

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Bates, Catherine. Masculinity, Gender, and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric

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Volume 35, Number 2, Spring 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105837ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i2.19375>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Blakelock, E. (2012). Review of [Bates, Catherine. Masculinity, Gender, and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 35(2), 145–147. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i2.19375>

on suicide; he unconvincingly interprets the soliloquy as a debate on Hamlet's withdrawal from political engagement.

Nevertheless, the volume presents valuable and deeply knowledgeable discussions of early modern political thought, providing an extremely useful and up-to-date survey of scholarship on a variety of political themes, including succession, the humanist debate over the active and contemplative lives, civic humanism, and republicanism.

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**Bates, Catherine.**

*Masculinity, Gender, and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric.*

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. viii, 263. ISBN 978-0-521-88287-3 (hardcover) \$95.

This book presents a variety of “perverse” Renaissance masculinities — masculinities that deviate from a phallic norm, are abject failures, and confuse due to their radical alterity — as writing subjects and as depictions within poetic works. Catherine Bates focuses on the work of canonical English authors Sidney, Raleigh, Shakespeare, and Donne, but chooses her case studies from among the most problematic and marginal works of these authors. Over the course of her analysis she also interrogates the modern critical approaches that have largely erased or transformed these perverse masculinities. In fact, Bates's criticism of the various critical “recuperative strategies” through which abjection is turned back into power, and linguistic failure into authorial mastery, is one of the most exciting aspects of this book — as is her alternative approach, which is to preserve the internal contradictions and ambiguity around gender in these works with the goal of allowing their authors to be emasculated, and to fail. Informed by Silverman's work on the “dominant fiction” of masculinity and Fineman's readings of Shakespeare's sonnets, as well as by Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Bates provides nuanced readings of neglected works by these canonical authors. Her analyses suggest that the reason these works have been neglected, even to the point of having their authorship contested, is tied

up with the approaches of modern criticism and its relationship to male power/linguistic potency.

Bates begins with a reading of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, a work in which clearly masochistic language and literary structure are present. The reader is placed parallel to the feminine Stella, who is the witness to a carefully staged masochistic production of Astrophil's many pains (p. 28). This chapter also serves as an exploration of the theorization of masochism, and Bates succinctly summarizes and reveals the limitations of Foucauldian, Freudian, and Deleuzian approaches, all of which tend to re-empower the masochistic subject, eventually introducing Mann's concept of "masocriticism" to explain how Sidney is able to relinquish his claims to mastery and self-consistency in order to produce this work. As in many subsequent chapters, Bates manages simultaneously to accomplish a nuanced literary analysis and a detailed meta-analysis of critical methods, both of which revolve around themes of mastery and abjection.

The fragmentation of the masculine subject is addressed in the next two chapters, one on Sidney's blazon "What tongue can her perfections tell?" in the *New Arcadia*, and the other on Raleigh's *The Ocean to Cynthia*. Sidney's blazon displays an outright gender confusion: it is spoken by a man dressed as a woman, describing another woman. Bates does not attempt to master these gender configurations, instead examining the ways in which they cause interpreters of the poem to swing from homo- to heterosexual interpretations, creating an unstable environment both inside and outside of the text. In Raleigh's poem, the text itself is fundamentally unstable, often leaving readers disoriented. For Bates, this is not "a problem to be apologised for or a difficulty to be explained away" (p. 140); rather, instability at the very core of Raleigh's poem helps stage the dissolution of the writing self. Her discussion revolves around Freudian notions of melancholia: an effect of the necessity for a boy to relinquish his first love-object, the mother, in order to identify with his father and become a man; in fact he does not give her up but continues to identify with her and installs her within himself (p. 148). Raleigh's poem dramatizes the refusal to relinquish the love-object, and the object's reabsorption into the self, with such lines as "Shee is gonn, shee is lost, shee is found, she is ever faire" (p. 164). Under such conditions, the subject can never be fully masculine, but bears a chronic wound. Thus the masculine subject of Raleigh's poem must travel constantly from consolidation to collapse and back again.

In the final two chapters, feminine identifications are the focus, first in Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint*, then in Donne's "Sapho to Philaenis." Bates explores the complaint's depiction of female homosociality and shared eroticism, in which the women's supposed object of desire (who is himself far from hyper-masculine) eventually disappears, leaving behind a scene of exclusively female masochistic desire. A complex set of cross-identifications is opened up, including the possibility of a male subject identifying with female homoeroticism, and other such "unthinkable" positions. "Sapho to Philaenis" depicts a mirroring, narcissistic relationship between two women in which neither is masculinized, an extremely unusual approach for this period of time. Bates examines this work as a complex parody of praise poetry, in a manner akin to Fineman's work on Shakespeare, but with even more radical implications relating to identity and gender.

Bates's incisive questions about the identifications that link persona and poet, reader and writer, writer and critic, and the effect of these identifications on issues of gender and power, make this book an exciting read for literary scholars. The title is overly generic and does not reflect the book's focus on perversity and masochism, or its exploration of the ways in which these issues can transform our understanding of Renaissance writings; as a consequence, the book may not reach the critically attuned audience it deserves. Those with a more historical approach will find themselves challenged by Bates's hesitation to place the works she examines in a detailed social context. Despite her reasoned critiques of some new historicist approaches, it is difficult not to wonder whether Freudian-derived descriptions of identities and power relations (the role of "the beating mother" in masochism, for example) need more fine tuning when applied to the English culture of the sixteenth century — a culture in which the practices of warding, wet-nursing, and even standard schooling might complicate or multiply relationships between children and their "parents." However, Bates's use of such critical tools reveals the fascinating gender dynamics to be found in shadowy corners of the English canon. Certainly, she establishes a basis for further investigation into the varieties of failed masculinity in Renaissance works, while contributing key insights into the broader theoretical problems posed by masochism.