The Androgyne in Early Modern France: Contextualizing the Power of Gender. Marian Rothstein.
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. viii + 256 pp. $95.

The author of two works on Amadis de Gaulle, Rothstein's new book is an intensively researched study (sixty pages of notes, twenty-one of bibliography) on a fascinating figure. Exclusively focused on the sixteenth century rather than the early modern period, the book contains chapters on the androgyne's sources, both biblical (Mosaic) and classical (Platonic and their rewritings), as well as its literary, visual, and material representations (Rothstein is particularly strong on emblems, coins, and rings); its role in compilations of "famous women"; and its depictions of queens and regents from Anne de Bretagne and Marguerite de Navarre to Catherine de Médicis and Jeanne d'Albret. Although there are disorienting variations in chapter lengths (from nine to fifty-one pages), the brief conclusion and the even briefer introduction (four-and-a-half and three-and-a-half pages, respectively) seem especially problematic. For Rothstein concludes that the ideas of the androgyne were eclipsed by the seventeenth century, but she refuses to speculate why, because this dimming should not be attributed to a single cause, she argues, cannot be given a firm date, and cannot be pigeonholed tidily — explanations that readers would surely never expect.

The introduction takes the position that the androgyne concerns "a parallel and quite separate tradition" from the hermaphrodite (2), which Rothstein casts as monstrous and corporeal, in contrast to her "figure of the . . . perfection of plenitude [of] originary and ultimate human possibilities and strengths" (2). And yet, in Amboise Paré's *Des monstres et prodiges* (1675), a chapter is devoted to "Des hermaphrodites ou androgynes," and Jean Riolan's *Discours sur les hermaphodits* (1613) states that the Hermaphrodite is "[what] we otherwise call Androgyne" (6). Rothstein's binary division allows her to exclude and

eliminate the body from analysis, even when the subject is erotic desire (in Ronsard, for instance). Throughout, there is an idealistic investment in "the androgyne state" as providing access to the highest aspirations and "the greatest strengths" of "human nature" (27, 3), in denial of paradoxes or contradictions in human subjects and thus the negotiations and accommodations that would attend attempts to access masculine behavioral tropes.

This idealistic, anticorporeal strain is also antihistorical in Rothstein's treatment of "functional gender," a concept not elaborated in the introduction, and never grounded theoretically. She seems to oppose latter-day conceptions of gender as anachronistic. Thus the work of Judith Butler or Joan Scott merits one sentence each; Katherine Crawford's important studies of early modern queens and regents fare no better. And yet, a search for the roots of "functional gender" leads to Durkheim and to the mid-twentieth-century work of sociologists such as Talcott Parsons. In that theory, society is made up of stable, interdependent (and complementary) categories that function to maintain a cohesive equilibrium — a conservative structuralist concept that has been criticized for reifying discriminatory and hierarchical gender norms. In contrast to (class) conflict, constructionist, and historicist theories, it justifies the status quo and fails to account for the variousness in social systems and for social change. Accordingly, in Rothstein's work, there is no analysis of shifts in gender roles over time in relation to dynamic historical, cultural, and political factors. Nor does she tap the most useful discursive sources for gender analysis in the Renaissance: the thousands of texts of the *querelles des femmes*, and I would add, *et des hommes.* Finally, there is no discussion of the contentious debates over Salic Law, which the advent of every French female regent or queen catalyzed. Instead, each queen continued to "access" the tropes of the androgyne, in Rothstein, without detailing the misogynist assaults on female rulers: only for Catherine de Médici is there a paragraph on the diabolical representations of this powerful woman, whose reputation has changed only in the past twenty-five years. Ultimately, Rothstein acknowledges that her book does not examine men's relation to the androgyne; in my view, this is because the first sex did not aspire to descend to the feminine or the effeminate, whereas the second sex wished to gain access to "superior" virile qualities. If the androgynous provided exceptional females the use of stable male tropes, what traits remained inaccessible, and which were unstable?

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