

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Mullaney, Steven. The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare

Glenn Clark

Volume 39, numéro 2, printemps 2016

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086564ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26874>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Clark, G. (2016). Compte rendu de [Mullaney, Steven. The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 39(2), 206–209. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26874>

Elizabethan poets, Moore claims, the performative nature of Castiglione's work was viewed with significantly more cynicism than was felt by Ercilla and his contemporaries.

As is typical of a work of literary theory, Moore's work is laden with theoretical concepts and jargon that make *Love, War, and the Classical Tradition* a thought-provoking but heavy read. His attempts to place the work of each author within a historical and literary context provide an example of how deeply scholars can probe their sources. Readers will likely be envious of the manner in which Moore is able to knit together the poems and the events in the authors' lives. However, the study focuses only on limited excerpts of the texts of these two epic poems, which naturally draws a little skepticism at the breadth of Moore's conclusions.

AARON TAYLOR MIEDEMA

York University

### **Mullaney, Steven.**

#### ***The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare.***

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pp. x, 231. ISBN 978-0-226-54763-3 (hardcover) US\$35.

In his highly influential *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England*, Steven Mullaney argued that the relative freedom of the Shakespearean theatre from conventional ideology was grounded in its location in the liberties and suburbs of London. In his new book, Mullaney's focus shifts to the interiors of the late-Elizabethan amphitheatres. He offers a rewarding analysis of ways in which plays including *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and Shakespeare's early histories refract their alienated cultural conditions as they make the theatre itself into an agent in a critical public sphere.

The book opens with a gripping meditation on the significance of the Edwardian purging of the great charnel of St. Paul's Cathedral. For Mullaney, the purge serves as an emblem of traumatizing Reformist efforts to sever their present from their past, but which also conditioned a theatre that helped Elizabethans grasp the processes and manage the consequences of that

emotional trauma. There follows a lengthy introductory chapter that theorizes a “collective self” and argues that effective ideology structures collective feeling. In the social and affective conditions of post-Reformation England, in which subjects could be sure of neither “what to believe” nor “how to feel,” new affective technologies emerged in order to engage and prompt reaction to widely-shared uncertainties (16). Theatre, in particular, allowed structures of feeling to come “out of solution” and exposed collective and individual self-division (40).

Chapter 1 opens with a critique of both mimetic and humoral approaches to the phenomenology of emotion. The author prefers a theory of emotion as constituted and experienced in the distributed and dialectical reception of stories across a social body. The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to demonstrating the generation of “affective irony” for and among the amphitheatres’ unsettled and self-divided audiences. For Mullaney, irony “marks a range of available alternatives by marking one possible meaning as exactly not what is meant, not what should be thought or felt” (74). The analyses of dramatic ironies in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *The Merchant of Venice* are deeply illuminating. Mullaney argues that through distancing emotional effects including metatheatricality and the exploitation of amphitheatre architecture the plays generate awareness of multiple and contradictory points-of-view. Spectators gain a profitably distracted apprehension of the equally incongruous and unsettling emotional responses of other spectators. What would be the effect, Mullaney asks, if one spectator perceived another spectator’s embodied discomfort at the punishment of Shylock? Ultimately, amphitheatre drama used shared emotional irresolutions to promote “perspectival ways of thinking with and through performance that were [...] remarkably interactive and open-ended” (92–93).

Chapter 2 hypothesizes a kind of trauma to collective historical consciousness which manifests itself in what Mullaney calls “structural amnesia,” a forgetting haunted by trace memories of a lost imagined community. While Shakespeare’s First Tetralogy reinforces orthodox Tudor nationalism, it also generates archaisms that allow the audience to remember the trauma of enforced forgetting. As the plays scatter core conceptual components of medieval reality, they thematize the vanishing of community as “indivisible, compound or corporate entity,” and reveal the failure of the past to become present (122). The plays generate an ironic, distanced experience of history in which there is no stable or privileged perspective. The chapter climaxes with a reflection

on Richard of Gloucester's own climactic moments near the end of *Richard III*, in which he mistakes the ghosts of his victims for his own individualized interiority. Mullaney suggests that such a misapprehension of the real may help consolidate its audience's "understanding of the modern as a radical form of misrecognition" (139). He further argues that the aporias at the heart of these plays allow their audiences the opportunity to collaborate in the making of meaning and the assessment of feeling.

The final chapter argues that critical and distancing amphitheatre performance ought to be thought of as a material commodity in publication, and consequently that the players and audiences of Shakespearean theatre constituted an early modern public sphere. The argument turns on Mullaney's inspired reading of Jürgen Habermas's unrecognized reliance on precisely the sort of perspectival "intersubjective transaction" Mullaney has shown to be facilitated by amphitheatre performance (156). The book then closes with a brief meditation on Hamlet's mourning with and through Yorick's skull as an epitome of the Elizabethan experience of the self-divided subject formed socially and collaboratively, as it would be, the author implies, while watching *Hamlet*.

*The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* is an innovative and compelling contribution to Elizabethan dramatic interpretation, theatre theory, and cultural critique. It might profitably be read alongside studies that demonstrate the plural and often contrary responses to Elizabethan theatre more empirically, such as Charles Whitney's *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*. Mullaney's dialectical method—in which the significance of transitions from chapter to chapter and within chapters is allowed to develop gradually—requires patience of readers. The author's introductory gesture to "fuzzy logic" may feel like a frustratingly unanswerable defense against critiques of conceptual haziness. However, the dialectical method also helps reinforce the book's central historical premise that the alienating trauma of the Reformation must be seen, paradoxically, as a primary condition for a theatre that enables critical and perspectival self-consciousness. *The Reformation of Emotions* represents an inspiring and methodologically appropriate synthesis of many critical perspectives. Nonetheless, its emphasis on the traumatic uncertainty of post-Reformation life as a condition of perspectival subjectivity seems somewhat disengaged from study of the Reformation as an agent of interiority through self-scrutiny. Conversely, Mullaney's argument might be seen to leave

a misleading impression of the Reformation as *the* moment of critical privation, as if its medieval past were not also constituted through a variety of crises and dislocations. In the end, Mullaney's book offers a powerful account of an Elizabethan amphitheatre technology that institutionalized the production of private perspectives in public.

GLENN CLARK

University of Manitoba

**Netzley, Ryan.**

*Lyric Apocalypse: Milton, Marvell, and the Nature of Events.*

New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. Pp. x, 269. ISBN 978-0-8232-6347-9 (hardcover) \$45.

It seems perversely appropriate to begin a review of this book with its ending. In the final section of *Lyric Apocalypse*, Netzley makes explicit the goal toward which the book has carefully been working all along. On the final pages we see that the higher purpose of Netzley's excellent close readings of Milton's and Marvell's lyric poems is nothing less than liberty from the grand apocalyptic illusions of contemporary society. Reading the apocalyptic lyrics of Milton and Marvell teaches twenty-first-century readers "what it is like to be free in the present, as opposed to imagining freedom as a prospective, deferred accomplishment" (205). Whether it is liberal humanism, western democracy, or the American Dream, people are socially conditioned to follow individual and collective utopian narratives. Netzley has argued throughout the book that to read Milton's and Marvell's lyric poems is to experience the force of the present moment, rather than the promise of future fulfilment, as the impetus for renewal. In a fitting paradox, Netzley's conclusion turns this experience of immanence into a transcendent good for individual readers, for the practice of literary criticism, for institutions of higher learning, and for society at large.

For Netzley's thesis to be persuasive, of course, his reading of the poems has to be spot-on. And it is. First, Netzley is persuasive in making the case that Milton's and Marvell's lyrics are immediate aesthetic events rather than promissory notes with future political realization. In the chapter on Milton's sonnets, for instance, Netzley demonstrates the prevalence of parataxis rather