

KENDRICK, Christopher — *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth in Renaissance England*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. viii, 382.

Christopher Kendrick's study of utopia in Renaissance England begins with an observation about the relation between genre and context. Utopias "thrive", according to Kendrick, "when there is a strong sense of entrenched, extensively damaging contradiction on the one hand, and of alternative social possibilities on the other" (p. 6). This observation sets the tone for the volume, which is at heart an analysis of English Renaissance utopias as responses to the socio-economic contradictions of Tudor England. In the essays that follow, Kendrick develops the thesis that "(Renaissance) utopia bespeaks, and is tailored to provoke recognition of and reflection upon, a certain kind of contradiction, contradiction determined by (archaic) uneven development" (p. 7). More concretely, Kendrick argues that English Renaissance utopias responded to "the impasse of feudal society, and either to the nascence of capitalism or the emergence of the absolutist state" (p. 6). Kendrick pursues this thesis through a series of sophisticated literary analyses of modern utopias by Morris, Fourier, and Marx, and Renaissance works by More, Rabelais, Starkey, Smith, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Nashe, and Bacon.

One of Kendrick's main arguments concerns the relationship posited in the book's title among utopia, carnival, and commonwealth. While scholars like J. C. Davis have emphasized the importance of distinguishing these genres from each other, Kendrick emphasizes their generic and contextual connections. Kendrick argues, for example, that utopia and carnival had a "peculiarly vexed and antagonistic mutual presupposition" (p. 74). Readers of More's *Utopia* would have recognized Carnival (or more precisely, Cokaygne) as a source: More foregrounded carnivalesque themes of consumption and uneven distribution and presented the Utopian state as a realization of Carnival's "practico-collective morality". Utopia shared one of its key characteristics with Carnival, a sense of "ontological uncanniness — the sense that the fantasied place is here and yet impossible" (p. 78). The relationship of these genres was vexed and antagonistic, however, because Utopia took the world of Carnival to its "impossible logical end" (p. 74), negating the socio-economic contradictions that drove Carnival. Kendrick makes a similar argument regarding utopia's "filiation" with commonwealth literature. The full title of More's *Utopia*, after all, was *Concerning the True Commonwealth and the Island of Utopia*, and Kendrick argues that utopia had a "dependence on the idea of the commonweal" (p. 113). While commonwealth writings like Starkey's *Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset* and Smith's *Discourse of the Commonweal* were not "repressed utopias" and indeed were "expressly anti-utopian", Kendrick argues that the power of More's utopian communism as a solution to the problems besetting the commonwealth forced them to "conjure with utopia" and even to "disclose utopian moments". While Kendrick's explanation of these utopian moments in Starkey and Smith's dialogues is not always clear, his analysis of commonwealth literature provides an important corrective to traditional interpretations of the genre as inherently conservative. One of the paradoxes of commonwealth thought was that it was quite radical — to promote conservative notions of the social hierarchy

and economic justice at a time when those values were ceasing to animate English society.

Class also plays an important role in Kendrick's analyses, because he argues that Renaissance utopias projected a "class wish, usually some sort of smallholder's wish" (p. 28) that responded to the contradictions inherent to the uneven development of Renaissance England. More's *Utopia* allied humanist literary culture with the smallholder class, and his "Utopian communism represented a fantastic solution to the problem of how this smallholding class could assert its own interests, and affirm its virtual metaphysical solidarity, in the face of absolutism and emergent capitalism"; indeed, Kendrick goes so far as to argue that this is evidence that "humanists' profoundest representative relation, their elective affinity, was — *not* with the court or aristocracy, as is usually assumed, and for which there is naturally an abundance of positive evidence — but with the diffuse but powerful class of smallholders, from which most humanists incidentally hailed" (p. 225). Moving forward chronologically, Kendrick argues that the Doctor in Smith's *Dialogue* discovers a new capitalist class by showing that seemingly opposed estates were united as currency-users in the face of coinage devaluation, reacting both against More's paradoxical dissolution of the middle class into Utopian communism and the 1549 rebels' conflictual account of the relation between the estates. Class is of greatest importance in Kendrick's final essay on Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, in which he argues that the utopian Salomon's House was itself "a desire for new kind of class being", a "state-industrial" class of researchers who would drive the scientific work of the house. Returning full circle, Kendrick states, "From the perspective of generic history, More's original Utopian fantasy of smallholding solidarity is winnowed and replaced, in *The New Atlantis*, by a no less urgent, but more specialized, hallucination, that of an independent intellectual *noblesse de robe*" (pp. 308–309).

It is impossible in this space to do justice to the full complexity of Kendrick's essays, and each contains many valuable observations. A few reservations must be registered in conclusion, however. Kendrick writes with great theoretical sophistication, and, while this yields new insights into well-worn texts, his heavy use of critical theory jargon comes at a cost to clarity, especially for readers accustomed to a different scholarly vernacular. More substantively, Kendrick's interpretation of Renaissance utopia relies on assumptions about "uneven development", "emergent absolutism", and "nascent agrarian capitalism" in Tudor England that are matters of contentious debate among historians of the period and will not meet with universal acceptance. Finally, Kendrick's interpretations of Renaissance utopias relentlessly emphasize socio-economic explanations; indeed, this is a strength of the book, but it also comes at the cost of situating these utopias more broadly within the intellectual history of early modern England. Many such studies exist, however, and Kendrick's dazzling study of utopia, carnival, and commonwealth in Renaissance England offers valuable new interpretations and makes an important contribution to the cultural history of Renaissance England.

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