

Julia L. Hairston and Walter Stephens, eds. *The Body in Early Modern Italy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. x + 438 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$70. ISBN: 978-0-8018-9414-5.

As Julia Hairston and Walter Stephens explain in their introduction, *The Body in Early Modern Italy* resulted from a 2002 conference at Johns Hopkins University that aimed “in short, to be truly interdisciplinary” (x). The roster of distinguished contributors attests that this goal has been admirably met: here are fifteen essays from largely senior scholars in literature, art history, history, cultural studies, history of science, architectural history, and even sport science. These are grouped loosely into four parts, the first of which treats the body in the Petrarchan tradition. Margaret Brose connects the instability and anxiety that surround the body in the *Canzoniere* to Petrarch’s preoccupation with temporality and decay. Luca Marcozzi’s essay provides a valuable history of the *corpus carcer* metaphor, followed by a thoughtful and detailed study of its use in Petrarch.

Part 2 turns to scientific and philosophical considerations, beginning with Katharine Park’s essay. Building on her ground-breaking *Secrets of Women*, Park disproves the persistent misconception that the medieval church prohibited dissection. The essay highlights an intriguing shift in end results from medieval to sixteenth-century dissection “from bodies producing thaumaturgic objects to bodies producing anatomical evidence” (70). Walter Stephens’s remarkable article traces the question of demonic corporeality from Augustine to Aquinas and Bonaventure, through to Ficino’s selective appropriation of Psellus. Scholars of the fifteenth century obsessively asked whether sexual relations with incubi and succubi were imagined or embodied. Stephens provides us with one of the volume’s most insightful comments on gender in arguing that the association of women with the senses turned the testimony of witches into powerful proof that demons had bodies. Their detailed sensory recollections of sexual encounters with devils confirmed demonic corporeality as philosophy couldn’t. Sergius Koderka also thoughtfully takes up the representation, understanding, and gendering of matter, figured in Italian Renaissance philosophy through the image of the prostitute.

The third and largest section of *The Body* treats “gendered corporeality”; these essays are largely traditional discussions of gender that assume an unproblematic correspondence of sex and body. Albert Ascoli eloquently explores the symmetry of impenetrable armored bodies and unpenetrated virgin (feminine) bodies in Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*; in addition to the content of this essay, its copious

notes are a valuable resource for any student of Ariosto. Julia Hairston's enlightening article builds on her earlier work on the Roman poet and courtesan Tullia d'Aragona, exploring d'Aragona's erasure of her body from her lyric poetry in order to carefully engineer her poetic reputation. Douglas Biow's provocative article explores a curious efflorescence of beard growth in sixteenth-century Italy that replaced the predominantly clean-shaven faces of men in earlier centuries.

Part 4, "The Body Involved," is in many ways the most innovative section. Although many of its essays are classed as examinations of gender, *The Body's* most original contributions lie rather in the field of what I might term gesture studies — that is, the exploration of movement, dress, and comportment. This crucial resituation of the body in its minute-to-minute changeability is overlooked in most studies, which discuss corporeality as an artificially static state. John Adamson and others have called for gesture and movement to be given greater scholarly consideration, particularly in the field of art history. *The Body* steps forward into this neglected direction with such articles as Sandra Schmidt's exciting and innovative study of Arcangelo Tuccaro, theorist and master of tumbling at the French court. Her detailed analysis of Tuccaro's tumbling takes us through every stage of a jump, illuminating the social and even philosophical ramifications of each movement. D. Medina Lasansky similarly resituates the body in time, exploring the *sacri monti* (remote Italian hilltop chapels designed to represent the sites of the Holy Land or scenes from the life of Christ or Mary) as "an artfully constructed multimedia setting in which landscape, architecture, sculpture, and painting work together to create a kinesthetic experience" (252).

It would be challenging for any volume of this kind to escape the problem of its own heterogeneity. Although the interdisciplinary approach of *The Body in Early Modern Italy* is a great success, the breadth of its topic makes dialogue between individual essays and parts difficult. Nonetheless, the value of the whole is underscored in the impressive reach of its parts.

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