

Eroticism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Magic, Marriage, and Midwifery. Ian Frederick Moulton, ed.

Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance 39. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016. xvi + 172 pp. €70.

This collective volume began as conference papers on widely divergent topics. The chronological range is broader than what would normally be considered Renaissance, with a grand survey of medieval literature and an instructive article on Lilith in rabbinical thought that ranges all the way from late antiquity to an oral parable by the Lubavitscher

Rebbe heard in 1978 by the author Sharonah Fredrick herself. Asunción Lavrin's essay on antisexual campaigns by Spanish and Mexican theologians extends deep into the eighteenth century to demonstrate the continuity of this thinking—a rather depressing “continuum” (44) of single-minded diatribes against “lewdness” and women, interspersed with cases of sexual molestation by clergy and their cover-up.

The title-word “eroticism” is applied loosely, as meaning some connection to the human reproductive system. Positive evaluations of erotic pleasure, as an exalting experience and an inspiration to creativity, are hard to find here, though this was an important aspect of the High Renaissance. In Lavrin's sources such pleasure is condemned fiercely. It would be good to know the actual words used by those Iberian zealots, translated as “lasciviousness,” “pollution,” “lewdness,” or “morose delectation,” but Lavrin provides no original texts; much could be learned from comparative semantics here, given that in Cinquecento Italy the loaded words *lascivo* and *lascivia* could be used for extravagant praise as well as for the kind of grim moralizing that apparently dominated Old and New Spain. Chantelle Thauvette's study of two English midwifery manuals from 1545 and 1656, courteously described as “building on” my 2003 book *Schooling Sex* (151), engages with the pleasure issue by asking how these authors' prefaces anticipate (and surely help to foster) an indecent, titillating response to what they present as serious medical treatises.

The methodologies displayed here are as varied as the subject matter. Some essays are essentially broad surveys of evidence transcribed from other texts. In contrast, David Orvis performs yet another pyrotechnic queer reading of selected Shakespeare sonnets, bringing out the inconsistencies of their marriage imagery. Rosalind Kerr likewise concentrates on a tightly defined literary source, late sixteenth-century pastoral drama, with a focus on the dazzling actress-author Isabella Andreini and her performative transformations of Tasso's *Aminta*. But Rubens's healthy-looking nymph and satyr on the book's cover, presumably alluding to this essay, convey an entirely different sensibility from the satyr scene written and performed by Andreini, an extraordinary mix of cruelty, seduction, and disgust.

Liliana Leopardi offers a trove of Renaissance gem lore, but the illustrations, though stimulating all kinds of research questions, are poorly lit photographs shot by the author from later compilations and with inadequate citation. (I found the ithyphallic Abraxas figure [fig. 5] fascinating, but could not gather where it might be or whether Renaissance artists could have seen it.) Leopardi's study, centered on Camillo Leonardi's *Speculum Lapidum* (Venice, 1502), raises important issues—for example, how much of the amorous and anti-amorous efficacy of magic stones derives from art (the images carved on them), how much from their natural properties or from the character of the wearer? This study would benefit from a larger context and a more dedicated pursuit of art historical implications. It is interesting to know that emeralds were valued for suppressing lust (109), but this is only half the story; in Rabelais, emeralds are attached to a codpiece for their “erective power” (*Gargantua*, ch. 8, citing Pliny the Elder). We would not learn from this article that, though Leonardi insists on the primacy

of nature, he provides a list of the best Quattrocento gem artists (including a mysterious “Leonardo of Milan” who “prints effigies in stone” [fol. xlviiii^r]). Instead, space is given to a coda that tries to apply Freud’s fetish, Jung’s talisman, and Lacan’s phallus.

This volume seems not to have been copyedited, so the reader is distracted by many inconsistencies, punctuation errors, and non-English idioms (as well as varying levels of scholarly rigor). The lack of an index further reduces its usefulness. But it should still be read, if as a multifarious and informative database rather than a model of historical interpretation.

James Grantham Turner, *University of California, Berkeley*