

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Pugh, Tison. On the Queerness of Early English Drama: Sex in the Subjunctive

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Volume 44, Number 2, Spring 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082725ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37554>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Stanivukovic, G. (2021). Review of [Pugh, Tison. On the Queerness of Early English Drama: Sex in the Subjunctive]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(2), 268–270. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37554>

met with admiration, while the more shy or uneducated in courtly ways, or those who, like Queen Lovisa Ulrika (1720–1782), “dared to challenge political realities,” could find it harder to fit in (242).

The structure of the rich study is logical and reader friendly. However, at times the author moves too quickly through his many examples and examined time periods. The queens and princesses and their courtly entourage sweep by at high speed, which at times makes it difficult to follow the analysis. Consequently, the discussions in some sections stay at a general level instead of going deep into the exciting material. However, an impressively extensive archival research lies behind this study, and it truly takes off in the sections discussing individual women, be it from the perspective of queens such as Christina (1626–89) or Ulrika Eleonora (1688–1741), or from their trusted chamber maids. Certainly, the latter is far less researched, not least in a Swedish context. Thus, to conclude, the study displays a vast knowledge of the intricate early modern courtly life and showcases much material that previously has been overlooked. *Women at the Early Modern Swedish Court: Power, Risk, and Opportunity* paints a fascinating picture of early modern Swedish court through the lens of women’s agency, voices, and challenges.

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<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37553>

### **Pugh, Tison.**

#### ***On the Queerness of Early English Drama: Sex in the Subjunctive.***

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. Pp. 256. ISBN 978-1-4875-0874-6 (Hardcover) \$65.

The historiography of queer sexuality and desire in early modern drama has been enriched by the publication of this well-researched and original book. Pugh’s monograph is concerned with exploring the least systematically examined pre-modern plays from the perspective of queer criticism, and in this sense his book fills a big lacuna in queer early modern scholarship. The book covers the period between the fourteenth century and the second half of the sixteenth, and interprets in detail both male and female homosexual desire

represented in liturgical drama, morality plays, interludes, and the mystery plays from the York Corpus Christi cycle. The book's other strong features lie in the author's attentiveness to lexical detail, and in the skilful balancing of historical and cultural surveys with fine-grained close analysis.

The idea for "a subjunctive theory of dramatic queerness" (21) is rooted in grammar, specifically in the subjunctive mood which indicates behaviours that are desired rather than an actualized experience, as the author argues. Against this general frame of the argument, semantic analyses of the words whose meanings seem lost to us or that are culturally and historically specific ground this book in the historical philology of queerness as well. For instance, the pages on queer slang, or those devoted to an analysis of "a lexicon of queer brotherhood" (51), make significant contributions to the philological study of queerness. Most queer drama of the early modern period can be subsumed under the useful theory of subjunctive queerness, because critics mostly recover queerness from a paucity of material evidence and from a linguistically opaque language. In this sense, queer critics often work "in the moment of wondering if what one just saw was really as queer as one might think" (23). This perceptive and helpful critical starting point has produced a plethora of engaging, lucid, and original interpretations.

In the theoretical chapter that frames the book's argument, the author illuminates "four clusters of potential queerness" (23): scopophilia, dialogue, characters, and performance. In theatre, these clusters overlap with each other; therefore, in the chapters that follow the theoretical section of the book, the reader will find numerous examples of engaging close analysis that reveal the blurred boundary between these clusters, clusters which are neatly and clearly explained and cogently illustrated in four short sections.

The part of the book devoted to critical readings of individual texts begins with a chapter about the York Corpus Christi Plays. The analysis focuses on the interpretation of the queerness of the biblical scenes staged in this cycle, especially "Jewish genders" (72), in relation to cross-dressing, effeminacy, cuckoldry, promiscuity, and expressions of queerness that move away from the main biblical story. The morality drama about salvation, *Mankind*, is the subject of an engrossing chapter about queer allegory within the play's narrative about the excremental. Pugh makes a persuasive case about two "conflicting desires" (107) subtending the allegory of excrement: sinfulness and humorous pleasures. The chapter that examines John Bale's five interludes is especially

noteworthy for its nuanced analysis of the multivalent term “sodomy.” The author is especially good at uncovering a rich sexualized vocabulary of eroticized transgressions in “eroticized kinship” (136). The last analytical chapter is devoted to an exploration of camp in Sir David Lyndsay’s *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, a medieval allegory influenced by Continental sources, written during the Scottish Reformation. The cross-gendering of stage roles, hermaphroditism, erotic gaze, intersexed bodies—these are carnivalesque expressions of sexual and erotic performances and sensualities captured by the term “camp” in this chapter. Throughout the book, the author makes a concerted effort to relate historiography and literary analysis to drama in performance. The book ends with a reminder that to know more about the structures of queerness in pre-Renaissance plays means also to sharpen our perspective about the evolution of the dramatic discourse of queerness in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. As Pugh writes: “If we reconfigure our perspective on these [English medieval] plays [...] viewing their tendency to preach to the converted as an appropriate, if not preferred, rhetorical circumstance during their period of production and thus as, if not precisely an advantage, not a detriment, their unique contributions come into sharper focus” (180).

This book has secured a place among the monographs that have shaped the field of early modern queer historiography and drama. The author writes accessibly, which will appeal not just to students but to all readers. The book will be of use to specialists in medieval and early modern drama, literature, and theatre; to critics of drama and performance history more generally; to theatre historians and queer theorists, and to social and cultural historians.

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<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37554>