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Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Renaissance Italy is an illuminating collection of essays that brings together new critical insight on the title's topics from a variety of disciplines. The volume, which pursues a line of inquiry comparable to Talvechia's edited collection *A Cultural History of Sexuality* (2011), is dedicated to the lifelong achievements of Konrad Eisenbichler, whose own brand of scholarship is distinctly interdisciplinary, comingling literature, history, and the visual arts.

In the Introduction the editors historically and theoretically contextualize the essays. They recognize the importance (and the limits) of Foucault's scholarship in foregrounding the "construction and control of sexuality in the European past" (2). They also value John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (1980) for prompting scholars to develop their research around erased evidence of "multiple sexualities." Subsequent studies in the 1970s continued to make progress, giving emphasis to gender as a category of historical analysis. Finally, the editors note that cultural studies and feminism—fields that thrive in interdisciplinarity and embrace a variety of research methodologies and approaches—have greatly contributed to a better understanding of the complex nature of sex, gender, and sexuality in the Italian Renaissance (1-16).

Capitalizing on these theoretical advancements, the volume offers a fresh, in-depth and enticing reading of Renaissance sexuality in its multiple manifestations. To better render the diverse, and yet very interconnected approaches that the authors employ to investigate their topics, the essays are grouped in three different sections. Those in the first section, titled "Sex, Order and Disorder," mostly address legal and political attempts to control sexuality and effectively unveil the interchangeable nature of sexual and political abuse. Guido Ruggiero, for example, reads Boccaccio's last tale of the *Decameron*, the tragic tale of Griselda, as a metaphor for political violence (21-34). Through the lens of cultural history, he interprets Gualtieri, the tyrant husband, as a Machiavellian prince ante litteram, a *signore* who abuses the territory he controls as well as his wife. As a counterpoint, in the following essay, Elena Brizio supports with careful archival research the idea of the widespread political use of sexual abuse in Renaissance Italy (35-51). Her "Sexual Violence in the Senese State" claims that men of all ranks and social background (politics, clergy, business etc...) considered sexual violence a legitimate tool with which to exercise power. Although laws regulating sexual acts and even the sex trade existed, and became stronger with the Council of Trent, norms and practices were often at odds. The somewhat exceptional case of Bologna, where prostitutes resided in numerous city neighborhoods firmly rooted in local social networks and living in close quarters with the working poor, is documented in Vanessa McCarthy and Nicholas Terpstra's essay (53-73). Even in Catholic Reformation Rome, as Elizabeth S. Cohen's enthralling essay on adultery shows, "a customary culture that tolerated various forms of heterosexual error persisted" (91). This first group of essays powerfully alerts the reader to the need to question preconceived and static notions of Renaissance sexuality in order to comprehend a highly nuanced cultural reality.

The volume's second section, "Sense and Sensuality in Sex and Gender," groups together essays that address inscriptions of emotions, sensuality, and even food within sexuality. Patricia Simons revisits the famous case of Benedetta Carlini, a seventeenth-century "lesbian nun" (97-123). Offering enticing evidence, she demonstrates how nuns' imaginations were nurtured by visual eroticism—more precisely, how both holy imagery and scriptures, by mixing the spiritual and corporeal, generated some extreme expressions of sexualized mysticism. In a much more secular Roman underbelly, Thomas Cohen reconstructs, through trial documents, the sexual adventures of *messer* Ludovico Santa Croce, a shady fellow loosely associated with nobility (125-140). The narrative of his sexual bravado (quite entertaining, if at times disconcerting for the modern reader), is

punctuated by the “live” testimony of the protagonists—both his victims and his accomplices—taken from court depositions. This narrative further demonstrates the porosity of Roman personal alliances—which often crossed class, status, and religious affiliation—when sex, prostitution, and the sexual abuse of women were involved. Analyzing Castiglione’s *Courtier*, Gerry Milligan draws a connection between clothes and fashion as external indicators of femininity and masculinity, and he stresses how a fear of effeminacy underlies the whole text (141-158). In “The Sausage Wars” Laura Giannetti turns her attention to food and interrogates early modern discourse on *carne* (meat), focusing especially on the association of (pork) meat with lust and gluttony (160-178). She shows how such discourse, while officially dictated by a moral and disciplinary vision, was fully appropriated by poets, *novellieri*, and dramatists from the fourteenth to the sixteenth-century. In this section, the juxtaposition of the first two essays focusing on microhistory and the last two exploring the metaphorical and symbolic language of literary sources, help the reader to appreciate the dialogical relationship between reality and literature.

The essays in the third section of the volume, “Visualizing Sexuality in Word and Image,” propose that readers carefully consider what early modern fluidity and boundaries in identity truly meant before imposing our own (and potentially too-rigid) categories on them. James Saslow analyzes available biographical information on the painter Antonio Bazzi, commonly referred to as “Il Sodoma,” and traces in it (and in the painter’s artwork), a blueprint of gay identity (183-209). Meanwhile, in his study of what he labels the “vagina monologues” in Alessandro Piccolomini’s comedy *La Raffaella, ovvero Dialogo della bella creanza delle donne* (Raffaella, or a Dialogue on Women’s Good Manners, 1539) and Pietro Aretino’s *Ragionamenti* (*Aretino’s Dialogues*, 1534), Frederick Moulton focuses on female sexual agency (women exchanging sex advice) as imagined by men (211-226). Ventrioloquized women’s voices constitute the protagonists in both works, and vaginas are “made to speak the truth,” as proof that “the truth of woman is her sex” (217). The objectification of lovers in pornographic and sodomitic fantasies (including bestiality), is also one of the striking stratagems Giovan Battista Della Porta uses in his *L’arte del ricordare* (*The Art of Remembering*, 1566), a popular short treatise on mnemonics techniques here analyzed by Sergius Koderá (227-245). Koderá demonstrates how Della Porta’s images and fantasies were foundational in his endeavors as an early modern magus and how they recur in his more well-known texts on theater, physiognomy, marvel, and natural magic. In the last essay of the section, Jane Tylus points to the erasure of female characters or at least, at the curtailing of female influence in Tasso’s *Gerusalemme conquistata* (Jerusalem Delivered, 1581) when compared to the *Gerusalemme liberata* (Jerusalem Conquered, 1593) (247-266). She argues that the Counter Reformation’s influence on Tasso’s creativity and his reconceptualization of himself as an epic poet is inscribed on his female characters’ bodies. By proposing in-depth analysis of vastly different examples of sexual and gender identity objectification, this last section reinforces the volume’s goal to reveal the gap between prescription and reality in Renaissance sexuality. This gap engenders contradictions and ambivalence that necessitate the flexible interpretive approach adopted by these essays.

The volume appropriately ends with a bibliography of Konrad Eisenbichler’s publications on sex and gender, and a complete index. Seventeen illustrations and two tables are integrated within the volume to enhance its contents.

All the essays here result from astute critical thinking and textual analysis, detective work in the archives, careful sifting through demographic data, and the gathering of trial testimony. They offer a multitude of perspectives on the topic of sexuality, bringing forth voices that until now were hidden: those of the working people, adulteresses, prostitutes, and, perhaps less expected, virtuous women harassed in the streets, and young boys sodomized by their masters. As the editors note, the essay form itself allows for a detailed exploration of case studies which, taken as a whole, convey the complexity of the topic. These works stand in dialogical relationship with one another, in light of

either their intertextual references or their research methodologies, which often comingle archival sources, trial testimony, visual and literary sources. What's more, each essay is a delightful read, written in a very accessible language and style. The collection is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate students, not to mention scholars of the Italian Renaissance, of cultural history, history of ideas, Italian literature, and gender studies. It could be an excellent complementary text for a course on Renaissance culture and sexuality, and many of the essays should be required readings for a course on the *Decameron*.

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