

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Skenazi, Cynthia. Aging Gracefully in the Renaissance: Stories of Later Life from Petrarch to Montaigne

Barbara C. Bowen

Volume 37, numéro 3, été 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090686ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i3.22486>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Bowen, B. (2014). Compte rendu de [Skenazi, Cynthia. Aging Gracefully in the Renaissance: Stories of Later Life from Petrarch to Montaigne]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 37(3), 315–317.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i3.22486>

© 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, 2015

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/>

An Introduction to German Pietism is an impressive scholarly work, especially in its interpretation of Pietism as a forward-looking, modern, and global religious and social movement. It is equally impressive as an introduction to Pietism's complex history and legacy. Shantz makes an excellent case for Pietism's relevance as a field of study. He writes clearly and effectively, providing context and ensuring that any potentially obscure terms are well defined. He discusses primary and secondary source availability for almost every topic, and suggests areas where there might be an abundance of sources that have yet to be sufficiently examined. The book's appendices offer a remarkable set of resources for both students and faculty or teaching assistants. The first two (A and B) are sets of translated primary sources available in English only in this volume. These include the sermons and writings of various Pietists, Pietist hymns, and personal letters between Pietists. Appendix C, which contains lists of discussion questions for every chapter, is particularly useful for instructors. The final appendix (D) is a list of student members of the Leipzig conventicle of Pietists in the 1680s, including biographical details for each one.

This book is clearly written and well structured. It tackles a complicated historiographical field while still emphasizing Shantz's own interpretation of Pietism's importance in the development of modern Europe and modern religion. Most importantly, it serves its primary purpose as an engaging and clear introduction to the study of German Pietism.

AVRAM HEISLER

York University

Skenazi, Cynthia.

Aging Gracefully in the Renaissance: Stories of Later Life from Petrarch to Montaigne.

Leiden: Brill, 2013. Pp 178. ISBN 978-90-04-25466-4 (hardcover) \$127.

Cynthia Skenazi's book has two main goals: to explore shifts in attitude toward aging from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, and to provide a historical perspective on the increasing proportion of elderly people, not just in Europe but globally; by 2050, people of sixty and over will outnumber those under fifteen (1), a phenomenon the author sees as a crucial problem of our time.

Chapter 1, “A Sound Mind in a Healthy Body,” begins with detailed reference to Foucault and examines the advice given by Galen, Petrarch, Ficino, Zerbi, Cornaro, Erasmus, and Montaigne. This combination of well- and lesser-known authors (I had never heard of Zerbi or Cornaro) on the subject of individual health care for older men stresses the reconciliation of the doctor’s and the humanist’s views (25). Galen’s acceptance of the Hippocratic four humors is well known; his program of self-help in *De sanitate tuenda*, less so. One of his examples, Antiochus, walked every day in his eighties and ate small amounts of food three times a day (18). Petrarch’s remarks on health in *Rerum senilium libri* encompass medicine, moral philosophy, religion, history, and literature (22). Skenazi provides a number of surprising insights: for instance, Ficino emphasizes the importance of praising God and studying (29), Zerbi states that old age extends from the thirtieth to the sixtieth year of life (33), and Cornaro interestingly identifies three plagues of his time—hypocrisy, gluttony, and Lutheranism—seeing the latter as corrupting the word of Christ (40).

Chapter 2, “The Circulation of Power and Knowledge,” discusses Cicero, Petrarch, Castiglione, and Montaigne, authors who all adapted classical sources. Skenazi explores in detail Petrarch’s attitude to Cicero, his relations with the Papacy, and his attempts to persuade the exiled pope to return to Rome. His attitude to old age comes across as particularly attractive to a modern reader, with its emphasis on dignity, serenity, wisdom, and inner freedom (74). There is lengthy discussion of the organization of Petrarch’s *Letters of Old Age*, of Castiglione’s depiction of the aged courtier, and of Montaigne’s essay on old age (1.57) in relation to the ongoing civil wars and as a challenge to Cicero’s *De senectute* (89). Karl Mannheim’s 1959 essay “The Problem of Generations” helps to explain Montaigne’s views (91).

The third chapter, “Love in Old Age,” showcases similarly varied characters—Petrarch and Montaigne again, Ronsard, and Pasquier—and begins with another lengthy disquisition on Foucault. Again there are illuminating insights: Petrarch’s conception of love capitalizing on *caritas* (104); Ronsard’s greater capacity for empathy as he ages (109); Montaigne’s display of the qualities of Castiglione’s young courtier, especially his “sense of negligence and effortlessness” (an effective translation of *sprezzatura*) in his 3.5 essay on sex (118); and Pasquier’s playful challenges to stereotypes of love in old age (124). The last chapter, “Then and Now,” relates the 1984 MacArthur Foundation study on “new gerontology” (139) to Erasmus’s dialogue *Senile Colloquium*, whose

speakers represent four different ways of growing old: Glycion is healthy and happy; Polygamos (much married), unstable and unhappy; Pampirus, even more unstable after a rambling life; and Eusebius, calm and dutiful. Skenazi also relates the study to Montaigne's "De l'expérience" and "De la vanité," with again much reporting of Foucault. I particularly like the suggestion that the A B C layers of Montaigne's text resemble the different strata of Rome's ruins (161).

Each chapter has a conclusion—that of chapter 4 charmingly relates Montaigne's views on aging to the process of aging Château d'Yquem wine—but, unsurprisingly, there is no general conclusion. I had no idea that the critical literature on aging was so abundant, but are the frequent references to it really essential? The constant recourse to Foucault also seems unnecessary; Skenazi's viewpoint is sufficiently interesting without all this support. Each of her chapters contains a lively assortment of material new to me, and her comparisons of very different authors constantly open up new perspectives; the book as a whole is a stimulating and instructive read.

BARBARA C. BOWEN
Vanderbilt University

Soranzo, Matteo.
Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples.

Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. viii, 169. ISBN 978-1-4724-1355-0 (hard-cover) £60.

Matteo Soranzo's book provides an original and welcome take on a series of texts from a specific period, the cultural world of Aragonese Naples. Though dealt with by historians such as Jeremy Bentley, Giuseppe Galasso, David Abulafia, Carlo de Frede, and Joana Barreto, and by scholars of literature such as Gianfranco Folena, Pasquale Sabbatino, and José Carlos Rovira, it remains a period largely neglected by scholars. Soranzo demonstrates a thorough knowledge of this unique cultural moment: an Iberian court established in Naples, intent on integrating itself as a veritable cultural and political power in the Italian peninsula, while maintaining ties with Aragon before its incorporation into the Spanish Empire as a viceroyalty in 1504. As such, the book is a must