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Le Comte, clinging to the older feudal order whereas Rodrique and his father
Don Diègue are partisans of the new monarchical political and historical
stance. Rodrigue is quick to perceive that an important historical change has
occurred whereas Chimène refuses that change and sees in it only a trans-
gression from the old order. Lyons shows how the psychological dynamics
among the characters are a function of their varying responses to the evolu-
tion of history.

While this book provides a remarkably insightful analysis of Corneille's
plays, it offers much more than that. It uses details of Corneille's theater to
raise some of the larger questions of seventeenth-century classical culture. It is
ultimately a book about why the French were so obsessed with the history of
Rome, how they used that history to understand their own history, and how
these concerns were an integral part of their developing sense of nation. I feel
that Lyons's analysis provides the right framework to understand many parts
of Corneille's plays and of classical culture in general that have not previously
made sense to me. In other words, I found myself frequently pausing to say,
"Aha," and then suddenly some other parts of the puzzle fell into place.
Lyons's book was a pleasure to read, not simply because of the "aha" factor but
also because he has an uncommonly wonderful writing style that makes
abstract concepts palpable and real. He has a gift for taking complex theoreti-
cal questions and unraveling them, thread by thread, to examine them in ways
that make me remember why I chose to study French literature.

Sara E. Melzer
University of California, Los Angeles

$45.00.

Jonathan Goldberg's Desiring Women Writing, as its title indicates, is motivated
by a "double desire"—the "desire that there should be women writers in the
Renaissance and that the desires articulated in their texts be acknowledged"
(14). The object of Goldberg's finely tuned polemic belongs to a critical tradi-
tion that celebrates female writers as Women Worthies, whose power derives
from their conformity to an ongoing Legend of Good Women. Submission
to sexual censorship, Goldberg argues, has been the price paid by early women writers for admission to the literary canon. Goldberg wields two weapons in the good fight to acknowledge the illicit desires of these women writers: sophisticated close reading and an unflagging attention to the false rhetoric of other critics.

Desiring Women Writing is divided into three parts. Part one, “The Legend of Good Women,” pairs Aemelia Lanyer with Aphra Behn. “Canonizing Aemelia Lanyer” critiques the “received view” of Lanyer as a foremother of liberal feminism. Goldberg analyzes how Lanyer’s religious rhetoric preserves as well as challenges patriarchal hierarchies; he then offers a class-based analysis to show that Lanyer’s maneuvering among traditional categories of gender helps her reclaim as author a position she had lost by marrying down. Lanyer’s community of good women, based on a desire of “like for like” that puts Lanyer on an equal footing with her aristocratic patrons, makes possible not only same-sex desire but also the sale of sexual services within the female power structure. Lanyer’s community of women is scandalous, home to the tribade as well as the pious woman. “Aphra Behn’s Female Pen” sets out to reclaim Behn, a traditionally scandalous subject, from the androgynous identity Goldberg thinks has been imposed on her by contemporary feminist scholarship. Analyses of The Rover and Oroonoko demonstrate, by way of Behn’s shifting identifications with male and female subject positions, that her investment in female characters depends partly on their status as objects of male desire. The relation between Behn’s narrator and Imoinda in Oroonoko, although a form of female–female desire, implicates Behn’s female pen in the kind of violence and racial aggression that Oroonoko associates with masculinity. Same-sex desire is not always benign.

Part two, “Translating Women,” challenges the assumption that Renaissance women were permitted to do translation precisely because the female translator was subordinated to a male author. “Margaret Roper’s Daughterly Devotions: Unnatural Translations” makes the fascinating argument that Margaret Roper, whose father considered himself and Margaret’s husband as sufficient audience for her literary labors, participated in the humanist game of literary emulation with none other than Desiderius Erasmus. Margaret’s correspondence with Erasmus allows Goldberg to read A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster, her translation of Erasmus’s Precatio Dominica, as her response to a combined compliment and challenge issued by Erasmus in the previous year, when he dedicated to Margaret Roper his commentary on Prudentius’s Christmas and Epiphany hymns as a way of marking the birth of
her first child. Erasmus associates Margaret with the passive role of literal motherhood but reconstructs her marriage to John Roper as a nonhierarchical relation between siblings. Margaret responds with a complicated set of rhetorical moves that transform her from the daughter of both Thomas More and Erasmus, her adoptive father within the humanist paideia, into Christ’s (male) sibling. In a final move, Goldberg talks about how Thomas More, in his one documented miracle, prescribed the enema that saved Margaret Roper from a life-threatening fever. This becomes for Goldberg an emblem of incestuous rape. But even this construction of the daughter, Goldberg argues, has been prefigured by Margaret’s own devotional rhetoric of the body, so that her participation in a discourse of pious subjection becomes a “way out” of traditional gender roles, an opportunity to claim for herself a place in humanist discourse by her very embrace of a self-abnegating piety.

“The Countess of Pembroke’s Literal Translation” examines the literary filiation between Philip and Mary Sidney through Mary’s translation of Petrarch’s Trionfi della Morte. While Sidney has been praised for her fidelity to Petrarch’s original, Goldberg examines patiently the ways in which Mary’s manipulation of textual relations within the Petrarch poem allows her to figure first Philip, and then herself, in terms of same-sex erotics. The effect is finally an incestuous union of living sister and dead brother in a Petrarchan relationship that unites, rather than separates, them.

Part three, “Writing as a Woman,” returns to a preoccupation of Goldberg’s earlier work, the relation of writing to agency and authority. While male authors of the Renaissance often write “as” a woman—speak from the position of a female character—Goldberg argues that contemporary critics naturalize too readily gender identifications in English Renaissance poetry. “Mary Shelton’s Hand” concerns a poem attributed to Tottel to Henry Howard, the earl of Surrey, but recorded in manuscript in Mary Shelton’s hand. This chapter argues that because “authorship” is gendered male, Shelton has been treated as the scribe rather than the author of the poem “O Happy Dames,” which appears in the Devonshire manuscript as well as Tottel’s Miscellany. If we accept, even for a moment, a female author for this poem, we can get beyond the conventional assumption that a poem lamenting the absence of a male beloved must be spoken by a woman. In his characteristically painstaking way, Goldberg deconstructs this brief lyric to show that it simultaneously constructs female desire as active and offers male-male desire as an alternative to normative heterosexuality.

“Graphina’s Mark,” celebrating a minor character from Elizabeth Cary’s
Mariah, argues that Graphina, although she stands allegorically for writing as silence and absence, is no mere cipher. Graphina echoes her lover Pheroras, but she also transgresses class and racial lines. The mutuality between Graphina and Pheroras, although superficially reinforcing compulsory heterosexuality, also has much in common with male-male relations in the play, particularly the bond of friendship that links Constarbus with the sons of Babus. As a sign for the female writer, Graphina is a displaced figure of male-male friendship, a suggested but unrealized model for relationships within the play Mariah.

Desiring Women Writing offers readers an elegant glimpse of one critic's struggle to free his subjects from confining sexual stereotypes. The book offers abundant examples of strenuous but subtle acts of close reading that acknowledge women writers as talented rhetors. Each chapter returns to one subject—the construction of same-sex desire in the early modern period—but Goldberg's careful attention to the complexities of this phenomenon prevents the argument from becoming monotonous. Desiring Women Writing is, however, sometimes compromised by its attitude toward the critical community with which the book engages. The Acknowledgments page is full of warm and specific thanks to individuals, including graduate and even undergraduate students. At the same time, Goldberg's use of other critics can be churlish. He enters the lists as a champion of desiring women against an institutionalized feminism tainted by the sexual puritanism of its Victorian origins. In the process, Goldberg attacks the women critics whose work provides a point of departure for his own and so replicates the process by which early women writers have been devalued. Such a disparity between preaching and practice becomes at times unnerving.

Readers who are thoroughly familiar with the feminist critics that Goldberg engages will follow the twists and turns of his argument most easily. On the other hand, the strength of this book lies finally in its ability to model the intellectual processes by which writers find their places in the critical conversation. For this reason, Desiring Women Writing will be of interest to students as well as academics. Goldberg offers readers at all stages a passionate and manageable introduction to major issues involved in reading and writing about Renaissance women writers. His argument in favor of acknowledging their illicit and transgressive desires is finally a winning argument.

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