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## Review Essay: Cholakian, Patricia Francis. *Rape and Writing in The Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre*

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Bartlett, Kenneth A., Konrad Eisenbichler and Janice Liedl. *Love and Death in the Renaissance*. Dovehouse Editions, Ottawa 1991. 219 pp. \$28.00.

The twin themes of love and death form the focus of thirteen papers gathered to commemorate a conference, sponsored by the Renaissance Society of America, forming the third in a series, Dovehouse Studies in Literature. The diversity of the texts studied in these essays offers an illuminating and captivating discussion of the significance of these subjects in Renaissance literature.

Modest in dimension, *Love and Death in the Renaissance* suffers from the apparently thoughtless way in which it was put together. Why the double theme was chosen would, in itself, have provided an interesting topic of introduction or epilogue, allowing the editors to link its history in classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the writings of Arabs and other non-European medieval scholars. Conversely, the relation of love and death in a period in which theology shared an equal importance with the revival of classical ideas might have provided the subject of a few provocative thoughts.

All these matters can be gleaned only in a fragmentary way from putting together the various essays. And even that is made arbitrary and difficult. For there is no apparent order to the essays. The sequence is neither thematic nor chronological. The reader is tempted to wonder why it took three editors to plot a strategy that is merely alphabetical.

Among the very interesting essays contained here are two that stand apart for their brilliant insights: those of Daniel Martin, who studied Hermes as Mercury as St Michael the Archangel as Montaigne, and of Olga Pugliese, whose analysis of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* studies love and death as affecting each other in the elegiac perspective of the treatise. The essay by Linda Austern, which seeks to relate the twin themes of the volume to ideas of music in the English Renaissance, concentrates on exploring the theoretical link between love and music. William Bowen's essay on Ficino's theory of love provides a very intelligent demonstration of the relation between the classification of intervals in harmonic structure and the degrees of love described by Ficino in *De amore*. The essay on Juan Luis Vives's *Instruction of a Christen Woman* by Margaret Mikesell brings to light, though in a limited context, a little-known text focusing on the education of women. Most of the other essays consist in *explications de texte*.

The breadth and variety of the essays provide a fascinating document of the diversity of literary energies devoted to these themes in Renaissance times. However, lacking an overall intellectual direction that might have guided the interested layman and provided an essential background for the budding scholar, the volume offers little more than a memorabilia for the initiated of a very special conference.

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Cholakian, Patricia Francis. *Rape and Writing in The Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre*. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1991. xiv + 301 pp. \$34.95.

In *Rape and Writing in The Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre*, Patricia Francis Cholakian embarks on a search for 'the mark of the female body on women's writing of the past' (p 219). She argues that the scene of rape in the fourth novella of *The Heptameron* is based upon an autobiographical incident that took place in Marguerite de Navarre's youth and that the fourth novella is thus the central generative story in the collection, the nucleus of a series of variations on the theme of rape. The desire to tell this traumatic incident compels de Navarre to write, and the risk of exposure and loss of honor are responsible for the complexity and indirection of her telling.

Cholakian's approach is informed by psychoanalytical theory, new historicism, poststructuralism, and also the feminist view that all literature is constructed by ideologies of gender. Aware of the way postmodernism has problematized the discussion of difference, she looks for evidence of feminine writing in the form as well as in the content of a work. She argues that an examination of women's writing must begin 'within rather than across history' and that feminine narratives should be read as 'palimpsests', a term she borrows from Gilbert and Gubar for texts in which 'the preexisting male narratives have been written over' (p 5).

The male narrative that de Navarre 'writes over' is the traditionally bawdy novella in which a woman is often the butt of the male author's humor. Cholakian demonstrates how in the fourth novella Marguerite de Navarre converts the masculine narrative on seduction into 'a feminine discourse on masculine vanity' when the resistant princess scratches and mars the face of her attacker (p 24). Switching between the point of view of the hero and the princess/victim, de Navarre destabilizes the novella form. Cholakian finds evidence of feminine writing in the vocabulary as well as the narrative structure and brilliantly analyzes the differences in the way men and women define such words as 'honor', '*jouissance*', 'rape' and 'seduction'.

In a chapter on Marguerite de Navarre's interest in Protestantism, Cholakian finds a connection between anticlericalism and de Navarre's antimasculinist bias. While some feminist scholars have argued that the Reformation marked a loss of sexual freedom and spiritual power for women (see Joan Gadol Kelly, 'Was There a Renaissance for Women?' in *Women, Theory, and History: The Essays of Joan Kelly* [University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1984]), Cholakian shows that the Reformation allowed women a space in which to challenge authority and hierarchy.

This book makes an important contribution to the growing body of work on women writers of the Renaissance. Cholakian's innovative critical approach, in which she gracefully combines French feminism, new historicism, psychoanalytic theory, and even film theory provides a guide for how to approach a woman-authored text from the past. Despite using this daunting list of critical schools, Cholakian never sacrifices clarity or close attention to language and historical context. She opens up new ways of reading and generously communicates her excitement about women's writing.