

Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis, eds. *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*.

Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013. x + 318 pp. \$124.95. ISBN: 978-1-4724-1364-2.

This collection of fifteen compact essays, bookended by the editors' introduction and afterword, is a distinguished entrant in what has become known as the affective turn in early modern studies — a turn fueled by overdue recognition of the passions' centrality to early modern social life, religious praxis, and moral philosophy. While the editors applaud this affective turn, they acknowledge the strong differences in scholarly approaches to the topic — with intellectual historians interested in “political subjectivity” (4), and literary historians in the passions of embodied selves. Somewhat contentiously (and to my mind reductively), editors Cummings and Sierhuis argue that scholarly preoccupation with the history of embodiment has pathologized early modern selfhood, disempowered human agency and ratiocination, and left “many questions unanswered” (5), mostly about the role of reason and its relation to the passions. They seek to address these questions and resist what they regard as an overemphasis on Renaissance materialism by returning to the central figures and topics of seventeenth-century intellectual history through the lenses of passion and subjectivity.

The richly learned essays, originally presented at a conference at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität and Center for Advanced Studies in Munich, and here organized into five subsections (“Intersubjectivity, Ethics, Agency”; “Embodiment,

Cognition, Identity”; “Politics, Affects, Friendship”; “Religion, Devotion, Theology”; “Philosophy and the Early Modern Passions”), skew heavily toward literature and philosophy with contributors drawn mostly from English and history departments in UK, American, and German universities. Their common objective, the editors claim, is to deliver “new models of the self and new models for interactive and inter-disciplinary history” (6). As to whether they deliver on such an ambitious promise, I find the results to be mixed: these essays certainly draw on many of the usual suspects (Montaigne, Shakespeare, Donne, Hobbes, Milton, Descartes, and Spinoza) and many of the usual topics (melancholy, the history of the soul, male friendship, the experience and rhetoric of grief, the war between reason and passion). It is refreshing to find essays on such less predictable figures as Fulke Greville (Sierhuis) and Philip Massinger (Adrian Streete), and to find emphasis throughout the volume on reflexivity (Christopher Tilmouth), on intersubjectivity and the shared social construction of emotions (Cummings on Donne’s letters), and the resistance to enslavement by passion (Stephan Laque) in Hamlet and Descartes. There is a nice balance of close readings and wider narratives — such as the recuperative, learned account of melancholy by Angus Gowland — and, as befits conference essays, many cross-references among them.

But it is surprising in an anthology on subjectivity and the passions published in 2013 — even one insisting on the topical place of traditional intellectual history and explicitly pushing back at materialist work like my own and Michael Schoenfeldt’s on humoral subjectivity — to find no essays about female poets, playwrights, or novelists and no attention to questions about the engenderment, privilege, and social scope of emotion that the rightful presence of female subjects in such an anthology might raise. By not acknowledging such embodied particularities, the editors’ working definition of the body “as felt to exist by a first-person subject” (7) universalizes, even flattens the body: their definition eschews the bodily variables of rank, gender, age, erotic orientation, ethnicity, and regional origin that — then and now — have been seen to complicate the social construction of early modern emotion. The contributors by and large seem to assume the expressive adequacy of the written record of this form of embodiment. Not surprisingly, the embodied selves implied by such a definition and created in the fifteen essays are not only male, but also strikingly privileged, autonomous, and articulate. There is small room for blind spots (whether ideological or historical) or aporias in the account of passions and subjectivity here.

Early modern ratiocination, the interaction between reason and emotion, the primacy of soul over body — all these topics need to be given their proper place in any narrative of early modern subjectivity, passions, and forms of embodiment, and so such a volume is to be welcomed by all of us engaged in the history of the emotions. But given the omissions hinted at above, it may seem obvious why to this student of the body that the contributions organized and edited by Cummings and Streirhus seem a bit bloodless.

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