

Katherine Crawford. *The Sexual Culture of the French Renaissance*.

Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xvi + 295 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$90 (cl), \$32.99 (pbk). ISBN: 978-0-521-76989-1 (cl), 978-0-521-74950-3 (pbk).

This richly erudite book is, first and foremost, an extraordinary resource for students and scholars of gender and sexuality in early modern France. From the analysis of Renaissance revisions of ancient models exemplified by representations of Orphic sexuality in the chapter on “The Renaissance of Sex,” to the analysis of regulation and interpretation of sexuality by means of astrology (in the chapter “Astrology, Generation, Sexual (Un)certainty”), this study offers a view of the complexities of sexual culture in Renaissance France from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. It becomes clear from the examples given that these representations and regulations of sexuality are frequently linked to the demands of procreation, and thus this study involves the analysis of a range of forms of heterosexual relations accompanied by the cultural suppression of various forms of extra-heterosexual behavior.

Crawford’s presentation of the evolution of homoerotic desire in Neoplatonic works as it is revised in the context of chivalric love and the *querelle des femmes*, in her chapter on “Neoplatonism and the Making of Heterosexuality,” is but one example of the complexity of material presented. Here, the corporeally sexualized feminine enters the realm of salvific homosocial love, turning it from a more rational or spiritual exercise to disorderly carnality. It is clear from the presentation of this material that a complex misogyny accompanied by the suppression of non-reproductive sexuality underlies many of these discourses. But this shift also reflects a turn towards marital love as a valid object of representation and discussion. “Cupid Makes You Stupid,” the chapter on bad poetry in which sexuality figures quite explicitly as a response to Petrarchan ideals, sheds useful light on a somewhat neglected aspect of the period. Much has been made of the dominance of Petrarchism in the sixteenth century; it is enlightening to see that a number of poets push back against this influence, and revise the models to express not only more carnal forms of eroticism, but also diverse philosophies of love. The chapter on “Politics, Promiscuity, and Potency” traces the participation of sixteenth-century French monarchs in the elaboration of their own sexual reputations. In the case of Henri III, Crawford demonstrates how this reputation escapes his control, and is turned against him. This is a useful introduction to the politics of sexuality in the period, as well as a good overview of the scholarship.

What is to be truly appreciated in this book is Crawford’s refusal to simplify her presentation of sexualities and their representations in this period. She offers a considerable quantity of varied examples, and does not reduce them to simple concepts, rather using them to convey the constantly transmuting nature of the culture, woven out of continual debate and discussion, transmitted in writing and in other cultural objects. The scope of this study, the sheer number of sources used as examples, the clarity with which the material is presented, all make this a valuable

introduction to the history of sexuality and gender in sixteenth-century France. Crawford's clear and elegant writing makes all of this material accessible to a broader audience; this study would be a suitable anchor text for university courses on early modern sexuality.

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