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Jennifer Eun-Jung Row, *Queer Velocities: Time, Sex, and Biopower on the Early Modern Stage*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2022. xii + 224 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780810144712; \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780810144705.

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Jennifer Eun-Jung Row's *Queer Velocities* makes a compelling case for recognizing the queerness of French classical theater through its speeds and temporalities. This is a study about tempo and velocity, about deviant speeds and suspended time, about delays and hastening that, in Row's analysis of early modern French theater texts and debates, create sensations, sync intimacies, and, crucially, manage the individual experiences and collective possibilities of biopolitics. Marrying queer theory's interest in temporality to Sara Ahmed's phenomenological-inflected notion of orientation, Row defines queer velocities as directed tempos, orientation with motion, or in her words, "the sensation of slowness and fastness that directionally veers away from a normative telos," whether that telos be futurity, reproduction, or another kind of biopolitical, temporal, or sociosexual norm (p. 7).^[1] Row's central insight, the gift that *Queer Velocities* offers scholars who work with early modern texts and sexualities, is that velocity, as a "vector quantity...comprised of a magnitude (speed or slowness) and a direction," extends a critical infrastructure with which to describe and evaluate the "differential speeds" of relations, affects, and intimacies in ways that go beyond identity-based models of being (pp. 5-6). Row builds out this critical infrastructure across four chapters and a substantive conclusion that each connect historical, literary, and rhetorical analyses to scaffold an array of queer velocities in early modern plays: clashing speeds or synced tempos in Corneille (*Le Cid*, *Polyeucte*); delay and dilation in Racine (*Andromaque*, *Bérénice*); and, in an elegiac concluding analysis, the collapse of queer kinships and affinities with the emergence of new "temporal-racial categories" in Voltaire's Enlightenment tragedy *Zaïre* (p. 180). Early modern theater becomes a site for creating and managing a range of tempo-related sensations and intimacies within emerging, but not yet fixed, structures, practices, and technologies of normative temporal and sexual regimes.

Queer Velocities opens with a vivid reading of Isaac de Benserade's play *Iphis et Iante* that invokes the different temporalities at stake in Row's study: the experience of time for theater goes at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1630s Paris; the dramatic time of the play's dénouement held off as Iphis, the newly married husband, delays revealing her body to Iante, her wife, on their wedding night; the normative temporalities of marriage and reproduction detoured by Iphis's "deviant speed," body and gender; and Iphis's erotic delectation in delay (p. 4). Row does not tarry with *Iphis et Iante*, however, despite the play's new prominence as a key text (Benserade's play) and story (Ovid's myth) in early modern queer and trans studies.^[2] Rather, she directs the chapters of

Queer Velocities towards the heart of French classical theater, its canonical tragedies and literary debates. In so doing, Row recalibrates the orientation of queer studies in early modern French theater away from singular, starring texts and personalities (Benserade's *Iphis et Iante*, Choisy's *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*, Théophile de Viau's poetry and literary persona) to consider queer formations and affordances (the latter is a key term for Row) at work in the creation of the literary and theatrical norms that will be known as French neoclassicism. *Queer Velocities* thus offers a significant contribution to discussions in queer studies about normativity and anti-normativity: first, by its historicizing account of the dynamic processes and biopolitical stakes of "an early modern moment when temporal normativity—and antinormativity...was in the very process of coalescing" (p. 27); second, by its insistence on approaching debates around verisimilitude and morality in early modern theater not as regulatory aesthetic doctrines in the service of political order but, drawing on Caroline Levine, as creative "forms" that afford (shape, support, or limit) variations of intensities, tempos, and speeds within the rule or norm (pp. 44-46).

It's here, on the terrain of seemingly familiar plays (Row will make them feel wonderfully different) with which the literary and moral notions of *vraisemblance* and *bienséances* get hashed out by writers, critics, and scholars, that *Queer Velocities* makes its intervention. A first chapter on "The Queer Disunity of Time" in and around *Le Cid* brings vital energy to seventeenth-century debates around theatrical propriety (notably the famous *querelle du Cid*) by putting sex and bodies back into the discussion. In this context, Row's prompting that "we can understand that the *bienséances* are particularly concerned with sexuality and sensuality insofar as most of the regulations govern the respectability and representability of bodily practices and corporeal intensification, whether kissing or dying" (p. 38) is especially apt in the way that it centers the intimate, bodily urgency of the debates provoked by Corneille's brash handling of the developing doctrine of the theatrical unities of time, place, and action.

Row's study both engages with yet ultimately aims beyond the history of the legitimization of theater in seventeenth-century France and the literary institutions and doctrines that emerge and converge with Louis XIV's absolutism to ask larger (and more intimately insistent) questions about the kinds of relations and feelings that early modern theater supported and/or foreclosed: "Instead of only producing flashy operations of ideological control, the *querelle* (quarrel) and the development of the *bienséances* and the *règles classiques* also reveal and foment the subtle temporal control of bodies, desires, and life" (p. 40). Row's theorizing of the strictures of theatrical propriety and temporal unity as creative affordances recasts the history of French classical theater as a process of testing, modeling, and managing feelings (of time, intimacy, sensuality) both normative and divergent. *Queer Velocities* urges the pertinence of early modern theater as a Foucauldian *dispositif*, a device for examining and experiencing the "capillary management" of biopower through the vital forces of tempo and speed (pp. 37-44).

Expertly and vividly, Row engages the history of timekeeping and management that distinguishes the "special strangeness" of the early modern period generally and of seventeenth-century France particularly as a moment of unprecedented change in the technology, precision, and mobility of timekeeping (p. 11). Adding to the rich scholarship on early modern chronometries of subjectivity, productivity, or disciplinary control, Row uncovers "the sexual and affective dimension of temporal management" (p. 12). Time, for Row, is sexuality, while early modern theater is a site for experiencing, cultivating, and ordering (or not) temporal and sensual relations. Not only does time feel different in the early modern texts and contexts that Row

excavates, but what emerges in the elegant accretion of her readings is that time feels erotic; there is pleasure in rush or dilation, in drag or deferral. Row sets out to “enlarge our understanding of what ‘counts’ as queerness in the early modern period” (p. 7) and, in so doing, gathers a rich lexicon of temporalities, speeds, and synchronicities that expand our critical vocabulary of affect and relationality. And this expansion, in turn, has implications for how we read early modern tragedy.

I’m thinking notably of Row’s deployment of tempo and “the feelings that tempos can create” (p. 5) to describe and analyze not only characters and plot predicaments but affective attunements or discords as well. A musical term signifying “relative speed or rate of movement; pace; time,” (p.) tempo diagnoses the differentials that Row attends to in affective relations and intensities.[3] It invokes the embodied rhythms and (dis)harmonies that orchestrate individual and collective performances. Finally, tempo is at once prescriptive (think about the tempo indications on a musical score) and personal (my tempo differs from yours). For Row, tempo becomes a critical tool in assessing affect in texts. As feelings created by tempos, queer velocities are “the supplementary, wayward affects generated by sensations of rushing, haste, delay, and drag” (p. 5). Like Sianne Ngai’s valorization of tone as a literary or cultural object’s “global or organizing affect, its general disposition and orientation towards its audience and the world,” tempo is a familiar aesthetic term that, refurbished and repurposed by Row, serves to index affects and feelings that work relationally, across distinctions between subjects and objects.[4] At the same time, Row’s notions of tempo and velocity equip us to attend to tragedy’s non-cathartic feelings. In this way, *Queer Velocities* not only invites us to “enlarge...what ‘counts’ as queerness” (p. 7) but also to expand the kinds of relations, affects and feeling states we attend to in tragedy.

Time and again, Row’s power readings, brilliantly dosed capsules of deep and creative engagement with a text, sent me hastening back to plays I thought I knew, with eyes and ears newly attuned to their speeds and temporal sensations. Each chapter features a rhetorical trope and the velocity effects it creates so that Row demonstrates—concretely, aurally, textually—how queer velocities work in the play texts she studies. Zeugma as a “figure of speed” (p. 52) in its elliptical yoking of phrases with a single verb earns a robust analysis as part of chapter one’s discussion of Chimène’s “feminist management of speeds” (p. 62) against the imposition of normative nation- or marriage-driven temporalities on her grief and desire. A chapter on Corneille’s tragedy of colonial governance and religious conversion, *Polyeucte*, unpacks the power of paronomasia to incite swift connotations of sound and meaning. The title, “*Polyeucte* and the Speeds of Sects (Sex),” sets the stage for a powerfully queer reading of the speeds and attunements that sync Polyeucte and his beloved Néarque. The “sonic sameness” of the doubling pun of secte/sexe connects the two men in a dynamic relation of similitude as Polyeucte counters the conservation powers of governance with his rush to join Néarque in Christian martyrdom (p. 113).

Balancing Row’s attention to rhetorical and textual analysis are the critical analogies that serve as creative force multipliers for the chapters’ close readings. Row invokes the “supplemental sonic pleasure” of the musical overtone, the harmonic tone that is produced from the matching of musical notes or the vibration of an instrument, to identify the textual effects of repetition and unison, “a redoubled, swift sameness,” that link Néarque and Polyeucte in a love that, like the overtone, is “apparent but not overtly stated” (pp. 120-21). At each turn and swerve of her analysis, Row embeds her acts of interpretation in historical and theoretical contexts. Thus, after exploring early modern texts and musical theories that link music and love, Row steers us back

to the textual overtone effect in *Polyeucte* that “serves as a figure of supplemental queer affection, hiding in plain sight” (p. 121). This analogy comes to function as a critical tuning device, attuning our ears to reading for queer attachments in texts even as it expands our vocabulary for describing something akin to what Lewis Seifert calls the early modern “cabinet”—dynamics of secrecy and disclosure of queer desire distinct from the modern Anglophone “closet.”[5]

Each chapter of *Queer Velocities*, in short, enacts a pirouette of creative, critical queering, a reading revelation coupled with critical duets that expand the queer potentiality of formative scholarship in seventeenth-century studies, including Katherine Ibbett on the politics of life and colonial governance in Corneille and Roland Racevskis on early modern experiences of time.[6] The result is to open French classical theater to new kinds of intimacies and attachments, thanks to an analysis as exciting as it is erudite. Enacting the enlargement of queerness that it promises, *Queer Velocities* oscillates between couple-centered tragedies (chapters on *Le Cid* and *Polyeucte*) and tragedies that, as revisioned by Row, queer the couple with polyamorous relations and non-human attachments (chapters on *Bérénice* and *Andromaque* respectively). Despite (or as Row might argue, thanks to) his expert adherence to the theatrical unities, Racine emerges in these pages as more queerly queer than Corneille. Row furnishes the celebrated nothingness of *Bérénice*—to invoke Racine’s challenge to “faire quelque chose de rien”—with her analysis of the rhetorical exercise of chreia that, through dilation and repetition, highlights “a queer temporality of nonprogress and rich repetition” (p. 128) that holds Bérénice, Titus, and Antiochus together in affective tension.[7]

Queer Velocities directs us away from the familiar binaries (female/male, Orient/Rome) that inform scholarship on this play inspired by the passionate separation of the queen of Palestine and the emperor of Rome “*invitus invitam* (despite him, despite her)” (p. 127). Instead, Row spends time with this couple’s close friend Antiochus, who emerges as the play’s “necessary third” to show us “the queer possibilities of the trio” (pp. 129–30). Resisting hetero- and chrononormative trajectories, this triadic tension holds through a kind of textual and affective circular velocity (Row’s analogic thinking at work again here) that delays, defers, and moderates the polyamorous relations of the triad. Row’s chapter on *Andromaque* performs a similarly ambitious act of queering thanks to a new materialist-informed reading of Andromaque’s relation to Hector’s ashes. Diversifying the scope of tragedy, Row shows us how normative temporalities and futurities are dismantled, or at least put on hold, “when the scale of ‘bios’ is expanded to encompass inanimate matter such as ‘ash’” (p. 90).

Across its pages of erudition and analysis, *Queer Velocities* offers itself as a gathering place for scholars of different disciplinary and theoretical orientations. Queer theorists and historians, dix-septièmistes, early modernists, and scholars of early modern sexualities will all find something that suits their speed and something that gets them thinking in a different gear. Above all, *Queer Velocities* offers a model of what literary reading can do: readings that are creative, kinetic, and filled with vibrant erudition. *Queer Velocities* is a model to academic writers as well: delve in for lively examples of how to frame a chapter; how to compose a vivid, directed plot summary; how to dialogue with theory and close read a theory text; how to write briskly engaging academic prose. With dash and generosity, *Queer Velocities* combines theoretical boldness and historical specificity to show us the queer speeds, tempos, and affects that animate early modern French tragedy.

NOTES

[1] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

[2] See, for example, Valerie Traub, Patricia Badir, and Peggy McCracken, eds., *Ovidian Transversions: "Iphis and Ianthe," 1300-1650* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

[3] See the definitions for tempo in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[4] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 28.

[5] Lewis C. Seifert, *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp. 173-75.

[6] See Katherine Ibbett, *The Style of the State in French Theater, 1630-1660: Neoclassicism and Government* (Burlington, Vt. and Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2009) and Roland Racevskis, *Time and Ways of Knowing Under Louis XIV* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 2003).

[7] Racine famously defends the spareness of *Bérénice's* plot in his preface to this play, asserting that "toute l'invention consiste à faire quelque chose de rien." (Jean Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Georges Forestier (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1999), p. 451.)

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