one's shift, an undergarment that was seldom removed. The lack of underwear without breeches emphasised women's "openness" and the ease with which their "privy parts" could be exposed both accidentally and deliberately. In the court records we find Mary Combe, an alehouse keeper's wife from Somerset, who was prosecuted for her "beastly behaviour" in May 1657, when she lay down in the highway and exposed herself, on another occasion "shewing her commodity" to a man who was not her husband, and urging him to have sex with her (p. 39).

This is in many ways a pessimistic book, a reflection of the nature of the primary evidence it deploys: court records by their very nature document failed community and family relationships, violence, infanticide, rape. The book's core polemic is the history of the systematic and unrelenting subordination of women, one where, for example, an expectant mother could be regarded merely as "the ecosystem which determined their future child's health," revealing attitudes towards pregnancy which acted then "as they can do now" to "control women's bodies and undermine women's autonomy" (p. 122). That they *can* and *could* is certain: that this is the most characteristic view of pregnancy today, or in seventeenth-century society, is another matter. Though it sounds even-handed and cautious, did childbirth rituals *really* divide women "*as much as* they bound them together"? (p. 154, my italics) The often primary and mutually supportive relationship between mothers and daughters, or other close female kin, which is evident if one reads different contemporary sources such as women's correspondence, is underplayed here. While the "sisterhood" angle was undoubtedly overplayed in many early feminist histories, understating the potential for compassion between women seems a step too far in the other direction.

The range of responses which are provoked by Gowing's political stance on this and other controversial issues will stimulate much further research and discussion. Not least here is one of the most useful and important assertions in her book: that same-sex desire between women was not officially "unimaginable" before the modern period (p.108), an idea which is often reiterated as a commonplace in the historiography of sex and gender from the Renaissance to the mid-nineteenth century. This is a provocative and richly rewarding addition to the historiography that I hope and anticipate will be in print for many decades to come.

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John A. Quitslund. *Spenser's Supreme Fiction: Platonic Natural Philosophy in "The Faerie Queene."* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. Pp. 432.

Some works are the product of a life-time of learning—and this is clearly one of them. John A. Quitslund's *Spenser's Supreme Fiction: Platonic Natural Philosophy in "The Faerie Queene,"* which explores the crucial influence of Plato and Platonism on Edmund Spenser's epic, argues that *The Faerie Queene's* encyclo-

paedic nature is intimately related to Platonic philosophy. Quitslund calls such Platonism “Spenser’s Supreme Fiction” because it informs the very structure of Spenser’s thought and poetry: it provides an order for his world-making, his creative process.

Fully aware that he is taking an “old” subject and making it “new,” Quitslund introduces this work with an apology of sorts. “I came to *The Faerie Queene*,” he writes, “with a mind devoted to close reading, prepared by what is now regarded as old historicism: the history of ideas and topoi, history of forms and styles, social history treated as the foundation for competing and evolving world views” (p. 4). He then proceeds to give a remarkable overview of the evolution of Spenser studies, observing Platonism’s place in criticism from deconstruction to queer theory. In the process, Quitslund speaks to his own scholarly evolution. Intellectual history has changed and, with it, his own ambitions for this approach. “The environment in which I read Spenser today offers some access to clarifications, but they are not,” Quitslund qualifies, “the sort I sought in an earlier day” (p. 6). In other words, he seeks to discover Spenser’s “worldmaking” creativity without creating another *Elizabethan World Picture* (p. 66). This newer version of older historicism does not attempt to be all-encompassing; it is, rather, necessarily partial and provisional.

Yet Quitslund also explores territory largely inaccessible to the aging new historicism: a philosophical tradition underpinning creation, or “cosmogonic,” myths in *The Faerie Queene* (p. 8). At stake here, he argues persuasively, is knowledge itself—how it is imagined, how it is shaped. Quitslund achieves this end, in a sense, by demonstrating his argument with his methodology; that is, he illustrates *The Faerie Queene*’s encyclopaedic character while revealing this as its ideal. The structure of *Spenser’s Supreme Fiction* makes this clear. At the center of this work is a tight focus—the Garden of Adonis episode—that expands tremendously, as Quitslund examines the philosophical, literary, and historical dialogue underpinning Spenser’s well-known creation myth. The first half of this work, “The Maker’s Mind,” provides a history of ideas (a kind of primer), the most important of which find their origin in Plato: analogies between the soul and the world—later, seen as the world soul—and notions of love’s connection to God, nature, creation itself. Quitslund traces the historical development of such ideas in exquisite detail; he moves from the place of knowledge in conceptions of early modern authorship to Platonic interpretations of the *Aeneid*, considering too Platonism’s influence on the aspirations of humanism and hermeticism. Fascinating in itself, this history is directed toward Part II’s new reading of the Garden of Adonis. Quitslund once again begins broadly, with a general discussion of nature in *The Faerie Queene*, and gradually narrows his thesis; issues of hierarchy, gender, and love figure prominently here. When he argues for “The Platonic Program in the Garden Canto,” readers are well prepared for it: Spenser’s Garden of Adonis is more than a little world made cunningly—it is a world about the world, one that contains within it a world of learning, a veritable encyclopaedia of creation myth.

The world of *The Faerie Queene* is no mere microcosm; it is a heterocosm of great complexity. "When scholars today attempt to describe the "notions" at play in the minds of Sidney, Spenser, and their peers," Quitslund writes, "the components of popular or middle-class culture, as codified in books such as *Shakespeare's England* and *The Elizabethan World Picture*, no longer seem so monolithic as they did in the 1940s and 1950s" (p. 121). Indeed, Still, Quitslund's excellent book reminds us that ideas have histories—as real, perhaps, as anything we can touch.

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Jonathan Gil Harris. *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Pp. 263.

Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England displays all the rigour, wit, and originality readers have come to expect from Jonathan Gil Harris's work. As Harris acknowledges, the book is a sequel of sorts to his first, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Both books undertake the valuable work of historicizing seemingly neutral modern conceptions of disease by charting their development in the early modern period and disentangling their complex imbrications with other early modern discourses. In *Sick Economies*, as in *Foreign Bodies*, Harris contends that early modern medical discourse, partly in response to such things as syphilis and the plague, underwent a shift from a Galenic, humoural conception of disease as an internal imbalance to conceptions of disease as an exogenous, foreign, and invasive body paradoxically both dangerous and potentially healthy (roughly the conception of disease with which we are familiar). If in *Foreign Bodies* Harris is concerned with the effects of this shift on the appropriations of pathology by early modern political discourse, however, in *Sick Economies* he focuses on the shift's relationship to an analogous shift in early modern English economic writing. In sixteenth-century discourse, economics was subsumed within the framework of the self-sustaining and internally regulated body politic of the commonwealth. In contrast, in the writing of such early seventeenth-century mercantilists as Gerard Malynes, Thomas Milles, Edward Misselden, and Thomas Mun, the national economy is conceived as necessarily connected to but potentially invaded by other, foreign economic bodies. In mercantilist discourse, this global economic interconnect-edness is both necessary—a natural law, even—and dangerous. Harris is not merely concerned to analyze the ways in which this reconceptualization of the economy is registered by a change in the medical metaphors used in early modern economic discourse, however. His thesis is rather more complex than that: "Pathology and economy, I shall argue, were interconstitutive domains of dis-