

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Kenny, Neil, ed. *Text, Knowledge and Wonder in Early Modern France: Studies in Honour of Stephen Bamforth*

Arazoo Ferozan

Volume 42, numéro 1, winter 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1064547ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064547ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Ferozan, A. (2019). Compte rendu de [Kenny, Neil, ed. *Text, Knowledge and Wonder in Early Modern France: Studies in Honour of Stephen Bamforth*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42(1), 393–395.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1064547ar>

Kenny, Neil, ed.

*Text, Knowledge and Wonder in Early Modern France: Studies in Honour of Stephen Bamforth.*

Special issue of *Nottingham French Studies* 56.3 (2017): 249–368.

The Autumn 2017 special edition of *Nottingham French Studies* (NFS) is a collaborative work of British and French historians in homage to Stephen Bamforth's contribution to the field of thought, text, and knowledge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a fundamental historian of the Renaissance literary genre, Stephen Bamforth "pays as much attention to the body and to material culture" as to the mentalities and thoughts in this period (253). This volume's collaboration recognizes the importance of his contribution through eight inspired essays, in particular to how the "nexus of wonder," in the high Renaissance period, shaped the transmission of knowledge in various forms, such as textual, oral, empirical, iconographical, and mythological.

For several decades now, Bamforth has enriched early modern scholarship by producing major works on literature and thought, especially within the context of French Renaissance medicine, festivals, scientific poetry, and more recently, texts on prodigies and monsters. Bamforth "has long made crucial contributions to our understanding of the interactions between text, knowledge and wonder [...]" by focusing on figures who shared his enthusiasm in the early modern period, such as Pierre Boaistuau, François Béroalde de Verville, and Jacques Peletier du Mans, to name a few (250–51). Inspired by Bamforth's work, scholars Jean Céard, Marie Madeleine Fontaine, Didier Kahn, Jean Dupébe, Richard Maber, Richard Cooper, James Helgeson, and Neil Kenny tackle subjects on the communication of textual and literary genre, transmission of knowledge through oral, institutional, and familial connections, and communication by the cultural nexus of poetry and festivals.

Kenny's introduction to this volume argues for the relevancy of text and knowledge by demonstrating how preoccupation with the concept of "wonder" against the regularity of nature resulted in a rich body of textual works in the Renaissance period, not only in natural history and medicine but also in a larger body of literary works that shed light on Renaissance politics and cultural life. "Wonder" in this sense is the unknown, the irregular, the unnatural, the extremes, and the "hidden irregularities that God and nature created" (249–50), which stimulated curiosity and questioning. The essays gathered here thus

similarly battle with the relationship between wonder, knowledge, and text during the high Renaissance period.

Céard, Fontaine, and Kahn focus on textual and literary communication of the wondrous and other knowledge. Here one can find Pierre Boaistuau's work analyzed in relation to the horticultural wonders. Céard's sharing of the secrets of the wondrous elements of the mandrake, ginseng, and the Baara root is followed by Fontaine's examination of Boaistuau's fascination with teratology. Kahn drives us to an unprecedented "fusion of alchemy and prose romance" with an analytical look at Morisoti's *Peruviana*. Dupébe, Kenny, and Maber demonstrate that the transmission of knowledge can come in the forms of oral, institutional, and familial contexts. Here one encounters how Nostradamus gained pharmaceutical knowledge not only through text but also through empirical sources and institutional teachings. Kenny's article tells the story of a scholar father who transfers knowledge to his son through text and hands-on practices of alchemy. Maber's essay brings back the transmission of knowledge from interpersonal to institutional, by examining the foundation and functionality of the first provincial royal academy in France dedicated to empirical and scholarly science combined: the *Académie de physique de Caen*.

Finally, one gets a glimpse of the literary tradition and cultural spectacle as a source of wonder and knowledge. Cooper's and Helgeson's essays demonstrate not only the transmission of cultural knowledge but also the deliverance of royal message and political power through royal festivals. Cooper shows us one of the most interesting ways physical and visual wonder such as iconography and mythology, in diplomatic textual sources in particular, invoked knowledge and reconstructed carnival festivities. Helgeson on the other hand believes in the continuity between the literary and non-literary tradition of transmitting knowledge where literature either enriches or unsettles one's knowledge. The essays thus exhibit a variety of ways by which the curious minds of western Europeans between "the late medieval scholasticism and the eventual dominance of Newtonianism" questioned the causal explanation of the natural and the unnatural. They not only produced literary texts but also invented means to transmit the knowledge that invoked mental and empirical experiments caused by their pre-occupation with "wonder."

This issue of *Nottingham French Studies*, in addition to the selection of diverse essays on text, knowledge, and wonder, provides an extensive list of Stephen Bamforth's work as a reference. Scholars and, more importantly,

students of Renaissance studies and early modern political and cultural thought can greatly benefit from the collection of essays gathered here. The range of topics covered from poetry to apothecary, medicine, plants, fantastic beasts, and spectacular festivals can be a starting point for any new researcher in the field of Renaissance thought and the practical implication of ideas produced throughout this period.

ARAZOO FEROZAN  
McMaster University

**Kuehn, Thomas.**

***Family and Gender in Renaissance Italy, 1300–1600.***

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xvi, 387. ISBN 978-1-107-40132-7 (paperback) \$31.99.

Legal sources can be extremely difficult to tackle, especially for those who study medieval and early modern Italy. With so many different types of law, competing jurisdictions, and an almost infinite number of local variations, it is impressive to see such deft handling of these sources as Thomas Kuehn's over the course of his career. In *Family and Gender in Renaissance Italy, 1300–1600*, Kuehn produces another interesting and insightful work on family in the law with particular attention to the law's flexibility and how it gave agency to various actors.

The sources used for this study are *consilia*, or the commentaries of jurists. These were sometimes commissioned for civil cases by one of the parties in a lawsuit, or were simply exercises in legal thought. These *consilia*, as Kuehn points out, are incredibly difficult to read (the Latin is infuriatingly hard to decipher as are the abbreviations) but can be more revealing than other types of sources, particularly when it comes to issues of family, women, and gender. Communal statutes, for example, provide only a sense of prescriptive ideas such as the inability of women to inherit certain types of property. *Consilia*, because they are about adjudication, give us insight into practices. As Kuehn shows, the law “was not a centralized system of rules imposed from above by some higher political power. The law, rather, was a panoply of negotiable rules at work in a panoply of discursive fields” (26).