Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Borris, Kenneth and George Rousseau (eds.). The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe

Alexandra Logue

Volume 35, numéro 2, printemps 2012

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105839ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i2.19377

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)
2293-7374 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

Logue, A. (2012). Compte rendu de [Borris, Kenneth and George Rousseau (eds.). The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, *35*(2), 150–152. https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i2.19377

and deals only tangentially with their vested interests in promoting their own positions and religious and personal views. We should be encouraged to continue this volume's meticulous query into the private life of the royal couple by scrutinizing the motivations of the other players around Anne and Henry. Examining the differing interpretations of the same events by various personalities at court would modify and enrich the rather singular perspective offered by Bernard's fascinating, though misleadingly intimate, viewpoint from the Privy chamber.

ÁGNES JUHÁSZ-ORMSBY, *Memorial University of Newfoundland*

Borris, Kenneth and George Rousseau (eds.).
The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe.
New York: Routledge, 2007. Pp. xi, 281. ISBN 9780415403214 (hardback) n.p.

The aim of this edited collection is to explore the representations of same-sex desire and behaviours as expressed in a multitude of early modern texts dealing with natural phenomena and the order of nature (p. 1). Evident in Kenneth Borris's cogent introduction and in the individual papers is an attempt to examine different forms of "intellectual disciplines" by expanding the definition of what constituted science in the early modern period. *The Sciences of Homosexuality* is a cohesive collection, beneficial to scholars of both early modern science and early modern homosexuality.

The work is divided into three sections: "Medicine"; "Divinatory, Speculative, and Other Sciences"; and "Science and Sapphisms." Although the first part of the collection approaches early modern science in a relatively conventional way, Kevin Siena's examination of same-sex transmission of the pox is particularly compelling, arguing that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English medical texts did not equate the pox with same-sex sexual acts. Despite condemnations of sodomy and, Siena argues, the likelihood of high infection rates among men engaged in same-sex sexual activity, "sex between men was not policed in this medically discursive way" (p. 115). The second section of the collection presents the most direct challenge to the accepted definition of early modern science and includes two insightful contributions

on same-sex love and astrology from P. G. Maxwell-Stuart and H. Darrel Rutkin, as well as essays focused on alchemy and representation in music. Harriette Andreadis's "Erotics Versus Sexualities: Current Science and Reading Early Modern Female Same-Sex Relations," in the final section of the book, is especially noteworthy. In keeping with the collection's goal of redefining and expanding the conception of "science," Andreadis is critical of the limited and anachronistic language typically employed by histories of homosexuality. In order to nuance understandings of early modern sexuality, she calls for a revised definition of "erotic" that includes, but is not synonymous with, "sexual."

Borris's introduction is one of the strongest contributions to the collection. He situates the essays within a historiography that relies on modern definitions of science and persuasively argues that these definitions are limiting. The collection calls for a broader understanding of science that includes medicine, natural philosophy, natural history, "mixed mathematics," astrology, physiognomics, and alchemy, all of which can lead to new sources for histories of homosexuality. Astrology, for example, had sexually analytic categories that complemented physiological and physiognomical classifications and can therefore be used in ways similar to traditional medical texts. Physiognomical texts also outlined sexual issues according to specific classifications, and, like astrological texts, allowed for discernible categories of sexual disposition and deviance. A reworking of the definition of premodern science is of central importance to this project; according to Borris, "the modern connotations of both 'science' and 'homosexuality' are precisely what must be placed into question to assess the interaction of their precursors and its historical effects" (p. 1). As the examples of astrological and physiological texts demonstrate, a broader definition of science is relevant to the contentious question of whether same-sexual identities existed before the nineteenth century and what those identities might have looked like.

Borris's introduction to the book is even-handed in its consideration of both male and female same-sex relations, and he acknowledges that "insofar as the premodern sciences were almost a male preserve, their androcentrism further distorts their Sapphic engagements" (p. 11). Yet the collection itself is androcentric, with only two of the thirteen essays focused on same-sex relations between women. To make matters worse, these two essays are cordoned off from the rest under the separate category of "Science and Sapphisms." Although a more balanced and integrated selection would have strengthened the collection,

The Sciences of Homosexuality is nonetheless an important contribution to the historiography of both early modern science and homosexuality.

ALEXANDRA LOGUE, *University of Toronto*

Christian, Kathleen Wren.
Empire without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350–1527.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. Pp. ix, 440. ISBN 978-0-300-15421-4 (hardcover) n.p.

Art historians studying the history of the collecting of antiquities in Rome have long depended on the detailed research that informed the magisterial work of Roberto Weiss in *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (1969), supplemented by Bober and Rubinstein's *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture* and, more recently, the online *Census of Antique Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance* (http://www.census.de/). Various theoretical approaches to the reasons behind the awakening of the classical past within Renaissance humanism, culture, and commerce have been brilliantly articulated in recent decades by Phillip Jacks, Salvatore Settis, and Leonard Barkan, to name but a few. Kathleen Wren Christian's book adds valuable new insights into, as she states, "the reception of antique figural statues — their engagement with poetry, changes in their reception over time and their eventual elevation by collectors and artists to a privileged aesthetic status" (p. 10). Thus, her interests are in the interplay of the material and the literary, the archaeological and the academic, and the status of figural sculptures as discursive subjects. Such emphases, by her own admission, lead away from more sustained critical inquiry into statues as material objects continuously engaged in changing spatial relationships and dialogues with interiors, exteriors, and the vast panoply of other objects, natural and artificial, that were deployed in those same spaces — the assemblies of which created a Renaissance culture predicated on a fluidly defined "antiquity" measured against an equally unstable and evolving critical evocation of a discoverable sense of the past. Accordingly, her chapters unfold chronologically from the period of Petrarch to the Sack of Rome, allowing her to examine changes in