ory of Dürer's similarly paired excursions. But, as Luber shows, there is little evidence to support such a proposition. Scholars have pointed to four paintings that purport to demonstrate Dürer's early acquaintance with Venetian art. Yet the attribution or dating of all four pictures has recently been doubted, making these works an unstable bedrock on which to build the theory of such a trip. Furthermore, knowledge of Italian prints, which would have traveled more easily to Nuremberg, would explain other features of Dürer's supposed contact. Luber's examination of the techniques of painting and drawing as they relate to Italian practice offers firmer evidence of Dürer's exposure to Venetian painting a decade later. As the author summarizes, there will never be conclusive evidence that Dürer did not visit Italy in the 1490s, but there is no good reason to credit this assertion.

A final chapter considers Dürer's various portraits of Maximilian I. Dürer first painted the emperor in his Madonna of the Rose Garlands in 1506. Yet Luber is most concerned with the relation between life study and Dürer's later portraits: the paintings in Vienna and Nuremberg, the drawing in the British Museum, and the closely related woodcut. The author contributes many insights to our understanding of this later series of images and their interrelationships, but the subject stands rather outside her predominant interests. It is a final essay that considers the artist's drawing technique and its role as preparatory to presentation paintings, but the references to Venice and the Renaissance are not paramount.

Luber's study is a valuable contribution to the literature on this prototypical Renaissance artist and to the central question of his debt to Italian developments. The book avoids discussion of Dürer's theoretical interests, his immersion in mathematics, and his elevated sense of self as an artist—so removed from the craft tradition of early modern Nuremberg. Rather than providing an overview of Dürer's relations with Venice and the south, Luber's investigations are narrowly focussed and consequently offer important insights into these specific questions.

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A beautiful, intelligent, and virtuous Florentine widow spends her life raising an honourable, obedient and naïve young daughter. She offers her daughter as a wife to a charming man of good social standing and on the wedding night the young virgin—adept at following instruction—so pleases her new husband in the bedroom that he questions her honour.

Sixteen years of age and feminine, an angelic young priest visits the country with some friends. He meets a friar who, taking him for a woman, falls in love. All but the friar are amused when, while seducing his beloved, the cleric discovers that the young lady is in fact a boy.

Forced by shame to leave his native Florence after being dishonoured by
friends whose practical joke had him temporarily and embarrassingly convinced that through some form of spiritual identity transplantation he had literally become someone else, a fat, foolish, yet talented young woodcarver moves to Hungary where he becomes rich.

In this collection of “tales in historical context,” Martines and Baca present a panoramic view of Italian Renaissance society and culture in fifteenth-century Tuscany. Six vivid and lively narratives, four fictions and two “accounts of real incidents” that “draw upon circulating oral testimony and reportage” portray “individuals in the daily give-and-take of city life: in conversation, groups, solitude, stress, pranks, and under the pressure of practical, conformist, pleasure-loving, but also tough—and often cruel—urban society.” (11) Each narrative is used as a point of departure for discussions on themes as varied as “marriage, ritual, age, gender, sexuality, love, family ideals, clerical misconduct, personal social identities, small groups, links between town and country, and the invasiveness of the public face of neighborhood and urban space.” (11) all of which Martines treats in the insightful commentaries that ensue.

Regarding structure and design, the book is successfully divided into six parts. Each section features a tale translated by Baca and a commentary by Martines, who maintains the interpretive framework of an historian. Reading fiction as historical documentation to find the reality therein, “seeking no more and no less than to take hold of the tales as history” while avoiding anything that could be construed as the “historical sociology of literature,” Martines uses the narratives “as decoys for enticing readers into the history of Renaissance Italy” (9). A comprehensive bibliographical commentary closes the book by providing a ready reference and study guide for the student and scholar alike.

In the first and shortest tale, Ricciarda by Giovanni Gherardi da Prato (1390), we are presented with a fictitious narrative in which a worldly and articulate widow is challenged to prove her daughter’s honourability to the man she (the daughter) has just married. The new mother-in-law is incredibly cunning and poetic in doing so. She invites her son-in-law to her country estate where she stages an event that, amazing him, forces the young husband to believe something that he would have never imagined to be possible. Making use of his malleable state, she directs her son-in-law’s thoughts to the subject of his wife’s virtue and draws a compelling analogy between the circumstances leading to his present epiphany and the experience he had on his wedding night. She thus convinces the man that he should accept as truth the unimaginable: that his wife might have actually been a virgin on their wedding day.

In his commentary on Ricciarda, Martines clearly and explicitly distills from the narrative that which is representative of Florence and its culture in the late fourteenth-century, distinguishing it from that which is “pure invention”. He opens a discussion on the role and image of women in Florentine society, as well as on related literary topoi of the time. He notes the importance of family reputation and the necessity of handling delicate matters in private. We emerge from the analysis with both a certain understanding of the historical context and the ability to recognize and apply appropriate and informed exegetical methods to the
work as well as to other literature of the period. The same can be said of all the commentaries Martines has included in this book.

The remaining five tales, Scopone by Gentile Sermini, Friar and Priest by Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, Bianco Alfani by Pireo Veneziano, Giacoppo by Lorenzo de’ Medici, and The Fat Woodcarver by Antonio Manetti, are all engaging reads. Though there are inevitable similarities between the tales owing to their common origin in both fifteenth-century Tuscany and the narrative genre established by Boccaccio in the Decameron, Martines is careful not to recycle ideas in his commentaries. By judiciously selecting and rigorously developing a well-defined and unique point of focus for the analysis of each tale, Martines ensures that we learn as much from any one narrative as we did from the tale that preceded it.

Though few in number, Martines’ literary explications are as scholarly as his historical analyses, making An Italian Renaissance Sextet a wonderful addition to the history or literature sections of any library, personal or public.

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In The Manly Masquerade, Valeria Finucci presents a series of essays that focus on the complicated and sometimes convoluted meanings of masculinity in Renaissance Italy. Moving easily between works of literature and the contemporary medical, legal, and theological discourses, she reveals the underpinnings of sex and gender identities for both men and women. The analysis is firmly grounded in the historical context of the time. More controversially, Finucci makes generous use of psychoanalytical theory to reveal the meanings and implications of the situations—historical and literary—that she cites. Freud is the most prevalent influence, but also well represented are Lacan and the French feminists. Finucci’s arguments are set in a multidisciplinary framework that in the end provides a clear and compelling view of the strains and stresses that informed gender identities during this critical period of Italian history.

The topics that catch Finucci’s attention vary widely, but they all relate in some way to the notion of the instability of sex and gender. Sex difference, she asserts, is not clearly distinguished by different genitalia, with the consequence that, for premodern people, sex and gender identity was fraught with anxiety. In particular, paternity was a problematic concept for men. Given the ambiguity inherent in biological paternity in an era before genetic testing, fatherhood was as much about performativity as it was about lineages and blood lines. Beliefs that children could be engendered by putrefaction, fermentation, and other means that did not involve sexual intercourse between mother and father threw into disarray the fundamental definitions of masculinity as linked to virility and fertility. Worse, even, was the possibility for men to engender monsters, toads, and all manner of