situate widows within set boundaries. Finally, Amelia Carr investigates the significance of a mislabeled relic of St. Leopold and the resistance of widowed Elizabeth of Austria to Hapsburg marriage strategies.

Expanding on the discussion of widowhood and visual culture into the contemporary world, Levy’s afterward (“Last Rites: Mourning Identities (?)”) is provocative as she draws on modern widows, like Jacqueline Kennedy, and the construction of the monumentalized body and memorial to address issues about mourning. Levy calls for a critical reassessment of the “particular, often ambiguous, status of widowhood and the ways in which it has been and continues to be represented” (252).

This theme of the ambiguities and tensions implicit in the meanings of widowhood and representation is a thread that runs through the entire volume. The essays embrace a wide range of media as well as types of widows. The strength of this collection lies in its broad geographical and chronological scope: the essays also reflect a diversity of critical approaches and examine widowhood and visual culture from multiple perspectives. Given this diversity, it would have been useful to have a general bibliography at the end of the volume, even though Levy does discuss books on widowhood in her introduction (5–7); though a minor point, it would have enhanced the expansiveness of the collection and allowed the reader easy access to material otherwise buried in the footnotes of each essay. Nevertheless, this is an exceptional volume and adds considerably to the literature on widowhood.

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Valerie Traub’s The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England exemplifies the generous rewards to be had when a scholar is willing to set about the odd mischief of starting over. In Traub’s case, the new trajectory
evolves out of sustained attention to a deceptively uncomplicated question: was it really the case that in early modern England lesbian desire was “invisible,” “unthinkable,” “not even noticed at all,” “inconceivable,” “silent,” “and impossible,” as so many prominent scholars have asserted (3)? The answers produced are often stunning. Historians of marriage and the family; theorists of gender and sexuality; critics of visual, musical, theatrical and literary arts; students of the history of rhetoric; specialists in Renaissance uses of classical genres; writers in religious studies; historiographers of psychology and medical models; authorities in the philosophy of science; and scholars of paradigmatic change—all would do well to learn from this study. The book is at once a compendium, a theoretical challenge, and a compass directing the reader through several centuries of cultural history.

To say that Traub begins afresh is not to say that she begins from scratch. Rather, after careful examination of the way a particular structure of historical understanding has been pieced together, she meticulously takes it apart. Disassembly quickly gives way to a fascinating reconfiguration. Two seemingly paradoxical strands make up the double helix of Traub’s argument; first, she asserts that in early modern England lesbianism was represented by what was “behind the seen” (36), and second, she calls into question “the idea that lesbianism has any . . . transhistorical ‘nature’” (221). As the material she examines illustrates, two dominant lines of representation can be traced: “a medico-satiric discourse of the tribade, and a literary-philosophical discourse of idealized friendship” (8). The book points out each thread’s role in the broader fabric of early modern culture, and traces the eventual twining of the two by the early eighteenth century. One of Traub’s most remarkable insights pertains to the relationship between the “consolidation of domestic heterosexuality as a dominant cultural ideology” and the “convergence of the figures of tribade and friend” (323).

The compendium nature of the book may be seen in the relative economy with which a veritable mountain of matter is introduced. From an overview of theory and history that is accessible in a way students can appreciate (yet rich in the complexity and sophistication prized by experienced scholars), to a provocative reevaluation of classical, early modern, and modern anatomical texts and theories, the introductory material neatly frames subsequent discursive intricacies. Further chapters include
an exploration of the political possibilities and limitations imbedded in representations of monarchical desire; a pointed consideration of explicit visual and verbal iterations of female desire in classically-inflected art, set in relation to an especially enlightening lexicographical overview of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century modes of signification; a careful delineation of how certain historical figurations of anatomy gave way, genealogically, to psychomorphologies that inflect critical discourse even now; a return to the curious status of pastoral as the genre that best stages “a crucial turn in the history of representations of female-female desire” (251); a further explication of signifying forms and their immediate contexts, with special attention given to similitude and identification as ontological categories of possibility; and a final meditation on the historical and theoretical quest for origins. Chapters overlap in useful ways, and the recursive style yields the kind of depth that such a wide ranging study otherwise might have failed to deliver.

When contextualizing primary sources, Traub is in her element. Her excellent theoretical elaborations are honed to effective precision, yet take their most compelling notes from the historical score so carefully crafted throughout the book. Moreover, her definitions (including the terms renais-
sance and lesbianism) are formulated with excruciating exactness. This allows her to keep a weather eye on the stormy ambiguity of the past's relation to the present, even as she steers a convincing course through the archives. Sources include familiar works by writers such as Shakespeare, Fletcher, Sidney, Donne, Shirley, Marvel, Herrick, Phillips, Cavendish, and Behn. Less familiar gems are also shown to good effect. The autobiography of Peru's Catalina de Erauso, the letters of Constance Fowler, John Crowne's Calisto: Or, The Chaste Nymph—as well as material from dictionaries, legal documents, doctrinal pronouncements, travel narratives, and diaries—make for a multifaceted account that refracts present concerns through the distinct yet revealing prisms of the past. The subsequent sorting allows Traub to assert that “the ways that social agents appropriated and deployed prior rhetorics . . . has been thus far an underappreciated aspect of how the past was able to be queer” (360). The historiographical point, here, is well taken: an argument's cultural force should never be confused with the institutional realities that scholars might otherwise see as compromising a rhetoric's logic.
Often clarifying original elements of a work in question even as she challenges and modifies its conclusions, Traub’s correctives to the assertions of previous scholars are consistently enlightening. Particularly noteworthy examples may be seen in Traub’s critiques of Luce Irigaray, Steven Greenblatt, and Thomas Laqueur, analyses which illustrate the ways in which Traub’s multi-faceted argument both adheres to and troubles current debates. In a related vein, the book avoids the simplistic conflation of institution with culture, even as it allows for the excavation of the intimate and inextricable threads shared by both. The result is that female agency emerges as a significant creative force. Sensitive to their own contexts, early modern women sorted through cultural ideas to choose what was of most use in a particular moment. “Constructing erotic opportunities out of the conceptual materials at hand,” explains Traub, “women practiced a resourceful bricolage . . . they were neither psychologically deluded ‘failed men’ nor politically inauthentic upholders of patriarchy” (195). Collectively, the chapters suggest that the people of early modern England continued to elaborate and shore up with culture precisely that which was not fully institutionalized. From chapter to chapter we watch as Traub demonstrates the ways in which multiple cultural meanings could remain in suspension as long as there were many kinds of action to organize.

While recognizing that it would be difficult to praise this book enough in such small space, three concerns are worth a brief glance. The first is perhaps an unfair quibble. I cannot help but wonder why—given the breadth of historical material and the depth of theoretical insight—Traub skirts the fascinating ontological paradox implied by all of her key points: that embodiment defines a self that is always already both object and subject, the result of both having and being a body (e.g., one simultaneously has joy and is joyful, has a wound and is wounded). Wrangling with this paradox would yield great dividends, especially in the chapter on psycho-morphology. My second reservation is that Traub sometimes too casually dismisses reasonable objections to a point in question. In the chapter on Elizabeth Tudor, for instance, Traub quotes Lisa Jardine’s caution regarding documents which may contain inaccuracies of translation, but surprisingly, the point is not engaged. Deploying a tactic she has criticized previously, Traub simply exiles Jardine and others to the isle of “dismissive argumen-
tative strategies” (140). Instead of reproducing such strategies herself, one might reasonably expect Traub to display an alternative practice. Finally, Traub tends to defer important points from one chapter to the next, a narrative strategy that is frequently frustrating.

Ultimately, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism* provides bountiful evidence that people could, and can, live quite nicely with multiple, conflicting ideas about the world. Indeed, in the closing chapters of her book, Traub suggests that students of ideology would do well to examine the institutional encounters that lead people to reproduce even discredited parts of their world views. As complicated as we think the history of sexuality is, this book urges us to come to grips with the probability that it is sure to be more complicated still.

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