

Anderson, Thomas P., and Ryan Netzley, eds. *Acts of Reading: Interpretation, Reading Practices, and the Idea of the Book in John Foxe's Actes and Monuments*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2009. 306 pp. \$65.00.

For a volume of essays featuring the contention that novelistic (continuous) reading is as backwards as “medieval Christianity” (65), Thomas P. Anderson and Ryan Netzley’s collection *Acts of Reading* makes for a worthwhile cover-to-cover read. In the preface, the editors affiliate themselves with “reflexive materialism” (14), an approach that engages the question “is there a transaction [when one reads Foxe] between reader and author or reader and book?” (18). From the vantage point of the collection as a whole, the answer is “both of the above.” Of course, as is usually the case with collected volumes these days, it would be misleading to suggest that *Acts of Reading* delves comprehensively into the complexities of reflexive materialism. The approaches and concerns of the contributors vary widely enough that *Acts of Reading* succeeds more at providing breadth than it does depth. That fact should come as no surprise. A number of the contributors refer in their essays to the general paucity of Foxe scholarship, thereby leaving them with an abundance of unexamined topics to explore.

Anderson and Netzley have organized the volume into three sections. The first section, “Reading Digitally,” offers a fascinating, balanced discussion of how the ongoing transition from physical to digital books might impact the future of Foxe scholarship. Of the three units, this first one coheres most overtly. Two scholars, Anderson and Richard Cunningham, stress the significance of the 2006 *Variorum Edition* of *Actes and Monuments*. Anderson believes Foxe intuitively foresaw that the readers of his *Actes and Monuments* might participate over time in “the construction of the text’s meaning and, more radically, in the reconstruction of its materiality” (44), both tasks made feasible through the publication of an online edition. In his essay, Cunningham argues that electronic hypertexts, like the *Variorum Edition*, encourage us to suspend our linear, novelistic reading habits in favor of the discontinuous reading style of Foxe’s day.

The next two essays seek to temper enthusiasm by pointing out the limitations of digital editions. Erin Kelly’s fascinating essay on Foxe’s *Kalendar of Martyrs* (as opposed to the Catholic *Kalendar of Saints*) points out that the *Variorum Edition* does not currently allow scholars to compare alternative sets of calendars, thus depriving them the opportunity to “read radially” a number of crucial visual dimensions of *Actes and Monuments* (81). Specifically, Kelly demonstrates how Foxe coded red ink to signify the blood of Protestant martyrs. Mark Rankin’s essay on illustration reinforces Kelly’s argument. Although Rankin grants that the *Variorum Edition* format is superior to anything available on CD-ROM, it unfortunately does not allow scholars to analyze the varied, nuanced correspondences between text and illustration in Foxe’s book.

Section two, “Rereading and Rewriting Foxe in Early Modernity,” is the largest of the three units and the loosest one from an organizational standpoint. Although there are occasional resonances among the five essays of this section—for example, John King and Susannah Monta both discuss how *Actes and Monuments* reached a wider variety of readers than one would expect from such a polemical work—Anderson and Netzley seem to have correctly prioritized quality of argument over coherence of subject matter. As a result, with the exception of Kelly’s essay in section one, section two boasts the strongest material of the collection. The unit begins with John King’s thoroughly readable, fascinating description of Foxe’s various readerships. In this relatively brief essay, King chronicles how marginalized groups, such as Catholics and

women read Foxe as diligently as did power players of the time such as Francis Drake and the British clergy. King successfully presents *Actes and Monuments* as a heterocosm.

In her essay, Nova Myhill resuscitates the discussion of the visual elements of Foxe's work that Kelly and Rankin introduced in unit one. In particular, Myhill analyzes a table from *Actes and Monuments* depicting the torture and execution of martyrs in the primitive church. She discusses the table's historical selectivity and its rhetorical purpose. Myhill persuasively concludes that the table functions as an "index" for the volume's enterprise as a whole (143). In the most readable essay of the collection, Susannah Monta utilizes the case of Catherine Parr, Duchess of Suffolk, to examine how Foxe attempted to "story" Providence in his work (156). Monta demonstrates how Foxe operated carefully within generic expectations to avoid exasperating intra-Protestant factionalism. Monta goes on to report how the Duchess's life inspired a variety of works from multiple perspectives after Foxe's death.

Following Monta's essay, Sarah Covington offers a remarkably sophisticated and compelling discussion of how Foxe represented the interrogation of martyrs in *Actes and Monuments*. After describing the record keeping protocols practiced by English tribunals of the time, Covington convincingly describes how Foxe fashioned trial testimony into performative play-texts that functioned as a "palimpsest of power" (183-84). In essence, Covington reveals how Foxe "imposes his own dominance" over the tribunals by revealing through them "a textual embodiment of God's unfolding plan" (184). Covington offers the trials of Anne Askew, Thomas Cranmer, and John Bale as evidence of how religious prosecutions in England operated equally within the realms of both law and theater. Covington's sweeping chapter is followed by Justin Pepperney's equally effective, yet considerably narrower, discussion of the image of hands in Foxe. Pepperney thoughtfully observes how the image of hands operates within *Actes and Monuments* as a metonym that "translates into the human potential for right and wrong because of its close link to individual and institutional agency" (212). Pepperney analyzes the way images of burning and severed hands (and legs) assisted Foxe in highlighting the spiritual transcendence of the Protestant martyrs by illustrating their composed responses to physical torment.

Section three, "Reading, Martyrology, and the Limits of Language" is the briefest unit of the collection, consisting of only two essays that have very little to do with one another. Liz Koblyk's begins the section with a perceptive discussion of the rhetorical value of rhetorical incompetence. Specifically, Koblyk points out that since persuasive rhetoric was closely associated with Papists, *Actes and Monuments* lionized instead the holy "implied community" of ineffectual speakers. According to Koblyk, Foxe understood that Papists would never accept the truth of Protestant rhetoric, no matter how effective it was, so what was the point? Although the martyrs could not effectively argue, Koblyk points out that they could effectively die, and Foxe's Protestant readers properly interpreted those deaths as testaments of truth. In fact, by correctly interpreting these deaths, readers could prove themselves to be members of God's elect. Netzley brings this satisfying collection to a close with a chapter on numbers. Describing Foxe's inexact method of calculations, Netzley examines how the number 294 came to operate as a fetish. But more importantly, he posits that the mere process and presence of mathematical calculation provided Foxe's readers with solace.

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