

H-France Review Vol. 10 (March 2010), No. 51

David P. LaGuardia, *Intertextual Masculinity in French Renaissance Culture: Rabelais, Brantôme, and the Cent nouvelles nouvelles*. Burlington and Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008. viii + 253 pp. Acknowledgements, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 (hb). ISBN 978-0-7546-6216-7.

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Intertextual Masculinity is a sophisticated and welcome addition to the dynamic field of masculinity studies and more specifically to the growing body of work enriching our understanding of masculinity in early modern France.[1] LaGuardia's overarching argument in *Intertextual Masculinity* is that masculinity is discursively constructed through the reading, writing, telling, collecting and transmitting of misogynist stories about women most of which have to do with adultery. Identifying the massive corpus of such stories as well as related materials concerned with controlling women's bodies and sexual comportment as masculinity's "intertext," LaGuardia persuasively argues that the tradition of the cuckold tale depends upon its place in this intertext to make sense and to do its ideological work. One key insight his approach offers is an understanding of masculinity as *always in process*. Put schematically, the book shows how representations of women's excessive desire interpellate men as subjects who need to control their own wives while potentially pursuing the partners of other men; that is to say, cuckold tales and kindred textual materials generate a sort of perpetual anxiety machine in which a man will pursue the wives of other men even as the possession of "his" woman will be threatened by her own wiles and by the advances of other men.

Reflecting on the method of his analysis, LaGuardia writes that "the complex explication of the masculine gender as it is derived from the intertext I have chosen is an attempt to combine theoretical with philological approaches to reading literature" (p. 108). This dual dimension is carefully laid out in the introduction. There, LaGuardia explains that "the cuckold as a representative of masculinity requires that we examine the conceptual framework in which he makes sense" (p. 2). He locates "the philological origins" of cuckold tales "in the immense corpus of misogynist, exemplary clerical literature" and its broader intertext in civil and ecclesiastical legal documents; penitentials and confession manuals; criminal registers; and *exempla*. LaGuardia also explains that his approach to this vast body of work depends on recent theoretical work that enables us to conceive of gender as an object of knowledge and subjectivity as socially constructed.

Four theoretical propositions inform his analyses and often find support in the materials he considers. First, that social exchanges between men are mediated by women (Irigaray, Rubin, Sedgwick); second, that the need to control domestic space and the desire to have women "belonging" to other men are produced and expressed through scopic desire in a visual realm (Freud, Mulvey); third, that gender is organized through socially pre-determined subject positions that individual men may more or less felicitously occupy or perform (Lacan, Butler); and fourth, that gender is materialized through social practice and institutions (Foucault, Althusser). Of these propositions, the first is likely to be familiar to readers. The second is amply demonstrated in the materials LaGuardia considers. The third is conceptually perhaps the most challenging, but it also generates some of the most important insights in the project as LaGuardia demonstrates how cuckold tales interpellate male readers in multiple ways (for

example, as subjects desiring to protect their own wives and as subjects covetous of the wives of other men—on this apparent contradiction LaGuardia writes “men had simultaneously to control their own wives’ desire, to provoke the desire of other men’s wives, and... to incite the desire of other men for their own wives” [pp. 17-18]. Although seemingly anodyne, the fourth proposition, concerning material practices, may be the most polemical and controversial of the group. By considering how the traffic in texts about cuckoldry constitute masculinity, LaGuardia is resisting the work of scholars who, by considering engagements with them to be merely rhetorical exercises or by reading them as the comic staging ground for more serious intellectual pursuits, do away with the *content* of such tales and related materials. I find this an important critical corrective, and LaGuardia’s emphasis on the material practice of intertextual masculinity could constructively dialogue with studies of the impact of early modern educational institutions and curricula on masculinity. Lynn Enterline’s work in particular dovetails theoretical sophistication with a concern for social institutions.[2] Leonard Barkan’s *Transuming Passion* offers another model for approaching some of the materials studied by LaGuardia that would insist on the imbrication of the corporeal and the intellectual/spiritual in much humanist practice.[3]

In the first chapter, “Masculinity as an Intertextual Concept in Legal, Pastoral, and Clerical Documents of the Late Middle Ages,” LaGuardia explains that “[t]his chapter will discuss the different conceptions of sex and matrimony that may be derived from a significant sampling of the official documents concerning marriage” that “provide a context for the understanding of adultery as it is presented in narrative literature” (p. 15). In pursuing this goal, he considers a wide range of materials including Justinian’s *Corpus iuris civilis*, Gratian’s *Concordia discordantium canonum*, Thomas de Chobham’s *Summa confessorum*, the *Registre criminel du Châtelet de Paris, 1389-1392*, and the *exempla* of Jacques de Vitry. Noting that civil and ecclesiastical codes often treated adultery and fornication in different ways, LaGuardia observes that nonetheless in both there were two roles men could play: “the husband, guardian of the *domus* of his marriage, or that of the usurping lover” (p. 17).

LaGuardia goes on to show how women’s desire was often represented as rampant and threatening in transcriptions of court proceedings. This all the more strongly subtended the need for men to control their women and suggested potentially catastrophic consequences if they could not do so. Because women found guilty of adultery were often severely punished, the court proceedings produced women’s bodies as that which must be subjected to male power either in the house or on the bonfire. Finally, in addressing *exempla*, LaGuardia explores how they depict wives as women who must be controlled at all times but who nonetheless always threaten to evade the strictures of their husband’s control, whence the important observation that masculinity is always in process. LaGuardia’s analysis of this wide range of texts demonstrates the extent to which the household was constructed as a space that needed to be monitored through visual surveillance by the husband and how the threat of women’s wiles worked to solicit ever more paranoid and stringent forms of control. It is from this network of texts, LaGuardia contends, that novella collections and later works devoted to cuckoldry emerge.

LaGuardia begins “Masculinities in the Intertext: *Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles*,” the second chapter of his book, by observing that if one took the novella collection as evidence for the vicissitudes of married life in fifteenth-century Burgundy then one would have to conclude that adultery was widespread and largely accepted. It is by reading such works within the frame provided by his survey of the “official documents” about marriage in the prior chapter that one can better understand the significance of cuckold literature. He argues that the “transcription of these stories participated in the complex intertextual procedures by which men of one generation passed on masculinist knowledge to men of the following generation” and that what might seem to be an innocent comic text in fact “engages in a deceptively subtle manner” with an enormous intertext of comic and serious material on marriage and cuckoldry (p. 57).

The chapter proceeds by offering a series of case studies of tales from the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* with each section elucidating a different dimension of the play of intertextual masculinity. As he puts it in his conclusion to his analysis of one novella, “The performance of masculinity.... requires that multiple subject positions—those of the usurping male friend, the husband, the listeners in the tavern, the network of friends...—configure the diverse possibilities and aspects of a more global definition of the masculine gender role” (p. 90). Throughout the chapter, he attends to the importance of the visual field, whether for the surveillance and control of space, for soliciting desire, or for providing the possibility of misrecognition, and in the conclusion to the chapter he underscores the centrality of the visual for the taking up of different subject positions within masculinity.

The heart of LaGuardia’s book is the long chapter on Rabelais’s famously difficult *Tiers Livre*. The chapter begins with a meditation on two often related bugbears of Renaissance studies: the relevance of theory and the importance of historical context for interpreting texts. His discussion of these issues forms part of his defense against an anticipated critique of the chapter, namely that the following assertion about the *Tiers livre* is anachronistic. In his view, the book “addresses consciously and ironically precisely those issues that were central to the construction of masculinity before and during the historical period in which he wrote” as well as “the way in which the masculine subject is constructed in and through the production and interpretation of texts is precisely Rabelais’s subject” (p. 109). Whereas some major scholars of the French Renaissance have insisted on the importance of reading an author such as Rabelais within a specific humanist and evangelical context, his own book situates the *Tiers Livre* within a different but also historically pertinent context by “analyz[ing] the ways in which the work continues and carries forward a certain medieval, clerical, legalistic, comic, ironic, and intertextual mode of masculinity” (p. 108). In terms of his use of theory, LaGuardia allows that while the precise way in which contemporary scholarship has allowed us to understand masculinity as an object of knowledge might not make sense to Renaissance authors, this does not mean that they could not have an ironic distance from the contemporary practices constituting masculinity and that masculinity could not be a topic of conscious reflection. One of the disheartening implications of LaGuardia’s argument seems to be that despite the possibility of early modern male authors maintaining an ironic and potentially critical stance towards contemporary masculinity, their writings would nonetheless contribute to the hegemony of the misogynist intertext of masculinity.[4]

The final chapter addresses the best known section of Brantôme’s *Dames galantes*, “Les Dames qui font l’amour et leurs maris cocus.” LaGuardia continues to argue that masculinity is produced through the circulation and collection of stories about women’s infidelity but adds that in Brantôme the “expression of opinions about different, possibly “perverse” sexual practices as “others”” helps to define a “normative” but increasingly unstable masculinity (p. 182). LaGuardia intriguingly notes that whereas in the novella tradition “the husband was blind and others saw him, in Brantôme, the husband must publicize his infidelity” (p. 187). LaGuardia demonstrates how ruthlessly this could be carried out, and explores how marriage, sex and war were linked in men’s minds in late sixteenth-century France (p. 195). He also shows how in Brantôme’s text men *solicit* the desire of other men by showing off their wives and explores the implications of such forms of homosocial bonding. The curious anecdotes concerning men showing off women (whether wives or adulterous conquests) to other men in the bedroom could be read alongside other studies of the forms of social intercourse transacted between men in bedroom spaces.

LaGuardia’s use of theory frequently offers important and innovative insights into the texts he is considering. Indeed, at times, his critical practice is exemplary and particularly given the extent to which his book is organized around readings of specific episodes could be very useful in the classroom for instructors interested in teaching theoretical material alongside Renaissance texts (e.g., his discussion of novella 62 in the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*). Moreover, one of the real strengths of LaGuardia’s book is his skill as a close reader. Although this is evinced in all of the chapters, it is nowhere more dazzlingly displayed than in the Rabelais chapter where it is often elegantly deployed in the service of LaGuardia’s argument. Teachers looking for materials on the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* or on

the *Dames galantes* will also find many fine sections that could be usefully discussed in the classroom whether or not theory is explicitly at issue.

Despite the generally impressive nature of LaGuardia's readings, there are a few times when his impassioned presentation of his argument seems not entirely in synch with them. For example, in one instance LaGuardia discusses a scene in which a man brags about his sexual potency to a woman he is pursuing and is then unable to live up to his boasts. LaGuardia concludes the paragraph discussing this passage by observing that "in the context of the texts I have been examining, the masculine speaker or writer is obliged to adopt the discourse of hyperbolic potency when considering the act of intercourse, especially when speaking or writing for an audience of his similarly-gendered peers" (p. 186). The problem with this analysis, as I see it, is that LaGuardia passes over in silence the fact that the boasting in this case was originally represented as being in front of a woman. Insofar as LaGuardia's book is a critical explication of the construction through intertextual practices of a certain kind of homosocial, misogynist masculinity, its focus on men makes sense, but also at times risks occluding the presence of women when they might complicate his argument. There were other moments where my concern was less about a streamlined reading practice in the service of an argument than about restricting an intricate reading that seemed in excess of its participation in masculinity's intertext. For LaGuardia, such moments demonstrate the labile nature of masculinity's various subject positions, but I am eager to see what other scholars will draw from the raw material of LaGuardia's insightful analyses.

In sum, LaGuardia's book is a compelling contribution to the study of masculinity in the early modern period. Scholars interested in the application of theory to early modern texts as well as those concerned about social context and gender will find much stimulating material. Although entire chapters might be unwieldy in the classroom, the episodic nature of LaGuardia's analyses and the care with which he frequently rearticulates the major points of his argument should make it easy to teach excerpts productively. Finally, LaGuardia's elaboration of the concept of intertextual masculinity in an early modern context, an important insight in its own right, should lead to important advances when brought into dialogue with other approaches to gender in the period.

NOTES

[1] For a general overview of French masculinity studies, see *Entre Hommes: French and Francophone Masculinities in Culture and Theory* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008) and *French Masculinities*, a special issue of *L'Esprit Créateur* 43/3(Fall 2003), both of which are edited by Louis Seifert and Todd Reeser. More specifically on early modern France, see Reeser's *Moderating Masculinity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and *High Anxiety: Masculinity in Crisis in Early Modern France*, ed. Kathleen Perry Long (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2002).

[2] Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body: From Ovid To Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[34] Leonard Barkan, *Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[3] Constance Jordan's *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Renaissance Models* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990) remains one of the most sustained mediations on possibility of early modern feminism. For an approach to the question that might resonate more strongly with LaGuardia's emphasis on intertextuality and discursively constructed subject positions, see Harry Berger, *The Absence of Grace: Sprezzatura and Suspicion in Two Renaissance Courtesy Books* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2000).

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ISSN 1553-9172