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Zlatar, Antoinina Bevan. Reformation Fictions: Polemical Protestant Dialogues in Elizabethan England

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Richardson's study is an imaginative and productive investigation of aspects central to Pieter Bruegel's work. In particular, its investigation of literary parallels in differing cultural milieus (the *Pléiade* and de Heere, Erasmus and Neo-Latin literature, the Dutch *Rederijkers*) is extremely useful and offers new insights into notions of vernacular art.

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Zlatar, Antoinina Bevan.
Reformation Fictions: Polemical Protestant Dialogues in Elizabethan England.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. x, 239. ISBN 978-0-19-960469-2 (hardcover) £60.

Describing her study as "an unashamedly interdisciplinary project, situated between cultural history and historicist literary criticism" (7), Antoinina Bevan Zlater surveys some twenty polemical Protestant dialogues published in Elizabethan England. These generically hybrid works, she argues, have rarely been read on their own terms, being dismissed on the one hand by literary critics as thinly fictionalized propaganda, and mined on the other hand by historians digging for evidence of Reformation thought. She therefore seeks to "rehabilitate" these dialogues as a group and as a genre, "for the first time giving them a literary, historicist, and, to a lesser extent, theological reading" (v).

A brief (nine-page) introduction—chapter 1—and even briefer (five-page) conclusion frame six relatively short chapters. Chapter 2 gives background to the polemical dialogue as a didactic genre anchored in a rhetorical conception of literature. Zlatar identifies some sources and analogues (sermons, catechisms, interludes) and notes the genre's characteristic if sporadic engagements with satire, topicality, colloquialism, theatricality, and fictive self-awareness. The foundational text in this account is Erasmus's *Colloquies*. Zlatar reserves discussion of the influence of earlier Reformation polemic until chapter 3, which notes formal and other continuities between Henrician, Edwardian, and Marian-era Protestant dialogues (including those by writers such as William Turner, Luke Shepherd, and John Bale) and their Continental Reformation

and medieval English sources and analogues. Zlatar observes that Elizabethan dialogues would abandon some of the tropes these earlier dialogues used to popularize their call to reform, but would continue to deploy others, such as the polemical opposition of the "benighted cleric versus enlightened layman" (60).

The treatment of Elizabethan dialogues proper begins with chapter 4, which offers a usefully sustained case study of the writings of John Véron, a French cleric who had lived in England since the late 1530s. In a series of dialogues published in 1561–62, Véron adapted polemic published by the Swiss Calvinist Pierre Viret in the 1540s and 1550s, in the process popularizing both the doctrinal content and the polemical modes of Continental Reform. Chapter 5 is more diffuse, addressing a cluster of anti-Catholic dialogues comprising works published in the early 1560s, the early and late 1580s, and 1600. While united in their effort to inculcate fear of "popery," each one of these texts, Zlatar acknowledges, responds to different religio-political circumstances. Chapter 6, titled "Puritans against the Bishops," opens with the deeply familiar narrative of the rise of "puritan" opposition to the Elizabethan Settlement, from the Act of Uniformity through the Vestments and Admonition controversies, the suppression of prophesyings under Archbishop Grindal, the appointment of Archbishop Whitgift, the subscription crisis, the 1586 Parliament, and the expected culmination in the Martin Marprelate controversy (1588–89), the high-water mark of radical "puritan" opposition. The works treated here follow the trajectory first traced by Edward Arber in the 1870s, from Anthony Gilby's *Pleasant dialogue* (1566) through John Udall to Job Throkmorton and associated Martinist and para-Martinist texts. Chapter 7 rounds out the study as a whole with two dialogues published in 1581 that promoted the benefits of a preaching clergy: George Gifford's *Countrie divinitie* and I.B.'s *A dialogue betweene a vertuous gentleman and a popish priest.* Their "down to earth" polemical mode, Zlatar concludes, is the one that would survive into the polemic and devotional literature of the seventeenth century, reappearing in works such as Arthur Dent's perennial favourite, *The plain mans path-way to Heaven.*

The best work here lies in the more substantial case studies: Véron in particular, but also Gifford and Gilby. But the too-brief introduction and conclusion point to some of the book's broader weaknesses: these framing discussions have the feel of an insufficiently revised thesis, and a thesis furthermore that claims to engage "historicist literary criticism" while ignoring almost all potentially relevant work by historicist literary critics published over the past two

decades. The survey of previous scholarship on polemical dialogues ignores the fact that polemical dialogues are a subset of polemic: the book simply does not mention any recent or even not-so-recent work on pamphlet warfare. Ritchie Kendall's *Drama of Dissent* (1986) covers everything said here about polemical theatricality. Joad Raymond's massive *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (2003) is not mentioned, nor is the work of any number of other scholars writing on this very popular subject. The Marprelate controversy is discussed without mention of the new edition (with substantial introduction) of the Marprelate tracts (2008), or of any scholarship whatever on the controversy published since Leland Carlson's monomaniacal 1981 attribution study. The introduction offers two unpublished Harvard theses from the 1960s and 1970s as the only full treatments of the polemical dialogue; yet nobody at Oxford (neither the PhD examiners Zlatar thanks nor her Oxford University Press editors) seems aware that John Benger's 1989 Oxford PhD thesis, "The Authority of Writer and Text in Radical Protestant Literature, 1540 to 1593" renders much of this monograph moot. Finally, Zlatar concludes with wistful speculations about the possible readers of these pamphlets, as if historicist literary criticism had not yet discovered either reading history or the history of the book; had not yet offered scores of studies that have provided new ways of asking as well as answering these kinds of questions. *Reformation Fictions* is a useful descriptive survey of a genre. But as an engagement with historicist literary criticism it is to a great extent written in a critical, theoretical, and methodological vacuum.

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