

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Fouigny, Mary-Nelly and Marie Roig Miranda (eds.). Réalités et représentations du corps dans l'Europe des XVIe et XVIIe siècles

Margaret E. Owens

Volume 36, numéro 2, printemps 2013

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091148ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i2.20178>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Owens, M. (2013). Compte rendu de [Fouigny, Mary-Nelly and Marie Roig Miranda (eds.). Réalités et représentations du corps dans l'Europe des XVIe et XVIIe siècles]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 36(2), 184-186. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i2.20178>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2013

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

Foulligny, Mary-Nelly and Marie Roig Miranda (eds.).

Réalités et représentations du corps dans l'Europe des XVIe et XVIIe siècles.

Europe XVI-XVII, 15 / 16. Nancy: Université de Nancy II, 2011. 2 vols. Pp. 400+495. ISBN 978-2-917030-04-2 / 978-2-917080-05-9 (paperback) €27 / 33.

In a two-volume collection of 46 essays, originally presented at an international colloquium held at the Université de Nancy in 2009, *Réalités et représentations du corps dans l'Europe des XVIe et XVIIe siècles* offers a remarkably wide-ranging assemblage of scholarship on early modern European body studies. Covering not only literary texts but also evidence drawn from the fields of philosophy, painting, sculpture, medicine, religion, history, and politics, the contributions shed light on both elite and popular discourses pertaining to early modern bodies. It is not just human bodies that interest these scholars: angelic and demonic bodies, as well as monstrous, chimeric, and various forms of hybrid bodies (animal-human-machine), also receive attention. While all the essays are published in French, they discuss primary materials originating in Spain, Italy, France, and Germany, with Golden Age Spanish literature prominently represented. No fewer than five essays engage with the works of Francisco de Quevedo, and three are devoted to Cervantes. Lope de Vega, Baltasar Gracián, Calderón de la Barca, and a number of less familiar Spanish writers also appear. Since it is impossible in the scope of a book review to summarize or even to mention all the contributions to this collection, my review will provide a mere sampling of the scholarship in the two volumes.

Diversity precludes the emergence of commonalities across the essays, not only at the level of the conclusions but also in terms of the methodologies and disciplinary tools brought to bear on the primary texts and materials. In a move typical of many multidisciplinary collections, the editors have sought to compensate for the lack of cohesion by grouping the essays into broad thematic categories, as follows: philosophic and scientific paradigms; the representation of the body's flesh-and-bone materiality; the paradox of the feminine body, from the legacy of sinful Eve to the optimistic vision of idealized beauty; and the body liberated from material chains, the dream body, and the glorious body. In a further gesture toward cohesion, Marie-Nelly Foulligny's preface traces a network of connections and thematic strands linking various contributions.

However, I anticipate that most readers will draw upon this collection selectively, turning only to those essays dealing with primary texts and national traditions that lie within the specific scope of the scholar's expertise. In short, given its extreme diversity in subject matter and approach and the highly specialized nature of each contribution, this project, like many others of its kind, seems destined to leave unfulfilled the promise of interdisciplinarity. The concept of the "body," after all, even when delimited to Europe between 1500 and 1700, proves far too protean to serve as the integrating principle for such a diverse array of scholarly enterprises.

Among the contributions that venture furthest into interdisciplinary territory are two essays that examine the influence of anatomical illustration on Renaissance painting. In a detailed analysis of the newly restored frescoes of the Last Judgement in Florence's Santa Maria del Fiore, Anne-Sophie Molinié identifies features in the depiction of the Resurrection of the Dead that correspond with images of auto-dissection and other forms of animate, flayed bodies in anatomical treatises by Vesalius, Berengario da Carpi, and others. Molinié argues that these frescoes attest to the Church's success in assimilating and harnessing the iconography of scientific investigation for didactic ends. Ranging more widely through sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century painting, Laurène Sanchez traces differences between northern and southern European appropriations of Vesalian iconography. In contrast to the rapid diffusion of anatomical iconography and discourses across many cultural sites, the animal-machine model that emerged out of Cartesian philosophy in the seventeenth century met with much greater resistance, as Géraldine Caps demonstrates in her study of Louis XIV's efforts to suppress the teaching of Cartesian philosophy. Inasmuch as the mechanistic model for the human body ruptured the concept of the Great Chain of Being, along with a host of received ideas, Cartesian thinking was perceived as a threat to the ideological underpinnings of monarchy.

The section devoted to the paradoxes of the feminine body includes several essays on witchcraft trials. For instance, Ana Conde, focusing on witchcraft prosecutions in sixteenth-century Cuenca, observes that the defining features of the witch were advanced age, femininity, and an insatiable sexual appetite. Conde argues that this construction of witchcraft was fueled by Counter-Reformation culture's preoccupation with sexual morality. At the other extreme of the polarized representations of the female body, Sébastien Riguet discusses

Spanish theatrical treatments of the Assumption of the Virgin through the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to Riguet, the remarkable vitality and longevity of the Assumption play as a dramatic tradition may be partially attributed to the absence of physical remains for this saint. That is, the theatrical emphasis on the miracles associated with the Virgin's body, from its resistance to attack (the legend of Jephonias) to its translation to heaven, served a purpose akin to that of the veneration of holy relics associated with other saints and martyrs.

Versions of the carnivalesque or grotesque body recur throughout the collection. In a fascinating analysis of the evocation of a pregnant, corpulent male body in Thomas Murner's anti-Lutheran pamphlet *The Great Lutheran Fool* (1522), Jean Schillinger demonstrates that Mikhail Bakhtin's optimistic, utopian depiction of grotesque corporeality does not correspond with the satiric deployment of carnivalesque tropes in religious controversy. Within the field of body studies over the past decade, interest in the Bakhtinian grotesque body has been increasingly eclipsed by a new critical focus: the posthumanist body, a perspective that focuses on the permeability of borders that ostensibly distinguish the human from the animal, vegetative, inorganic, and digital realms. The influence of this critical trend is most visible in Benito Pelegrín's essay on Baltasar Gracián's *El Criticón* (1651–57), an allegorical novel featuring a diverse array of hybrid bodies that combine human, animal, and inorganic elements. Pelegrín credits Gracián with ingeniously anticipating the development of modern prosthetics, organ transplants, and other innovations in biotechnology.

With the exception of Pelegrín, most of the contributors to this collection show limited interest in exploring connections between postmodern and early modern understandings of the body. Indeed, this collection as a whole does not threaten to *revolutionize* the field of body studies. What it does accomplish is the assembly of a wealth of intriguing scholarship, which, in its sheer diversity, is bound to include something of interest to specialists across a wide array of disciplines.

MARGARET E. OWENS, *Nipissing University*