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Katherine Crawford response to Gary Ferguson review of *The Sexual Culture of the French Renaissance*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xvi + 295 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$90.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-521-76989-1; \$33.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-521-74950-3.

I should perhaps begin by sketching the issues addressed by *The Sexual Culture of the French Renaissance*, as Professor Ferguson concentrates much of his energy on local readings. My analyses trace the development of a distinctively French sexual culture as it emerges from encounters with Italian and ancient ideas about sex, gender and subjectivity. The impetus of the Renaissance is crucial in each of the domains I examine: the influence and anxiety about Antiquity, the promise and danger of astrology, the idealism and eroticism of Neoplatonism, the masculinist claims of certain poetic practices, and the efforts to produce a stable and productive royal sexuality.

Throughout the book, I take up specific figures and discourses as indices of broader cultural concerns. Orpheus, for instance, is one example of an iconic figure whose representational transformation, mobilized by new knowledge and knowledge practices, delineates exciting (and often frightening) sexual possibilities. In the same vein, poetry that both draws on and presses against the Petrarchan tradition reflects a larger tension between intangible ideals and material goals; while formal and aesthetic issues are clearly significant to the literary history of such texts, I am primarily concerned with their role as cultural symptoms. I found myself absorbed—and occasionally obsessed—by the complex mathematical systems that undergird early modern astrological theories, but I concentrate on how those theories foreground a fraught relationship between sexual desires and social imperatives. Margaret McGowan, in her review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, writes, “Crawford revels in the contradictions that she handles so deftly, juggling with multiple flows of influence. Occasionally, there are worries about selectivity, about finding what you are looking for, but Katherine Crawford is subtly conscious of these and reminds us that she knows.”[1] I appreciate the positive assessment of my scholarship, but I am more concerned here to emphasize the point about deliberate selection. I am explicit about the choices I make from among the many cultural artifacts of the period. My areas of inquiry are linked by interrelated historical subjects and the simultaneously collaborative and adversarial evolution of ideas. Clusters of personal and textual influence operate within and across domains as the narratives in each chapter move through time.

Professor Ferguson has dedicated extensive effort to the exposure of translation errors, and I do not wish to ignore that preoccupation. Let me first acknowledge that this book contains errors. At each stage of my research, I consulted a number of scholars who work with early French, Italian, and Latin. I benefitted from the generosity and erudition of many interlocutors; any mistakes that remain are my own.

I have discussed Professor Ferguson’s criticisms with these scholars and others. They were able to agree with one another, and sometimes with Professor Ferguson, on some points; in other cases it was difficult to find consensus, as conclusions rested on acts of interpretation. It would be possible—endlessly possible—not only to debate matters of interpretation, but also to argue

the distinction between interpretation and fact. But here I diverge sharply from Professor Ferguson in my sense of the purpose of a review, or indeed of a response such as this one. There is something fierce and admirable in Professor Ferguson's desire to protect credulous and ill-prepared readers. However, there is also something troubling about an assessment that discounts the practices of peer review, both as they guide a book toward production and as they evaluate that book through an accumulation of response. As a result of such practices, and of my larger experience of my field, I trust my readers to be both careful and informed. It seems unnecessary and ungenerous to argue questions here which their expertise will allow them to answer for themselves.

The consideration H-France showed in sending me this review has been, to a degree, a double-edged sword, and two issues made me hesitate to respond at all. The first arises from a human reaction which our profession trains us not to display, but which some of my readers may recognize: the "ouch" that defies expression within the conventions of intellectual exchange. The second stems from my sense of being caught among barren options, forced to choose between participating in a spectacle of public animosity—which would be not only self-indulgent but, for me at least, inauthentic—and engaging in interminable local debates. But that narrow realm of choice is illusory, and I turn instead to the idea that human reaction has a place, even an urgency, as we come together in this forum to share our commitment to our field: not the ever-inarticulate "ouch," but the speakable desire that we might continue to move forward through engagement with one another's work. While this will be labeled my response to Professor Ferguson's review, it is not a private exchange about a single book; it is a public invitation to discuss collective methods and goals. It would be naive to imagine that scholars concerned with gender and sexuality, and more specifically with the project of recovering lives and stories that challenge the master narratives of oppression and abjection, should be allied by that shared endeavor. We are no more immune to squabbles, aversions, and genuinely substantial disagreements than any other community. Yet there are naivetes I choose to preserve, and among them is the hope that we might focus on issues that advance our scholarship and highlight the stakes of what we do, even or perhaps especially at the height of our disputes.

As is perhaps obvious, I cannot agree with Professor Ferguson's characterization of my scholarship. But this book will be judged, as all books are judged, by its peers. The process will produce a palimpsest rather than a verdict, which, for those of us invested in the freedom of academic discourse, is as it should be. At this belated moment, my opinion of my own work is the least relevant to that process. I willingly leave the next steps in this conversation to you.

NOTES

[1] Margaret M. McGowan, "A King's Arts," *The Times Literary Supplement*, November 12, 2010.

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