English Renaissance, despite groundbreaking work by, for example, Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. (who contributes an excellent afterword to the volume). As Nancy Simpson-Younger and Margaret Simon suggest in their introduction, the focus of the volume is on literary representation, mostly in the period 1580 to 1670, with three sections dealing with lyrical poetry, drama, and long poetry and prose, respectively. More specifically, the volume strives to elucidate “the interplay between literary forms and forms (or states) of consciousness” (1), in the sense of both how lived experience can be transformed into aesthetic experience and how sleep states offered opportunities for experimentation with traditional forms. Sleep is “a biocultural process” (2) that offered opportunities for classification but also for investigation of humanness in a broader sense, including “emotive, ethical, and aesthetic concerns” (4). In short, whether the sleeping body was approached theologically, medically, or otherwise, it invited meditation not just on the senses but also on how the soul and consciousness operated. Form becomes a central concept here since, as the editors argue in their introduction, it allows for a perspective on how “physical form, literary form, and forms of consciousness” (10) interacted; more specifically, the essays are concerned with how form implies consideration of “ethical definitions of the human, in multiple stages of consciousness that are bioculturally inflected” (10).

These concerns are perhaps most clearly reflected in the first section, on lyrical poetry, which discusses how the conceptualizing of sleep could activate considerations of literary form. Giulio J. Pertile’s chapter is of clear interest as it goes beyond the strict case-study perspective of the other essays and offers a rich survey of how sleep was represented—often in terms of insomnia and liminal states between the conscious and the unconscious—in Renaissance sonnets including Italian and French ones, but also Daniel’s, Sidney’s, and Wroth’s sonnet sequences. Of course, drama, with its display of physical bodies, offers a rich array of opportunities for discussing embodied sleep. The three chapters in the second section all focus on Shakespearean drama, and two of them particularly on sleeplessness. This section is arguably less focused on form in the sense promised by the editors, although the individual essays often make for perceptive thematic analysis. To this reviewer, Brian Chalk’s contribution on *King Lear*, with its discussion of how “monarchical wakefulness . . . transforms into a gradual evacuation of agency through exhaustion” (144), was a particular standout.

The third section is clearly the most eclectic in its focus, with material ranging from Spenserian and Miltonian epic to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Again, questions of form are not addressed in any detail, and the focus here is on thematic and contextual aspects. Such a focus, however, allows for insightful discussion of, for example, humoral theory (in Cassie M. Miura's chapter on Burton) and more broadly of the human faculties (in N. Amos Rothschild's chapter on Milton) and their relation to sleep.

The individual chapters frequently offer first-rate scholarship, but there are some, perhaps inevitable, problems with the thematic unity of the volume. The selection of texts can appear somewhat random, and the focus on canonical material means that some of the Renaissance texts that most insistently thematize sleep—Lyly's *Endymion* or Nashe's *The Terrors of the Night* come to mind—are neglected. As noted, the section named "Sleep, Ethics, and Embodied Form in Early Modern Drama" is strictly focused on Shakespeare, which raises questions on general applicability. Various themes are addressed, often fascinatingly so, in individual contributions: for example, the question of gendered sleep is brought up in some chapters but is not flagged as a thematic interest. The time span of the volume, moreover, suggests the question of whether notions of sleep changed over time, but the emphasis on material before 1650 (with *Paradise Lost* as the primary exception) obviously does not allow for much consideration of this. And, as previously stated, the promised attention to form clearly varies between the chapters; in the end, this concept seems somewhat unconvincing as a structuring device for the book. Despite these reservations, *Forming Sleep* offers a rich, wide-ranging set of perspectives on a field that still merits much more scholarly attention.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2022.89

Nostalgia in Print and Performance, 1510–1613: Merry Worlds. Harriet Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xii + 240 pp. \$99.99.

In this compelling study, Harriet Phillips knowingly turns to the anachronistic concept of nostalgia to explain how the seemingly ubiquitous trope of the merry world—a pre-Reformation England inhabited by disguised kings, honest ploughmen, and mythical figures like Robin Hood—could serve contradictory purposes in commercial productions throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Through the lens of nostalgia, the past was transformed into a trope identified more by “the feelings it evoked” than “the exact contours” of the past it purported to portray, offering a memory of a flourishing, unified England that existed before the ruptures of the Reformation (40). As such, the merry world functioned as an ahistorical construct invoked both by Catholics lamenting the Reformation and Protestants harkening back to a “reformist native tradition” (2). Tracing the construct of the merry world as it moves from polemic