

*Corps héroïque, corps de chair dans les récits de vie de la première modernité.*

Christine Sukic, ed.

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This volume, which follows a conference organized in 2012 by the Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Languages and Thought, includes contributions by scholars in the history and literature of early modern Europe. Whereas heroism can be viewed as

a “symptom of the epistemological mutation in early modern Europe” (9), the “representation of the heroic body, in particular, is part of [the] reconfiguration” that is taking place, in the context of the redefinition of anatomy by Vesalius and new approaches to dissection. The “‘invention’ of the modern body,” as Gisèle Venet recalls, implied retraining the imaginary and concrete itinerary “from the ‘humors’ to the ‘passions,’” and following the “mutations of a ‘melancholic body’ subjected to the vicissitudes of [early modern] European bodies” after the coincidence in 1543 of Vesalius’s “revolution” and the Copernican revolution — the “‘revolutions’ of the celestial ‘bodies’ turned heliocentric” (235). Sukic emphasizes the dialectic between heroism and very graphic representations: in Greville’s account of the life of Philip Sydney, he paints a heroic figure (“*héroïsé*”), yet remains very “factual in his account of the latter’s death” (9). He thus parts ways with the classical tradition, where physical descriptions were immediately legible in moral terms. The aim is to explore the relationship between life stories and the body. In this respect the two chapters of the last part, “*Corps de chair et conscience de soi*,” are emblematic. Cécile Toublet’s “*Les Aventures corporelles de Dassoucy (1605–77): Représentation antihéroïque de soi et naissance de l’individu*” and Laetitia Coussement-Boillor’s “*Moll Cutpurse: Corps héroïque, corps de chair*” highlight connections between the body, marginality, and autobiography — however problematic the latter term is for these texts — since both Dassoucy and Mary Frith (*Moll Cutpurse*) are marginal in their sexuality and/or gender identification. The first section, “*Le Corps et l’expérience du sacré*,” explores the place and representation of the body (spectacular or fallible, or even absent, as a negative imprint, “*en négatif*” [75]; see Marion de Lencquesaing on Jeanne de Chantal) in different religious experiences. The subsequent section, “*Le Corps mis en scène*,” is concerned with the textual construction of public bodies (one may perhaps question the inclusion of Line Cottegnies’s study of the Life of Donne with the figures of Catherine of Medici and Don Juan of Austria here). The penultimate section, “*Du corps au corpus*,” explores the connection between the writer and his or her writings, and the textual productivity of the body.

The variety of the texts and perspectives results in a very interesting if occasionally uneven volume, which sheds light on the evolving role of the (emerging modern) body in the definition and representation of the individual. The risk of reading the body into the texts, however, has not always been avoided. It may be a detail, as in Anne Dunan-Page’s “*Les entraves de la chair? Le corps, les émotions et la voix dans les récits de l’expérience spirituelle*”: her paragraph, “*La voix brisée*,” is actually based on a text praising a church that “pick[s] out of their broken expressions the gracious dealings of God” (70; “broken expressions” does not mean broken voice). Or the life story may become the main focus and a character’s body metonymically substituted for the character him- or herself. In Marian Rothstein’s “*Catherine de Médicis: La reine-veuve et le cœur du roi*,” a very stimulating presentation of the significance of Catherine’s perennially black-clad body (as Henri II’s widow) is followed by a discussion of the body as it loosens. But whose body? The queen’s, the dead king’s, or that of the queen’s devise? Though the parallel with Queen

Artemise of Caria, the devoted widow who built the mausoleum, ostensibly implies fighting bodies, the article seems more concerned with presenting a nuanced vision of the queen's actions than with explicating the connection between body and text. Similarly, in Véronique Garrigues's "'Ce grand héros étant ainsi rétréci.' D'un corps en majesté à la dépouille démenbrée de Don Juan d'Autriche (1547–78)," the reader, indeed, follows the strange story of a body. Yet the body often stands for the person. "Le Corps souffrant" (126) does not clearly distinguish between the mental suffering of the hero and his ailing body, and the concluding remark that Don Juan's posthumous glory shows "the ambivalence of the position of the bastard's body" (133) would characterize more aptly the bastard than his body. This, however, does not diminish the interest of the articles, nor of the volume, which makes an important contribution to our understanding of the emergence of the representation of the modern body and (auto)biographical writing.

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