

Carolyn Springer. *Armour and Masculinity in the Italian Renaissance*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. xii + 235 pp. index. illus. gloss. bibl. 55. ISBN: 978-1-4426-4055-9.

A hybrid batwing breastplate designed by Filippo Negroli. Muscular *all'antica* cuirasses. A burgonet depicting a Turkish prisoner bound and imprisoned by allegories of Victory and Fame brutally clutching his moustache. An

anthropomorphic helmet with a steel drip of hanging snot. These are among the remarkable objects under investigation in Carolyn Springer's sophisticated interdisciplinary study of sixteenth-century armor interpreted as an ideologically resonant "cultural artifact and symbolic form" (3). This thematic study deftly explores the multivalent, often contradictory meanings generated by armor and its representation and excavates the social, political, and economic networks created and fostered by its fabrication, gifting, and viewing. Springer follows recent scholarship on the agency of material culture; armor is shown to produce, not merely reflect, meaning and to influence, not merely adorn, political spectacle.

Part 1, "Armoured Bodies," examines three morphological categories inspired principally by Bakhtin (classical, sacred, and grotesque). Armor's paradoxical relationship to the body ties together these chapters. By its very nature, armor affirms power and yet simultaneously admits vulnerability and denies invincibility, most tellingly in the case of "sacred" armor invoking Christ and thus explicitly inviting bodily harm and suffering. Armor might suggest the fantasy of an incorruptible body at times connected to a classical ideal, but Springer more productively exploits the concept of an Ovidian body materialized by much zöo- and anthropomorphic Renaissance armor, one "based on continual metamorphosis and improvisation" (63). No body, not even one of steel, can ever be unitary or complete.

"Studies in Self-Fashioning," part 2, surveys key patrons or recipients of armor and the gendered meanings and ideologies embodied in and visualized by their armor and its representation. Three case studies consider a sixteenth-century ruler (Guidobaldo II della Rovere of Urbino, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and Cosimo I de' Medici), but equally his predecessors and/or successors, and these chapters are predominantly concerned with legitimacy and lineage. As Springer reminds us, armor "advertises lineage and thus inscribes the individual in a system of male power relations" (162). The book deftly unpacks the political, propagandistic, and dynastic contexts of these commissions, though it tends toward an almost singleminded focus on fathers, sons, and the vicissitudes of heredity succession (and its challenges and failures) that is fundamentally structured by the familiar psychoanalytic interpretative key of masculine anxiety. The author provides sophisticated and innovative analyses of the proliferating forms and meanings of sixteenth-century armor, most successfully in her discussion of imagery relating to Medusa, Hercules, and the *Orlando furioso*. Masculinity, however, remains less varied, typically singular, and defined almost exclusively in relation to dynastic succession and its anxious defense. Assertive and vigorous masculinity is the norm here, as it no doubt should be, but an unexamined one nonetheless, and thus somatic and cultural contexts including beauty, age, courtliness, and chivalry remain peripheral concerns.

Armor, Springer argues, became progressively elaborate and essential as an "enabling fiction" (160) throughout the sixteenth century as it became functionally obsolete because of advances in technologies of artillery. Indeed, Springer demonstrates that images of armor, particularly in ducal Florence, were more

readily available and efficacious than actual metal. Italian armor and its accoutrements of the fifteenth and earlier centuries (which of course could be quite flamboyant, elaborated and splendid) are not discussed, however, beyond the hortatory and moralizing discourses against the effeminized, glittering princes of the fifteenth century from the other side of the invasions of Italy; the trajectory traced by the author (together with its implications for aristocratic masculinity) thus suffers from the fact that earlier armors and armored bodies are entirely absent from this account. The insight that armor's "charisma is undoubtedly due to its tactile quality" (94) could likewise be extended to consider more fully the spectacular surface effects of the materials and surfaces other than the metal encasing the body — gilded leather, radiant jewels, sumptuous brocade, spurs and stirrups, and fabulous and imposing crests (*cimieri*) — that together comprised the armored body and constituted courtly masculinity and authority. Springer's rich study of these theoretically neglected objects will, one hopes, serve as a call to arms for further studies contributing to a "historical anthropology of armor — a sustained critical attention to armor and its representations" (163).

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