



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

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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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.

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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

than prolepsis as the rhetorical mode of the Miltonic sonnet. In contrast to the Petrarchan sonnet, whose form and content lean toward future resolution, the Miltonic sonnet serves by only standing and waiting in the present. Unlike his narrative poetry, Milton's lyric poetry offers a synchronic rather than diachronic activity with an immediate rather than anticipated effect. Marvell's resistance to closure, coupled with the famous ambiguity of his lyric poems, makes reading his poems an aesthetic activity of the present that is freed both from the *telos* of future fulfilment and from the tyranny of fixed meaning.

Second, Netzley is persuasive in demonstrating with close attention to the text that the political significance of the lyric poems lies in their commitment to the process in the present rather than to the person who embodies the political future, whether Royalist or Republican. In his reading of Marvell's Cromwell poems, for instance, Netzley argues that Marvell deliberately locates future hope more in the process of change than in the person of Cromwell. Netzley shows that the use of metonym and metaphor reveals Marvell's allergic reaction to the totalizing tendency of political ideology within a providentialist narrative. (Netzley here aligns garden-variety millenarian thinking with modern fascism, implying that the reader must be wary of this tendency in its contemporary forms, too.) To take another example, the apocalyptic force of Milton's *Lycidas* is not in bringing about the ruin of a corrupted clergy, but in asking the reader to imagine the liberating potential of the present.

In order for the book's argument to succeed, however, the reader must accept the post-structuralist definition of "apocalypse" that Netzley adopts in the introduction and follows throughout the book. In the introduction, Netzley dismisses philosophers and historians, from Hegel to Kosselleck, who construe "apocalypse" as a patterned movement toward a goal. Instead, Netzley adopts Gilles Deleuze's notion of an immanent force: it is an intransitive verb in the present tense, with no object to be realized in the future. In Netzley's words, "[i]mmanence believes in the possibility of transformative revelation in the present precisely because it does not preserve a goal or realm of unreachable impossibility toward which all ethical or political activity aims" (61). Netzley could have invoked Derrida's concept of "messianicity without messianism" as a way of describing the ethics of a post-structuralist apocalyptic model for Milton and Marvell. This book is intent on demonstrating that the Deleuzian immanent force is already at work in Milton and Marvell, who both use the forms of lyric poetry to reveal the positive aspect of present reality over the

remembrance of things past or the substance of things hoped for. Readers who prefer to treat “apocalypse” as a historically-conditioned phenomenon will have to account for the resistance to teleological futurity that Netzley identifies in Milton’s and Marvell’s lyric poems by other means.

The implications of Netzley’s argument about the lyric poems are intriguing both for reading other works by Milton and Marvell and for early modern literary studies generally. How does Milton’s and Marvell’s “lyric apocalypse” relate to the millenarian tendencies or political projects of their prose? How might Netzley’s reading of the lyric poems generate fresh readings of *Paradise Lost* or “Last Instructions to a Painter”? Do other lyrical poets of the period treat political events in a similarly a-teleological way? What is the relationship between historical context, aesthetic categories, and a philosophical construct such as “apocalypse”? In presenting Milton and Marvell as acting on an apocalyptic impulse, which differs from traditional interpretations of their lyric poems, Netzley is suggesting new ways by which they can liberate readers from the tyranny of outcome-based reading with only a view to the future.

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Nicholson, Catherine.

Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. Pp. 215. ISBN 978-0-8122-4558-5 (hardcover) \$55.

Catherine Nicholson’s study of the vernacular in early modern England, *Uncommon Tongues*, is a triumph: winsome and elegant prose, broad erudition, and an abiding attention to her central argument—that with dubious success a “barbarous” nation sought to import and imbibe old wine in new bottles, accommodating classical to native thought. Nicholson’s remit is the “failed experiment” of late sixteenth-century English eloquence—“failed” from later perspectives, like Samuel Johnson’s—as it marked not only nationhood but “the outer limits of vernacular decorum” (164–65). English writers found in the “fantasy” of eloquence “a potent justification for their efforts on behalf of the vernacular”: in ornament was armament; eloquence as an antidote to