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Sexualities
in England, 1570–1640

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ENGLAND, 1570–1640

Edited by

*Constance C. Relihan
and
Goran V. Stanivukovic*

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PROSE FICTION AND EARLY MODERN SEXUALITIES IN ENGLAND, 1570–1640

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To Tom, Maeve, and Meg

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S E R I E S E D I T O R ' S F O R E W O R D

Prose Fiction and Early Modern Sexualities in England, 1570–1640, is the first title in the Early Modern Cultural Studies Series that focuses explicitly and almost exclusively on representations of sexual thoughts, feelings, and practices. It does so in a way that reveals these thoughts, feelings, and practices to be culturally specific, and crucial in the production of human subjects as individuals. The study of early modern sexuality is of course not a new phenomenon, but *Prose Fiction and Early Modern Sexualities* makes a crucial contribution to this field of inquiry because it explores a genre – prose fiction – that has hitherto been unfairly slighted in favor of the drama and poetry. As Constance C. Relihan and Goran V. Stanivukovic, the editors of *Prose Fiction and Early Modern Sexualities*, observe, “our picture of early modern sexualities will never be complete if we do not delve into the erotically rich narratives of early modern fiction.” But *Prose Fiction and Early Modern Sexualities* does of course much more than merely study a neglected genre. Gathered here are essays dealing with constructions of “geographic otherness” in the early modern novella, “passion and reason” in Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, the impact of Greek Romances on early modern conceptions of marriage, “sexy dressing” in Sidney’s *New Arcadia*, “supernatural desires” in Mary Worth’s *Urania*, “urban seductions” and homoerotic male bonding, print culture’s “gelding” of Gascoigne, the undoing of sexual binaries in Lyly’s *Euphues*, and, indeed, much more.

The word “sexualities” in this volume’s title is deliberately used in its plural form, and the essayists assembled here – Darlene Greenhalgh, Lisa Hopkins, Steven Mentz, Sheila Cavanagh, Stephen Guy-Bray, Morgan Holmes, Alan Stewart, Elizabeth Sauer, Robert Maslen, and Lori Humphrey Newcomb – firmly underscore our suspicion that the early modern English never lived by a single, unified, dominant discourse of sexuality (with the grudging recognition that marginal individuals or small groups of individuals might have practiced deviant behaviors). Indeed, what the examination of romances, novellas, translations of romances, and rogue literature points toward is that most of the representations of sexuality and desire in prose texts altogether defy the familiar traditional discourses of moderation and self-control. Exploring knightly romances, for instance, one contributor argues that the texts offer the early modern reader with a range of generally positive representations of same-sex erotic desire – representations that do not fit the traditional categories of “loyal friend and courting knight.”

What emerges most powerfully from *Prose Fiction and Early Modern Sexualities* is that discourses of sexuality are both amazingly varied and closely intertwined with other cultural discourses. Furthermore, influenced by the best tendencies of new historicism, the authors here allow for dynamic, reciprocal interaction between different cultural spheres, always refusing to explain sexualities in prose fiction in terms of other, seemingly more authoritative, discourses such as medical, political, or theological discourses, with which they may or may not coincide. Nor are they satisfied to understand sexualities within the generic constraints and conventions of the prose genre. In fact, because of prose fiction's marginal status in early modern culture, we can reasonably argue that its authors did not feel the same duty to color within the lines as did writers of a generically more strictly defined genre such as the drama or a more highly respected genre such as poetry. Intended to be read in private, the sprawling, non-narrative character of many prose fictions is in some ways the perfect vehicle for the exploration of, and experimentations with, sexualities without imposing on them the moral judgments, plot restrictions, and social condemnations that would be required of texts performed on the public stage or that aspired to the lofty name of poetry. No matter that scholarship today has unjustly snubbed this lively and thought-provoking genre, *Prose Fiction and Early Modern Sexualities* reminds us all just why the early modern multitudes were drawn so strongly to these texts: they dealt with sexuality in all its stimulating and breathtaking variety.

Ivo Kamps
Series editor

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Stephen Guy-Bray is Assistant Professor of English at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *Homoerotic Space: The Poetics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Toronto, 2002) and several articles, chiefly on Renaissance poetry and drama.

Sheila T. Cavanagh is Masse-Martin/NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor of English at Emory University. She is the author of *Cherished Torment: The Emotional Geography of Lady Mary Wroth's Urania* (Duquesne, 2001) and *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires: Female Sexuality in The Faerie Queene* (Indiana, 1994) and numerous articles on Renaissance literature and pedagogy. She is also the Director of Emory Women Writers Resource Project, a website devoted to women's writing from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries.

Darlene C. Greenhalgh received her undergraduate degree from University of California, Berkeley, in English and Comparative Literature, and is currently completing her doctorate on Hellenistic Romance in Sidney and Shakespeare at the University of Georgia. She presently lives in Oxford where she is the program coordinator for the University of Georgia student exchange program. She has published on Shakespeare.

Morgan Holmes is the author of *Early Modern Metaphysical Literature: Custom and Strange Desires* (Palgrave, 2001). He is the Director of Rochester Communications and teaches literature and cultural studies in the Division of Continuing Education at Ryerson University in Toronto.

Lisa Hopkins is Reader in English Literature at Sheffield Hallam University and editor of *Early Modern Literary Studies*. Her most recent publications are *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Palgrave, 2002) and *Writing Renaissance Queens: Texts by and about Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots* (Delaware, 2002). She is currently working on *Shakespeare on the Edge*, a study of Shakespeare's representation of the borders of early modern England, for Ashgate.

Lori Humphrey Newcomb is Associate Professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her study of Robert Greene's *Pandosto* and its many revisions, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England*, was published by Columbia University Press in 2002. She is currently writing on print, performativity, and adaptation in plays by Greene and Shakespeare.

Robert W. Maslen is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Glasgow. He has published a book, *Elizabethan Fictions: Espionage, Counter-Espionage and the Duplicity of Fiction in Early Modern Prose Narratives* (Clarendon, 1997), and editions of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (2002) and Dekker and Middleton's *News from Gravesend* (forthcoming), as well as essays on sixteenth-century prose, erotic narrative poetry, and drama. He is currently writing a book about Shakespearean comedy.

Steven Mentz is Assistant Professor of English at St. John's University. He has published several articles on English Renaissance prose fiction, including studies of Thomas Nashe, Philip Sidney, and Robert Greene. He is also coeditor of a collection of essays on the early modern rogue, forthcoming in 2004 from University of Michigan Press.

Constance C. Relihan is Hargis Professor of English Literature at Auburn University. She is the author of *Fashioning Authority: The Development of Elizabethan Novelistic Discourse* (Kent State, 1994), *Cosmographical Glasses: Geographic Discourse, Gender, and Elizabethan Fiction* (Kent State, 2004), and editor of *Framing Elizabethan Fictions: Contemporary Approaches to Early Modern Narrative Prose* (Kent State, 1996).

Elizabeth Sauer is Professor of English at Brock University, where she holds a Chancellor's Chair for Research Excellence. She is the author of *Barbarous Dissonance and Images of Voice in Milton's Epics* (McGill-Queen's, 1996) and the just completed *Paper-Protestations and Textual Communities in England, 1640–1675*. She has also edited or coedited the following: *Agonistics: Arenas of Creative Contest* (with Janet Lungstrum, SUNY, 1997), *Milton and the Imperial Vision* (with Balachandra Rajan, Duquesne, 1999), winner of the Milton Society of America Irene Samuel Memorial Award; *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies* (with Jennifer Andersen, Pennsylvania, 2002); *Reading Early Women: Texts and Manuscripts in Print, 1550–1700* (with Helen Ostovich, Routledge, 2003); *Literature and Religion in Early Modern England: Case Studies, Renaissance and Reformation* (with Jennifer Andersen, 2004). Her work in submission includes *Osiris and Urania: Milton and the Climates of Reading* and *Comparing Imperialism 1500–1900*.

Goran V. Stanivukovic is Associate Professor of English at Saint Mary's University. He has published an edited collection, *Ovid and the Renaissance Body* (Toronto, 2001); a critical edition of Emanuel Ford's *Ornatus and Artesia* (Dovehouse Editions 2003) and essays on Shakespeare and Renaissance drama, nondramatic poetry, rhetoric, early modern queerness, and the Mediterranean. He is currently completing a book on prose romances, ethnography, and sexualities in early modern England, and is editing a volume of essays on the Mediterranean and early modern English literature and culture.

Alan Stewart is Professor of Renaissance Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London, and Associate Director of the AHRB Centre for

Editing *Lives and Letters*. His publications include *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton, 1997), *Hostage to Fortune: The Trouble Life of Francis Bacon 1561–1626* (with Lisa Jardine; Victor Gollancz, 1998), *Philip Sidney: A Double Life* (Chatto & Windus, 2000) and *The Cradle King: A Life of James VI and I* (Chatto & Windus, 2003). He is currently editing volumes 1 and 2 of Bacon's *Works* for the new Oxford Francis Bacon.