Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne J. Connolly, eds., *Blake, Gender and Culture*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012. Pp. 242. £60. ISBN 9781848933040.

This volume represents the latest in a series of collections by Bruder and Connolly on the topic of Blake and sexuality and/or gender, a constellation that the editors refer to as Blake's 'hottest topics' (2). In particular, the introduction suggests that inquiries at the crossroads of history and sexuality will yield the boldest insights into Blake's work, given his participation in sexual cultures often bypassed in accounts of the development of sexual mores. One way to approach the varied offerings of this often quite strong collection, then, is to think of them in terms of their different ways of conducting historical research and crossing it with the study of sexuality.

On what might be called the historical recovery end of the spectrum are essays by Keri Davies and Martha Keith Schuchard, continuing their own excavation of the Moravian context of Blake's mother's religious life and its likely influence on Blake, particularly given the fact that Catherine Armitage Blake belonged to the group during the period known as the 'Sifting Time' (from about 1743 to 1750), when its leader, Count Zinzendorf, turned to 'bridal mysticism', which emphasizes Jesus's literal sexual union with believers and values human sexuality (heterosexuality, at least) as the earthly expression of that union. Essays by David Fallon and Elizabeth Bernath invoke history in terms of two discourses – philoprogenitive and botanical, respectively – which provide helpful contexts for understanding Blake's work. Beginning with the association of political revolution and sexual activity in *America*, Fallon suggests Blake's slight shift from the (usually republican) notion that increased population correlated with increased liberty, in his emphasis on the enhancement of physical pleasure rather than simply an increase in human reproduction. Bernath looks through a 'queer botanical lens' (112) at Erasmus Darwin's *Loves of the Plants* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to suggest that the botanizing in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* retains a queer cast from its connection to the other texts.

Luisa Calè and Bethan Stevens invoke the history of visual culture to cast new light on Blake. Calè reads Blake's extra-illustrations in Thomas Gray's poetry, undertaken for John Flaxman as a gift for his wife Ann, in the light of a letter of Ann's that touches on this work as well as many other classical and Renaissance sculptural forms. Stevens, beginning by establishing Edmund Burke's hegemonic distinction between the (masculine) sublime and the (feminine) beautiful, considers how Blake's illustrations to Robert Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil* refer to and undermine Burke's categories. For Stevens, the volume manifests a struggle between Thornton and Blake, in the editor's efforts to feminize, heterosexualize and prettify Blake's (often lost) designs by framing them in such a way as to shrink them. Mark Crosby and G.A. Rosso, in considering connections of Blake's texts to biblical texts, also touch on discourses contemporary with the poet. Crosby's discussion of Blake's depiction of the creation of Eve usefully complicates the currently dominant critical framework which suggests that Blake should be classed with the 'enthusiastic' radicalism of figures such as Richard Lee rather than 'respectable' radicals such as Thomas Paine. Rosso, in his discussion of the figure of Rahab and its connection to hermaphroditism, walks a fine line between acknowledging the sexist nature of some of Blake's imagery and conversely trying to read *through* that imagery to its historical referent, in a way that can present a more palatable reading of his texts.

Finally, the volume includes three essays which offer athletic readings of Blake works meriting the attention of any of his serious students. Peter Otto's 'Sex, Violence and the History of this World: Blake's Illustrations to the *Book of Enoch*' continues his practice of lovingly

detailed explications of Blake's graphic works. Here, Otto deploys Swedenborg's cosmology to suggest that Blake's sketches for illustrations to the Book of Enoch, an extrabiblical work that includes the earliest Jewish apocalypse, record his critique of the Swedish mystic's disciplinary account of proper sexuality. Catherine L. McClenahan's 'Changing the Sexual Garments: The Regeneration of Sexuality in *Jerusalem*' offers a subtle reading of two moments of sexual regeneration in that poem, in such an effective manner that the essay should become a point of reference for the many commentators on gender identity in Blake. The essay's persuasiveness stems from McClenahan's suggestion that gender regeneration in Blake arises in moments of gaps and incoherencies in gender definition, rather than in any heroic throwing off of restrictive notions of sex. Elizabeth Effinger's challenging essay on *The Book of Thel* puruses the poem's seeming setting in a realm of pre-existence to suggest that it explores 'intrauterine existence' (124) and a mode of subjectivizing characterized by partiality and co-emergence (as described in the post-Lacanian theory of Bracha Ettinger), rather than the clear cuts and monolithic subjectivities of Oedipal developmental accounts. If many historical approaches in this volume of essays serve to map Blake's works so as to locate them in a graspable way, Effinger's essay has the advantage of openness to what seems not fully graspable within a poem such as *Thel*.

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