ainsi “poétisée” (par l’alternance de pairs et d’impairs, de glissements et d’échos sonores) situe le texte à la frontière de la raison et de la folie, de la veille et du songe. De façon plus générale, l’écriture poétique chez Montaigne, qu’elle soit citation ou prose poétique, est “une écriture de variation, sinon de la diversion,” et c’est précisément dans les glissements les plus imperceptibles de la prose à la poésie que nous nous approchons du “coeur de l’enjeu même de l’écriture” (p. 190).

Concernant la présentation du livre, il convient de noter l’existence d’une bibliographie clairement établie, ainsi que l’index des passages des *Essais* cités ou commentés. On peut regretter l’absence d’un index des noms d’auteurs cités, qui aurait rehaussé l’utilité pratique de l’ouvrage. On aurait aussi souhaité ne pas trouver tant de coquilles dans les noms et titres anglais (pp. 9, 15, 88, 202, 206, 207), mais ces fautes n’enlèvent rien à la valeur intrinsèque de l’étude.

Dans sa conclusion, Nathalie Dauvois note avec raison combien la question du rapport de la prose à la poésie dépasse, chez Montaigne, les catégories habituelles de la rhétorique et de la poétique. Même si Dauvois se propose de dépasser les enquêtes lexicales et philologiques à la Jakobson, il semble que l’intérêt du travail de Dauvois se trouve précisément dans la finesse et la rigueur de l’analyse linguistique. Ce volume original, mince de par le nombre de pages mais riche en analyse, pourrait très bien édifier tout lecteur de Montaigne, du débutant au plus accompli.

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Ilona Bell. *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. xiv, 262.

The old-fashioned definition of lyrics as poems expressive of the speaker’s subjectivity has been under question since the heyday of structuralism; in the case of Elizabethan lyrics, the final demise of that time-worn definition may well be signaled by the publication of Ilona Bell’s *Elizabethan Woman and the Poetry of Courtship*. For, in this book, the attention to the subjective quality of late sixteenth-century lyrics, to their individual or aesthetic dimension, is replaced by a discussion of their possible public resonance and, especially, their function as voicing the perspective of the participants in the process of courtship. The sonnet, in particular, is seen here, not as a genre that takes love as its intellectual excuse, but rather as having a specific social function: an instrument to be used in the negotiations of courtship, aimed by the male poet at persuading the primary reader, and thus (and this is one of the key points made by this book) giving that reader — the female addressee — the ultimate control over the content of the poems. Thus the ideological position of this book fits very much in the Bakhtinian tradition: its aim is to restore

the dialogue that is implicit in Renaissance lyrics by making us aware of the constant interaction between the poet and his primary reader, the beloved. But that beloved is not to be seen as a passive, distant Petrarchan mistress: by placing the sequences in their proper social context, it becomes evident that the specific conditions of Elizabethan courtship allow women more participation in and control of their relationship to men than a de-contextualised or purely intertextual reading might suggest.

Every work of historical revision has an implied adversary, or a mode of reading that it tries to counter-balance or to reverse. In this case, that adversary is the tradition which, in the forms of New Criticism or of Poststructuralist Textualism, has tried to separate sixteenth-century poetry from the intricacies of political and sexual realities. Significantly, several of the critical positions against which Bell explicitly positions herself are directly illustrated by T. S. Eliot, but it is legitimate to see them aimed at later forms of criticism as well: for Bell, it is especially the critical tendency to see the woman in Elizabethan poetry as a metaphor, a figure of speech or an icon that has to be discarded in the light of the documentary evidence. It is clear that, at least among the educated classes, the capacity of women to vindicate their own position and to respond to the poetry addressed to them was a significant factor in the development of courtships that might effectively lead to the start of a relationship, to actual sexual intercourse or to marriage.

The book begins by considering the context in which Elizabethan courtship occurred, and here already, several preconceptions have to be abandoned: Bell brings in abundant documentary proof of the complicity that might often occur between parents and children in the processes of courtship, and of the convergence of economic and affective factors in the preparations for marriage, as opposed to the absolute submission of the latter to the former. A richly informed analysis of guidebooks and manuals for the composition of letters and poems of love also reveals that both men and women might be well trained in the ambiguities and double entendres to be used in the negotiation of love. The complex picture of Elizabethan courtship that emerges here sheds a new light on our reading of the poetry, on the use of allegories, posies, and sonnets in the difficult negotiations and transactions previous to the start of a relationship. A dialogue between Thomas Whythorne and a female disciple in his days as a master musician may take place through a series of notes containing “posies” and riddles, left by the potential lovers on the strings of the guitar on which they are practising. The extended relationship of Anne Vavassour and Sir Henry Lee can be accurately negotiated through the circulation of manuscript poems in which the potential lovers ventriloquize each other’s voices — from Lee’s complaint against Lady Anne’s marriage to her teasing response to him, and, finally, to Lee’s public representation of that process in the final pageants he wrote for Queen Elizabeth in the 1590s, when he and Anne were finally living together. Throughout, Bell makes remarkable contri-

butions to the critical literature on her subject, showing how Lee's first poem on the affair is a clever subversion of the codes of the female complaint for his own purposes, or attributing the authorship of an anonymous text to Anne Vavassour, in an excellent example of textual scholarship.

Ilona Bell's book, then, gives a dialogical dimension to a discourse that has been traditionally seen as monological. The specific forms of female authorship and poetic voice are also discussed here (in the cases of Isabella Whitney or Queen Elizabeth, among others). But even when the voice of the lady is mediated, or ventriloquized, by the male poet, her response is essential to the development of his sonnet sequences. The first printed versions of Daniel's *Delia*, for instance, appear as a strong effort to de-personalise and rewrite in idealistic fashion the account of a female reader's resistance to entering into a serious relationship with the poet, a resistance which had been represented in its starkest, most dramatic form (much more explicit, as well, on the topics of sexuality and victimisation) in the pirated version of 1592. From now on, it will be difficult to achieve a significant reading of, or produce significant research on, *Delia* without taking into account the contrast between the two versions of the sequence, which corresponds to the distance between the private development of Daniel's courtship and his public presentation (and idealistic transformation) of it. By producing discussions such as these, Bell's work points the way towards a considerable amount of scholarly work to be done; her methodology could also be applied to Sidney's sonnets (abundantly quoted, though not directly discussed in this volume) or to Michael Drayton's.

Still, it might be argued that the polemical quality of the book's supersession of the old topics of womanhood as trope or intellectual excuse for the poetry is excessive throughout: that primary goal is successfully achieved through Bell's detailed reading of the poems and manuscripts, and does not need to be over-emphasised. Moreover, the constant assumption of a divide between Petrarchism (or rather, Petrarch himself) and the English sonnet tradition, whereby the latter appears as confronting more directly the problems of desire and sexual victimisation, lessens the impact of Bell's discussion of Daniel and Spenser (especially of some misogynist images in the *Amoretti*, which are more directly borrowed from Petrarch than might be supposed). In fact, the continental Petrarchan tradition, as Giuseppe Mazzotta, Gary Waller, and others have shown, is not without its own insistence on sexual drives or perversion: the *Canzoniere* itself is pervaded by an acute awareness of the materialistic nature of human love, dialectically opposed to a tendency to turn that love into an intellectual abstraction. The materialistic tendency of the English tradition should therefore be seen as capitalising on that thematic potential and expanding it, rather than as going against the grain of the received Petrarchan tradition. This is, however, the only serious objection that could be made to the stimulating discussion carried out by Ilona Bell on the Elizabethan poetry of courtship — a discussion which, along with its methodology

(especially its fascinating analysis of manuscript sources), should have a rich progeny, if we are to increase our understanding of the many material and sexual conditionings of Renaissance poetry.

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