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Marc D. Schachter, *Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship: From Classical Antiquity to Early Modern France*. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008. xiii and 227 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography and index. \$99.95. (hb). ISBN 978-0-546-6459-8.

Review by Anna Klosowska, Miami University, Ohio.

Marc Schachter's book is welcome for three reasons: it sheds new light on a very well studied subject (Montaigne on friendship), it disarms the reader by the erudition it wears as lightly as Montaigne himself (Greek, Latin, contemporary theory, philology), and it adds a lovely scholarly voice—subtle, gentle, inimitable—to the sometimes mundane field of sixteenth century French studies (how perversely mundane considering the near other-worldly delights of its subject matter). I will look forward to every book Schachter writes. There will be many, I know, and the more they will speak his mind, the more elegant they will be. This volume would have benefitted from extensive editing and cuts. The intelligence that drove it should have sought and found a more intuitive and fluid way of structuring the arguments. A book on Montaigne's friendship (one of the busiest places in the field) must be fully realized as a concept in order to make an impact. This book is far more complex, nuanced, and therefore, in the context, appears less than optimal. I will try to sum up a few of the volume's many strengths below. While I do not focus on philology, I applaud the book for its extensive work in the service of important new readings (including a subject central to Schachter, Etienne de la Boétie's *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*) and dialogue with other critics. In part, it is that dialogue that endears Schachter to me as an elegant and invaluable interlocutor. (The field explored by the book is so central to the discipline that the footnotes sometimes dominate the page, although they are only as long as necessary).

The book reveals Montaigne as he “practices La Boétie’s obsequies until his own death twenty-nine years later,” tracing the “practices at once of freedom and servitude, and their relationship to survival, to the ethics of self-fashioning and to the erotics and politics of friendship” (p. 21). My favorite chapter is the fifth. I like Schachter’s voice, and wish it were more constantly present, for instance, on Derrida: “Although [his] perspective on friendship is sometimes said to ignore the historicity of the discourse, this is not exactly true. [He] may not track the social history of friendship, but he is extremely attentive to the shifts in the rhetoric of the discourse itself” (p. 163). On previous readers: “their point is well taken, but [they] miss half of what Montaigne imagines, because Montaigne also considers such a relationship [equally engaging body and soul] between two men” (p. 156); “but I demurred before one element of Starobinsky’s otherwise astute reading: the suggestion that Montaigne sought solace through the conquering of a woman. Instead, I pointed out that Montaigne’s focus had . . . been himself” (p. 171); “the textual history of the passage. . . profoundly complicates if not entirely refutes Halperin’s assertion” (p. 177). The evolution of the passage in question shows that while in earlier *rédictions* “Montaigne’s will penetrated and lost itself in La Boétie’s, the wills now interpenetrate, if successfully rather than simultaneously” (p. 170). This nicely sums up Schachter’s main argument in the book: that Montaigne progressively arrived at an understanding and wording of a mutuality of love, comprehending body and soul, that is both post-Neoplatonic and post-mystical (my terms)—but, one might add, not unprecedented (Dante, Petrarch).

To progress through the book in a linear order: Schachter opens the Introduction, devoted to “freedom and servitude, and their relationship to survival, to the ethics of self-fashioning and to the erotics and politics of friendship” (p. 21), with the evocation of “tyranny of passions” and Lucretius, linking Montaigne’s essay on friendship with Foucault’s work on styling the self. Very importantly for those of us who work on friendship in the framework of politics, or on the premodern foundations of modern political theory, democracy, statehood, citizenship, subject, *bios politicos*, terror, etc., Schachter introduces a sheaf of texts relevant to current discussions, especially on early modern political thought. That sheaf of currently important texts includes: Foucault’s 1978 lecture “Qu’est-ce que la critique? [critique et Aufklärung],” its pretext (Kant’s “What is Enlightenment?”), its afterwords (for example, Butler’s critique of Foucault). Schachter shows how Foucault’s thinking on the self (as something to be attained through styling but not discipline in the restricted renunciatory sense) works against “scales of power” (self to self, self to other, self to the political, p. 5) and also against the idea of a preexisting self or a “true” identity to be liberated or localized (p. 9). Schachter notes that the same two books are fundamental for Foucault and for La Boétie’s *Servitude Volontaire* (Plutarch’s *Erotikos* and Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*; 14). Already the introduction provides a taste of Schachter’s seductive close readings, for instance comparing Derrida’s “breath” (“so it all comes down to less than a letter” *Politics of Friendship*, 209, cited by Schachter, 18) to Schachter’s critique of Derrida’s reading of Montaigne: Schachter’s “scrutiny of [Derrida’s] engagement with Montaigne. . . hinges on something almost as exacting [as a breath on which Derrida’s close reading hinges]— a paragraph break” (p. 18). That typographic break, splitting Montaigne’s previously seamless discussion of hetero- and homosexual sex into two discrete categories, is an anachronistic “correction,” introduced in an eighteenth century edition and remaining at present (this is just one of Schachter’s important interventions where philology is always in the service of meaning).

Chapter one, on Plato’s *Symposium* and La Boétie’s *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, analyzes the early modern readings of *ethelodouleia* (“voluntary servitude”) and the triad of *pederastia*, *philosophia* and *philogymnastia*, mostly through the discussion of Pausanias’s speech of Plato’s *Symposium*, including the story of Harmodius and Aristogiton. The latter is a frequent reference throughout Schachter’s book, because it is double-edged (or as Schachter says, “problematically unproblematic,” 33): the tyrannicide either an *exemplum* of political virtue as an emanation of homosexual love or, for those authors who exploit it anti-heroically, of homosexual jealousy. At the end of the chapter Schachter identifies his key concerns foregrounded in Pausanias’s speech: 1) “a link between the erotic and political registers of voluntary servitude”; 2) “a related connection between pederasty and political liberty that haunts perfect friendship’s denials of hierarchy and desire”; 3) the always problematic articulation of private and political: Harmodius and Aristogiton; 4) the exclusion of women; 5) “the use of marriage and sexual difference to represent— and naturalize—political hierarchy and the production of consent” in voluntary servitude (pp. 37-8). As Schachter later notes: “Gender’s leash controls both men and women, but its collar lies more tightly around the necks of some than others” (p. 49). Schachter foreshadows his overall reading of Montaigne as post-Neoplatonic when he ends the chapter thus: “this book focuses on accounts of lovers and friends who do not necessarily seek to discipline their desire so that it will look beyond the particular to the universal. Instead, I address relationships where voluntary servitude to one’s beloved is embraced and cultivated, becoming a practice, a way of honoring the dead, a site of transformation for the living” (p. 38).

Chapter two, on La Boétie’s translation of Xenophon and his own *Servitude volontaire*, opens with a more detailed discussion of Foucault on Kant’s “What is *Aufklärung*?” A passage where Schachter’s reading seems uncharacteristically unsatisfying concerns Critobulus (p. 43: the tone colors the meaning, and uncharacteristically Schachter does not attend to the tone or color). Schachter shows “La Boétie’s quite active use of classical texts to further his meditations on consent and the political situation of his own day” (p. 47); he sometimes “eschews tradition and makes [his own interpretation] more radical” (p. 48), as well as independent of the “scales of power” tradition (p. 52). After a discussion of textual issues, Schachter recalls Foucault’s assertion that “power relations, governmentality, the government of self

and of others, and the relationship of self to self constitute a chain, a thread. . . around these notions. . . we should be able to connect together the question of politics and. . . ethics” (p. 57). Schachter then shows how for La Boétie “voluntary servitude is. . . both a great mystery and. . . profoundly unnatural” (p. 61), and the “perverse will to serve” is gendered and therefore, indirectly, also sexed: “we are all free because we are brothers, La Boétie writes, apparently without regard for the freedom of our sisters. . . we thus must ask who gets to be a friend. Not women, evidently, nor sodomites” (pp. 68-9), leading to one of Schachter’s most important readings: “whether [La Boétie’s] treatise makes a ‘call to courage’ similar to the one Foucault identifies in Kant’s ‘What is Enlightenment?’ depends upon who answers the summons” (p. 70).

Chapter three shows Montaigne’s evolving thought on friendship and politics as both lyrically mourning and critiquing La Boétie. Just as Foucault turns inside out the Platonic/Christian/mystical *maxime* and builds the *History of Sexuality* on the premise that “the soul is the prison of the body” (p. 87), Montaigne’s *liberté volontaire* (a will to liberty) is a *dépassement* of La Boétie’s pessimism in *servitude volontaire* (a will to subservience): “eventually, Montaigne would offer him yet another place, one within his own works, one he would not cease to elaborate until his own death. . . a series of places” (p. 83), including editions as well as “borrowings” and “radical redeployments” (p. 85): “for Montaigne, liberty is something that must not only be willed or desired but also imagined, sought, actively cultivated through the application of judgment and critical thought” (p. 90). Schachter asks: “what if the essayist’s oft-remarked conservatism reflected less his comfort with the status quo than his sense that evolving political realities required newly envisioned forms of resistance in the pursuit of a not yet imaginable or ever-receding liberty?” (p. 90). In an important departure from La Boétie who assumes a human nature “opposing two natural inclinations” to servitude and liberty, for Montaigne, “freedom. . . is not the absence of or escape from constraints so much as it is a willful, deliberate relationship to them” (p. 98). “But can we understand virtue to be self-evidently isomorphic with the interests of the state when, in the time of civil war or under an incipient tyranny, the state’s interests seem divided against themselves?” (p. 101). Here, Schachter shows how Montaigne’s thought on politics evolves as “open-ended” and “deliberative” rather than dogmatic (p. 102). The chapter closes with the discussion of “uncanny. . . textual cohabitation” between Montaigne and La Boétie, erased in the posthumous editions by Marie de Gournay. That erasure is the topic of the subsequent chapter, “Friendly Usurpations,” which also discusses a range of Montaigne’s thoughts on marriage. One is grateful for this important inclusion of de Gournay: “the Montaigne read by Pascal was Gournay’s Montaigne, and the Montaigne translated into English by Florio and read by Shakespeare was Gournay’s Montaigne” (p. 134). The fifth chapter (described earlier) is followed by a brief recapitulation/conclusion, not devoid of new interest; for example, Montaigne’s description of love making, perhaps the more stunning because it is given in passing: “biting and bloody scratches” (p. 190).

Schachter’s book attracts one by its *fréquentations*, that is the choice of texts that inspire it, and it disarms by its ways of thinking (“productive problems,” (p. 37), as opposed to premature foreclosures; “volatile and often highly regulated border,” (p. 36), as opposed to facile generalizations; and so on). I hope the citations above also testify to the grace of Schachter’s writing.

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