Christopher Kendrick. *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth in Renaissance England*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. 382 pp. $85.00/£55.00.

One of the main achievements of Christopher Kendrick's new book is that it moves us beyond the impasse of late twentieth-century criticism that was content to reinforce a false binary between utopia and dystopia. At the same time, Kendrick shares with many intellectuals on the Left an impatience with Marxism's outward rejection of utopia. He shares with his mentor and advisor Fredric Jameson an insistence on the multiple traditions of utopian thinking within Marxism itself, including Ernst Bloch's ideal of hope, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical thinking that ruptures a conventional bourgeois narrative of history, and the Frankfurt School's concept of "strong memory" that gives aesthetic texts revolutionary power. Jameson himself goes so far to suggest that "*all* class consciousness"—not just the ideology of the ruling classes—is "in its very nature Utopian."[1] Kendrick attends more to the political ambiguities of utopia. He emphasizes that the utopian genre is necessarily bounded by history. Utopian texts may function on some level as thought experiments, but these experiments are founded in historically determined contradictions. Such contradictions ultimately remind us of the "*impossibility* of sketching a consequent vision of social happiness whole"—or, as Kendrick puts it in more colloquial (and, again, Jamesonian) terms, remind us that "thought in fact is not free" (10).

Kendrick insists that Marxism has depended on utopian thinking all along. He locates in works like Marx's essay on the Paris Commune a particular type of utopia, one that acknowledges the "necessary and salient utopian dimension" of class struggle (24). Kendrick actually regards Marx's stated anti-utopianism as a characteristically utopian response, one that helped him and others to define abstractions like "mode of production" and "working class" which were so essential to his vision of the future. It is in the tradition of utopian fiction itself, beginning with Thomas More's *Utopia*, that Kendrick locates a notion of history as both progressive and epochal. Kendrick's hefty task in *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth* is to trace in detail the origins and implications of such contradictions, not just in obvious places such as More but in a constellation of historically connected texts in the Renaissance, including Rabelais's *Pantagruel* and

1 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 287 (emphasis in the original), 289.

Gargantua, the "commonwealth" tracts of Thomas Starkey and Thomas Smith, Thomas Nashe's *Piers Penniless* and *Nashes Lenten Stuffe*, and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*. Kendrick's resulting work of scholarship offers complex arguments and detailed readings of interrelated texts, something of a luxury for the reader at a time when academic presses (at least in the U.S.) seem to be taking their cues from Disney and Viacom in subordinating all aspects of intellectual production to the principle of profit maximization.

Following Ernest Mandel's Trotskyist theory of late capitalism, Kendrick locates a key source of contradiction within Renaissance utopias in the historical process of "uneven development," which Marx defined as the overlap between modes of production manifested in the disparity between economic and social power of the ascending yeoman class. Kendrick's definition of uneven development (which he labels "archaic") includes a specific historical process by which a centralized Tudor monarchy was both motivated and hampered by nascent capitalism (83), as well as a more general sense of the relativity of social forms. Far from reducing the works at hand to so many proto-Marxist manifestos, Kendrick uses the historical genre of utopia as a way to interrogate Marxism itself. He provocatively suggests that utopia itself "sketches the limits of a Marxist politics by foregrounding the difficult question of (especially working-class) culture and consciousness" (17). In the process, he embraces Ernest Bloch's assimilation of Marxism and utopia and rejects Louis Marin's arguments for a break between them (18). In his original readings of More, Starkey, Smith, Nashe, and others, Kendrick tries to retain the power of utopian fiction to remain situated in the "real" over and against Marin's restriction of utopia to a merely signifying practice.

Kendrick defines utopian literature in terms of two enabling discursive conditions: commonwealth literature and Carnival. Commonwealth literature grew up in the shadow of More's *Utopia* and took a more practical, legal position toward many of the social problems outlined by More and other humanists. Kendrick shows how key commonwealth texts like Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset* (c. 1529–33) and Sir Thomas Smith's *Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England* (1549) both rewrite Book I of More's *Utopia* in an attempt to legislate the communal values associated with carnival and a vanishing feudal countryside. Where More regards private property as the most dangerous threat to commonwealth ideals, Starkey focuses on hereditary monarchy and Smith targets currency devaluation. Focusing on socio-economic issues, this commonwealth literature puts a conservative face on its radical body

because it longs for the social cohesion of a vanishing feudal order while advocating radical new restraints to be enacted by an absolutist monarchy. Where More produces a picture of a humanistically ideal society, Starkey and Smith articulate a method of practical action mediated by the state. In short, Starkey and Smith both reject utopia in favour of practical reform (134). From a historical perspective, Kendrick uses this response to demonstrate how utopia comes after Carnival but before the elaboration of the commonwealth idea.

Drawing on the work of Bakhtin and Michael Bristol, Kendrick also tracks the important associations between utopia and Carnival. Kendrick identifies a utopian kernel within carnivalesque texts—carnival revels in the grotesque body and mocks ruling-class customs and pretensions, unleashing what Kendrick calls "utopian desire" in the process, although utopian fantasies are usually more disciplined and rational (208). Kendrick usefully modifies Bakhtin by situating Rabelais's *Four Books* in relation to More; he also demonstrates how Bristol overlooks the blend of utopian and carnivalesque elements in Marlowe and Shakespeare. Kendrick's discussion of carnival emerges most fully in his discussion of Renaissance drama, where he notes that carnival can be found in the endemic rioting of the period and where he suggests more generally that "literary practices of the Carnivalesque," especially the prose of the sixteenth century, "mobilize the tropes of Carnival in more totalizing or utopian ways" (216).

Given Kendrick's dialectical mode of analysis, it is not surprising to learn that Carnival is both anti-utopian and constitutive of utopian thought in *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth*. Thus we read that Thomas More "silently presents Utopia as the negation of Carnival, as its impossible logical end" (74) and that Rabelais abstracts and gentrifies the carnival and its associated fantasy of Cokaygne in his grotesque prose romances. The Abbey of Theleme episode at the end of Rabelais's *Gargantua* becomes an anti-monastery in the shape of a monastery that allows commoners to both reject aristocratic ideologies of birth and to inhabit, as a fantasy, aristocratic forms of power. In the process, "Rabelais returns Utopia to its disavowed origins, subjecting it to specifically carnivalesque animus" (111). This conclusion foregrounds the specific class function of the carnivalesque and utopian modes of literary production: Carnival is a lower-class fantasy, while utopia and its model of moderation pleases the "ideals of the yeomanry and master craftsmen and retail traders—what the times had to offer in the way of a respectable middle class" (82). Yet, as many historians would argue, it is very difficult to locate such a "respectable middle class" in early modern England. Unfortunately, Kendrick solves the

problem of "class" in the English Renaissance by ignoring it altogether. The reader waits in vain for tangible evidence of the smallholders whose class fantasy More's *Utopia* supposedly fulfills. Kendrick's focus on theoretical problematics within the texts at hand sometimes comes at the expense of the historical and material forces at work in the period.

An exception to this rule can be found in Kendrick's more fully historicized discussion of Nashe. Kendrick reveals how Nashe's *Lenten Stuffe: The Praise of the Red Herrynge* carnivalizes the genre of the praise of a city (*laudatio urbis*), praising the red herring of Yarmouth as a kind of money for everyman that lowers the cost of living and aids poor families (256). Nashe's Yarmouth becomes a "virtually utopian place" that nevertheless personifies the carnivalesque (258–59). His chapter on Bacon's *New Atlantis* is equally revelatory. Kendrick reads Bacon's text as a failed technological utopia that uses the model of the guild to construct a new and paradoxical state-industrial class. *The New Atlantis* is a utopia of the forces of production which also reveals More's *Utopia* to have been a utopia of the relations of production (289). Thus the House of Salomon founds scientific inquiry as part of a larger strategy of strengthening local institutions or guilds from state control.

The weakest chapter of the book addresses Renaissance drama, which Kendrick awkwardly entitles "Sprung Desire and Groups in Flux: On the Politics of the Utopian Impulse in Marlowe and Shakespeare." Here the author is content with broad generalizations that cannot account for the political and cultural complexities of the Renaissance stage. He offers little in the way of new readings of familiar plays. Beginning with the observation that the numerous and contradictory political readings of Shakespeare indicate something "peculiarly available and detachable" (199) in his plays, Kendrick's extension of this claim into an analogy between drama and a universal marketplace where one can buy any goods one wants is unwarranted. Perhaps the sheer intellectual labour of theorizing the multivalent playtexts of the Elizabethan stage as a "utopian machine" (199) induces such abstractions as the phrase in the title, "groups-in-flux," and the following description of Marlowe's protagonists in *Edward II, Dr. Faustus,* and *The Jew of Malta*: "'Declassment' is pervasive, and offers the most direct and positivistically plausible explanation for the springing of passion into desire's boundless intensity. Absolute desire appears most cogently and simply as the expression of declassed popularity" (223). Kendrick tries to construct a general model of the politics of Renaissance drama, but he can only muster a series of reductive generalizations about the "manifest political ambivalence" of the plays in question (212).

It is understandable why Kendrick must focus on Renaissance drama, given his interest in Carnival. But he could do much more to demonstrate the important ways that commonwealth ideologies and utopian concepts intersect with carnivalesque practices on the Shakespearean stage. There is nevertheless something about his overreaching, like that of Marlowe's own stage heroes, that sustains the reader's interest until the very end. Kendrick's theoretical acuity and originality of thought shine through *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth in Renaissance England* on almost every page, even if he slips momentarily into abstraction or when a (somewhat too common) typo throws a wrench into his already elliptical prose. This work proves equal in intellectual weight and ambition to many of its influences, including the work of Louis Marin, Richard Halpern, Fredric Jameson, and Raymond Williams. It deserves to share shelf space with these authors as an account of utopian politics and literature.

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Karen Bamford and Alexander Leggatt, eds. *Approaches to Teaching English Renaissance Drama*. New York: Modern Language Association, 2002.

For those of us who have taught courses in non-Shakespearean Renaissance drama, the challenges are familiar, such as the perceived need to situate every play in terms of Shakespeare, the unfamiliarity of the language and social world portrayed, the inexplicable motivations of the characters, and the relative paucity of film/stage versions for supplementary viewing. This book is part of the Approaches to Teaching World Literature series published by the Modern Language Association under the general editorship of Joseph Gibaldi, with the purpose of being a "sourcebook of material, information, and ideas on teaching the subject of the volume to undergraduates" (Preface). This welcome addition to the series deals with English Renaissance drama, giving a variety of classroom approaches in twenty-eight essays that focus on a range of plays by dramatists such as Jonson, Marlowe, Kyd, Webster, Cary, and Middleton.

In preparation for this volume, Bamford and Leggatt conducted a survey in which "instructors were asked to report on the courses in which they teach Renaissance drama, the challenges and opportunities it presents, and the critical approaches they have found useful" (3). Leggatt's brief overview