

Marc D. Schachter. *Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship: From Classical Antiquity to Early Modern France.*

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Marc Schachter offers an elegant study of Michel de Montaigne and his two friends Étienne de La Boétie and Marie de Gournay, focusing on their engagement with the question of voluntary servitude or consent in the erotic-affective and political domains, as developed or explored by ancient thinkers such as Plato, Xenophon, and Plutarch, and which Schachter approaches through the work of the modern theorists Derrida and Foucault, notably the latter's concepts of "governmentality" and "critique," understood as the cultivation of "voluntary inservitude."

The first chapter sets the scene with Plato's *Symposium*, where, in the speech of Pausanias, voluntary servitude is posited as an admirable quality in the context of a pederastic relationship that fosters manliness and resistance to political oppression. Nevertheless, Schachter points out, Pausanias's arguments should not be taken at face value and the example of the tyrannicide lovers Harmodius and Aristogiton is contested. Chapter 2 concerns La Boétie's *De la servitude volontaire*, in which Pausanias's positive erotic concept (with beneficial social effects) comes to describe a negative political state (with overtones of moral turpitude). Schachter emphasizes the extent to which the treatise goes against established political discourse, and thus its originality, but also the limitations evinced in its deployment of nature and gender. In addition, Schachter discusses La Boétie's translation of Xenophon's *On Household Management*, edited by Montaigne, where a number of unusual choices in the French text designate self-interested friendship as the best means to obtain service from estate employees.

As Montaigne served as editor to La Boétie, so did Gournay to Montaigne. This, along with Gournay's *Promenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne*, forms the subject of chapter 4. The novel develops a reflection on the nature of monarchical rule that foregrounds the cost to women of patriarchal power structures. In relation to Montaigne's *Essais*, discrepancies between Gournay's text and that found in the *exemplaire de Bordeaux* raise (ultimately unresolvable) questions about the editor's possible interventions. For Schachter, Montaigne and his *filles d'alliance* become in places textually consubstantial; Gournay also succeeds in affirming herself as a writer and in inserting herself into the masculinist friendship tradition, without, in the process, privileging either heterosexuality or biology.

Justifiably, Schachter devotes the greatest attention to Montaigne, the focus of chapters 3 and 5. The *Essais*, especially "De l'amitié," notable for its coining of the term *liberté volontaire*, are read in dialogue with La Boétie, Plato, and Plutarch. The depoliticization of friendship is emphasized as is its eroticization, seen as involving in particular receptivity and passivity, which, following David Quint, Schachter relates to an (anti-Stoical) ethics of yielding and to the promotion of freedom in others. Here, as throughout, the study offers many fine readings, to which a brief review cannot begin to do justice. At the same time, I am not wholly without

reservations concerning the aim of countering the widely accepted idea of a certain (Oedipal) rivalry between Montaigne and La Boétie. While this has perhaps at times been overstated, I share the view of those who argue that various textual indications, including additions made to “De l’amitié,” point to the essayist’s transcendence of an initial feeling of inequality. It is in this sense that I read the well-known passage concerning Montaigne’s will — originally seized by an “inexplicable and fatal force,” causing it “to plunge and lose itself” in La Boétie’s — which was revised to claim that La Boétie’s will lost itself similarly in that of Montaigne. If Schachter’s association of the earlier formulation with a penetrating will and an absence of subservience, equated with passivity, is intriguing (174–78), the extract speaks more readily to me of a will wholly (and involuntarily) subjugated by love, driven to cast itself into oblivion in the other, and of the essayist’s subsequent writing in of the other’s equal and equalizing expression of love for him.

Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship is an impressive and masterful study, at once erudite and innovative, focused in terms of the material discussed but wide-ranging in its implications. Not only will it be essential reading for all scholars of La Boétie, Montaigne, and Gournay, it also has much to offer those interested in the friendship tradition, the history of sexuality, and political theory more generally, and in the highly fraught boundaries and intersections between them.

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