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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Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade. Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. Pp. x, 316.

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

unnatural creatures through misspent semen, male pregnancy, and bestiality. On this, both medicine and myth agreed, leaving men in a quandary about their generative potential.

Femininity and maternity are equally as problematic for Renaissance society. Finucci examines the prevalent notion of female toxicity and the danger women can pose to their sex partners. In the context of Machiavelli's *La mandrogola*, she provides a complicated and smart discussion of women's sexuality as polluting and harmful to both their sex partners and their fetuses. Drawing heavily on theorists, in particular on psychoanalysis as mediated by Lacan, Freud, and Karl Abraham, she analyzes the conflicting needs of men to prove their masculinity through sexual virility and the danger inherent in doing so. Thus Machiavelli can have Nicia hire someone else to impregnate his toxic wife, but he can retain his rights to paternity because he has legal power over his wife's body. In Nicia's case, constructed paternity trumps biological paternity.

Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* provides the opportunity for Finucci to delve into aspects of maternity and the increasing need for men to be certain about their offspring as primogeniture replaced partible inheritance in the mid sixteenth century. Men increasingly wanted to see themselves mirrored in their offspring and looked to physical resemblance for reassurance of their paternity. At the same time, a woman could influence the appearance of her child through her imagination or by gazing at a picture during intercourse. Thus stories of black children being born from two white parents or other anomalous offspring led to the belief that a woman could virtually erase paternity through the exercise of her imagination. Turning to Tasso, Finucci presents a psychologically grounded analysis that demonstrates the links between sexualized and racialized beliefs in contrast with notions of male/father/Christian/white.

Similar examinations of gender and sexuality are teased out from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Bibbiena's *La calandria*. As with all of the essays in this volume, these take a slightly different focus and a slightly different tack but continue the discussion of the performativity of gender or of sex, and are contextualized against the scientific, medical, legal, and theological discourses that helped to shape social beliefs and practices. With Ariosto, Finucci is able to show how the imperative to demonstrate masculinity through sexual virility was also dangerous because medical theory indicated that excessive ejaculation of semen would make men effeminate. How, then, was a man to know the correct balance of virility and abstinence that would reinforce his social masculinity while not imperiling his biological masculinity? In an equally disturbing way, the distinctions of sex and gender are explored in terms of hermaphrodites and cross-dressing. Using Bibbiena, Finucci elucidates the implications for identity when gender can be changed with one's clothes. Even more worrisome, however, is the belief that hermaphrodites could use either their male or their female genitalia as needed or desired. Sex and gender are thus destabilized and potentially undifferentiated.

The final essay in the volume moves away from literary portrayals to examine the paradox of castrati in Italian society. While castration was practiced consistently from antiquity through to the seventeenth-century, throughout the Middle Ages

it was either the result of punishment, medical intervention, or accident. Only when church choirs sought to prolong the vocal purity of prepubescent boys was voluntary castration for social and economic reasons again practiced in western Europe. The physiological signs of the castrato reinforced their external and self-perceptions as "putti" or diminished men, regardless of age. Yet, many castrati had mistresses or married and belied the popular notion that without testicles they were feminized and their humours colder and wetter and like those of a woman. So distressing was the notion of a virile eunuch that Pope Sixtus V forbade them to marry. Yet, as Finucci clearly argues, castrati were not emasculated in terms of sexual ability, so much as unable to procreate. Thus it was generation more than genitals that was at the heart of premodern castration; it was not until Freud that the focus of castration shifted from the organ of generation to the organ of penetration.

Valeria Finucci, then, has published a volume that is of great interest to all scholars of sexuality and gender in the premodern period. She expertly deploys sources from a variety of disciplines and views them through a heavily but carefully theorized lens. This is a noteworthy achievement and well worth the read.

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Levin, Michael J. *Agents of Empire. Spanish Ambassadors in Sixteenth-Century Italy*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005. Pp. 228. ISBN 978-0-8014-4352-7 US.\$ 39.95

Michael Levin's first monograph is a concise and critical study of Spanish diplomatic relations in Italy under Charles V and Philip II. Although modern historians usually argue that the Italian peninsula was firmly under Spanish control in this period, sometimes referred to as a *pax hispanica*, Levin's work on the dispatches sent between Spanish kings and their ambassadors in Rome and Venice reveals a very different situation. Anxiety and mistrust of Italians permeates these dispatches, which Levin skilfully uses to reveal the paradoxical relationship between Spanish military strength and Spain's inability to ever totally dominate European politics. Even after the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), in which Henry II of France relinquished all dynastic claims in Italy, the ambassadors continued to fear a French invasion at the instigation of untrustworthy Italian princes. As Levin argues, the Italian peninsula became a microcosm for the near success, but ultimately failure, of Spanish imperialist aims. This failure grew out of the ambassadors' arrogance and it was compounded by their inability to understand Italian resistance to and resentment of Spanish demands.

Levin's study follows the experiences of Spanish ambassadors in Venice and Rome, predominantly in the period from 1559 to 1598. The chief focus of ambassadors to Venice was the *Signoria's* independent relationship with the Ottoman Turks. The ambassadors' failure to bend the Republic to the will of Spain and their continued surprise at Venice's independent political acts emphasises the conclusion that Italian states did not see themselves as subject to Spanish subordination. In Rome, Spanish ambassadors strove to influence the election of a pro-Spanish