

Philip Ford and Paul White, eds. *Masculinities in Sixteenth-Century France*. Proceedings of the Eighth Cambridge French Renaissance Colloquium 5–7 July 2003. Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 2006. xii + 202 pp. index. illus. n.p. ISBN: 0–9511645–9–7.

Not only masculinities, but also subjectivity, Neoplatonism, humanistic relativism, skepticism, and dynastic crisis are explored in this collection. The articles focus on mainstream sixteenth-century authors who create or manipulate masculinity for a reason specific to their text, thus undermining the idea that early modern “ambient masculinity” (heteronormative) was self-evident, “natural,” uniform, or held in common. These authors’ goals are political satire (Henry III as a hermaphrodite or “passive”), hermeneutics (Montaigne’s “ideal scepticism”), and politics and pedagogy (“civilizing” iconography at Fontainebleau commissioned by Francis I, Jean de Sponde’s preference for *prudentia* over *fortitudo*, the Counter-Reformation cult of Saint Joseph). The contributions demonstrate that, whether condemned by satire or idealized, masculinity is never exactly what it should be in sixteenth-century France. Even its source texts either have been misunderstood (as Montaigne points out) or are being willfully misinterpreted (by Sponde). As Philip Ford and Paul White point out in the introduction, it emerges from this volume that the “ambient [normative, heterosexual] masculinity” against which these different gender performances emerge, is often a matter of nostalgia (among others, for the chivalric knight). Moreover, some contributions show that, from Montaigne to Cyrano de Bergerac, early modern nostalgia is sometimes for a form or forms of masculinity that have nothing to do with heterosexual orthodoxy. A few contributions document a significant change of attitudes: for instance, comparing the flattering use of the figure of the hermaphrodite (Francis I) with the satirical use (Henry III); another paper presents gender play as a discursive nexus that defines a style (Mannerist vs. Baroque) — in Mannerist poetry, masculinity is, or plays at being, conflicted, vulnerable, and polymorphously perverse.

Gary Ferguson traces the evolution of the figure of Saint Joseph from 1400 to 1650. The saint, object of ridicule in the medieval tradition, needed rehabilitation before he was made into a “prototype” of a modern, sanitized masculinity by the Counter-Reformation. In his *histoire d'idées*, Ferguson makes a connection to Jean Gerson's earlier revival of Saint Joseph, also related to a crisis of power.

Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier catalogues mythological and Neoplatonic references in Fontainebleau wall paintings. She posits the contrast between the ambient “obsessional fear of devirilization through culture” and the “humanistic revolution” of the 1530s. In her reading, the program “feminizes the warrior” by offering hermaphroditic, same-sex, and autoerotic models, not gratuitously to titillate, but to inspire “humanistic politics of . . . tolerance” (45) and dynastic optimism. (*Caveat*: when consulting the plates, enlarge them first.)

Kathryn Banks contributes to current work on the early modern subject by suggesting that Maurice Scève's *Délie*, under the influence of Neoplatonism (Marsilio Ficino, Leone Ebreo), prefigures the psychoanalytic subject, a “darkened and fragmented self” (83). The Neoplatonic subject and the subject in Scève are like the postmodern subject, and the three are unlike the Cartesian subject.

Cathy Yandell traces poetic experiments with preexisting forms and conventions of lyric and erotic poetry in Ronsard's *Folastries* (1553), expertly identifying Ronsard's antecedents and discussing the transformations Ronsard's poems effect. In *Folastries*, gender, rhetoric, and convention are bent and unsettled. They are intended, according to Yandell, as a manifesto of poetic freedom, experimentation, *varietas*.

Todd W. Reeser closely analyzes Montaigne's reading of same-sex themes in Plato, contrasted to other contemporary texts that “read out Platonic sexuality”: that is, mask or evacuate it. The discussion of Plato in the “Apologie de Raymond Sebond” exemplifies Montaigne's “ideal scepticism”: his reading of “sexuality . . . is closely related to . . . cultural relativity and ‘ethnography’” (115). And, according to Reeser, in Montaigne, we witness an effect that goes further than Jonathan Goldberg's “deontologizing effect of sodomy,” as “the reading act and Platonic sexuality overlap” (125). A quibble unrelated to the main argument: Reeser's characterization of Halperin “reads out” that eminent Foucauldian's earlier stance.

Contributing to the discussion of humanistic relativism, John O'Brien traces figures (hermaphrodites, Siamese twins, sex change, cases of assumed identity) in Montaigne, D'Aubigné, Artus Thomas (*Ile des hermaphrodites*, 1605), political satire, and historiography. O'Brien catalogues the uses of these figures, focusing on Montaigne: while the “ambient” use of monsters is as portents or metaphors, Montaigne shifts from a divine tetralogy (“beyond . . . human cognition”) to a form of cultural relativism (“deontologizing” effect).

Guy Poirier explores the texts related to Henry III's sterility, foregrounding paradoxes: the attribution of sterility to the king, not the queen; linking sexual transgression to devotion; allegations of the king's sexual passivity that arose as the dynastic crisis progressed. Marc Bizer analyzes the Protestant Jean de Sponde's commentary on Homer as a political and cultural manifesto on statesmanship (and

masculinity), and shows how Sponde manipulates his material to fit his concept of ideal warrior and statesman, privileging *prudentia* over *fortitudo*. Bizer notes Sponde's divergence from traditions: for example, from Socrates and Plato on weeping (for Sponde, on the contrary, "men that cry are good," 178).

Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani analyzes the use of mythology, sometimes discreetly signaling bisexual or homosexual preference, and she makes a distinction between Baroque poetry "that takes the other for the other and wants to possess him/her" (197), contrasted to Mannerist poetry (Ronsard, Tyard, Desportes, Théophile, Tristan) characterized by fantasies of merging, bisexuality, autoeroticism, and inversion.

Finally, it is so pleasurable to have the joys of erudition enhanced by the elegance of thought and writing, for instance in O'Brien's article.

ANNA KŁOSOWSKA  
Miami University