

Hugh Roberts, Guillaume Peureux, and Lise Wajeman, eds. *Obscénités Renaissance*.

Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 473. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2011. ISBN: 978-2-600-01466-3.

This book presents the work of an international research group of twenty-two scholars from the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States. The group previously worked together on another collection of essays treating the subject of obscenity, published in 2010 in the EMF: Studies in Early Modern France monograph series. In contrast to its previous publication, which presented a collection of case studies, the group's current publication aims to give a "panoramic view" of the various problems and issues surrounding obscenity in Renaissance France, without, however, making any claim to presenting a comprehensive treatment of any given issue or to presenting all facets of obscenity during the period. The individual chapters present original research on a rich and varied corpus of texts and images, yet the book as a whole has a remarkable cohesion and sense of purpose: the authors offer close textual analysis but routinely recontextualize their object of study in relation to a common set of issues surrounding obscenity in the period and in relation to previous research in the area. The corpus of materials studied includes important figures such as Erasmus, Rabelais, and Montaigne, but also an impressive variety of other materials such as dictionaries, emblems, engravings, medical treatises, travel narratives, music, poetry, and theater.

For a number of reasons, obscenity turns out to be an elusive subject. The word itself was only starting to be used in French texts and the terms related to obscenity were slow to enter French dictionaries. Part 1 addresses this problem, offering a conceptual history and prehistory of obscenity in the Renaissance. The contributors use a range of approaches — looking at occurrences, cognates, intertextuality,

contemporary reception of texts, and discussions of decorum — to locate and define the concept within Renaissance culture and to situate it in the context of medieval and classical conceptions of obscenity. Defining and locating the obscene is no easy matter because it was thought to blur boundaries and contaminate that with which it came into contact. Part 2 focuses on the dynamics of such boundaries. The boundary between what is or is not obscene was highly dependent on context and was constantly shifting through time because obscenity is inherently tied to reception or the effect that it produces. The obscene provokes offense, but it also provokes laughter. Part 3 takes up the comic dimension of obscenity, looking at the relationship between obscenity and laughter. Here too we see texts that play with the boundaries of the obscene, but also instances of the contamination mentioned above: if obscenity is a rebellion against social order, laughter can be seen as a rebellion against the control of the body, which is itself a model of social order. The body and its various practices loom large in part 4, which treats a range of discourses on human nature including medical treatises, travel narratives, works on demonology, but also fiction. However, this section is as much about the varying dynamics of discourse as it is about the dynamics of the body. The articles look at implicit, explicit, and allusive treatments of the obscene as well as the types of discourse that attracted censorship and those that did not. Part 5 focuses on the complex dynamics of political obscenity. Paradoxically, official attempts to suppress obscenity sometimes ended up producing or propagating it. On the other hand, obscenity played a role in establishing moral and religious norms.

This book is more accessible to an anglophone audience than would first appear. It is a bilingual French-English publication, with ten of the twenty-two chapters in English. The general introduction and conclusion, signed by the project's three editors as well as the preface by Michel Jeanneret, appear only in French. However, each of the five section introductions appear in both French and English. The volume also contains a general bibliography of primary and secondary sources, as well as an *index nominum* and an *index rerum*, which will be particularly useful given that many names and concepts appear in more than one chapter. Given its scope and format, this book will be of interest to advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars of early modern culture.

NICOLAS RUSSELL

Franklin & Marshall College