Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion (review)

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Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds. *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. vi + 384 pp. Ill. $59.95, £30.00 (cloth, 0-8122-3760-9); $24.95, £16.50 (paperbound, 0-8122-1872-8).

The thirteenth and final contributor to this collection of essays quotes a powerful passage by Nietzsche from his *Genealogy of Morals:* "I consider even 'psychological' pain to be not a fact but only an interpretation—a causal interpretation—of facts that have hitherto deified exact formulation—too vague to be scientifically serious—a fat word replacing a very thin question mark" (p. 274). It seems to me that the majority of the contributors consider *passion* such a "fat" word, one that needs to be questioned or, in modern lingo (fortunately used by only a few of the authors assembled here), interrogated.

Richard Strier makes an argument that in the "Western tradition" there is a strong strain of valuing passion and emotion over patience, reason, meekness. (But even with the texts he uses to make his point—including *King Lear* and Herbert's poems—the reader will passionately say, "but, but, but!"). As if responding to this argument and pointing to its limits, Michael Schoenfeld then shows that Milton's attitude toward passion is equivocal and situational, and "represents the radical inconsistency with which early modern culture confronted the phenomenon of passion" (p. 46). Schoenfeld recognizes a central Renaissance debate about the respective claims of reason and passion, but he shows (with or without intended irony) that Milton locates it in hell as a subject of dispute of the fallen angels. Looking closely at the portrait known as *Mona Lisa,* Zirka Filipczak tries to separate what in the subject's gestures denotes gender and social class versus personal emotion. John Staines, in his essay on compassion in the public sphere of Milton and King Charles, returns to the topic of passion versus reason; he, however, would like to see them not as antithetical, but as part of a single communicative practice of early modern writers. According to Staines, Milton saw the limits of passion or pity in the public sphere, for here bonds of compassion easily become bonds of slavery.

Starting from a playful exchange between Prince Hal and Falstaff, in which both spin out analogies between objects and animals they call "melancholy," Gail Paster draws attention to "the passions being distributed as sensible features" of a natural world traversed by a host of sympathies and antipathies (p. 121). Here, and in some other articles stressing features of the ancient belief in a body made up of the four humors, I wonder how the label "early modern" (prominent in the collection's title) applies. Also starting from Shakespeare, but trying to elucidate the notion of "English mettle," Mary Floyd-Wilson makes an attempt to read ancient views of Scythians/Northerners as versions of a Bakhtinian grotesque—I am happier with the more general (and usual) term "other." She shows interestingly how notions of climate, country, and gender enter into what she calls a "geohumoralism" (p. 142). Bruce Smith elucidates the notion (also in Shakespeare) of hearing "green songs," and the relationship of that green to the black of melancholy. In a daring stretch, he works in greensickness, the (anemic?)

illness of young women in the early modern period. Katherine Rowe uses Davenant's reworking of an emotional scene in *Macbeth* to ask what happens if readers interpret a passionate passage from beyond a gulf of time, or even from beyond a paradigm shift.

Gary Tomlinson has contributed the most demanding but possibly also the most rewarding study, for he juggles Aby Warburg's idea of a gestural rendering of emotion (or his *Pathosformel*) with seminal ideas of Warburg's teacher Usener, with the "crucial proximate" source Giambattista Vico, with Monteverdi's musical emblems rendering passions, and ultimately with ideas of Ficino. Victoria Kahn takes the romance notion of *leggiadro inganno* (lovely deception) and tests it for its political charge with thinkers from Macchiavelli to Albert Hirschman. (In her discussion of aesthetic sweetness, Giovanni della Casa most likely stands for male-male or homoerotic relationships.) Concentrating on book I of the *Faerie Queene,* Douglas Trevor finds that for Spenser "sadness—not joy—is the exact opposite of melancholy" (p. 245): melancholy is "dull" or ugly, while sadness is part of the (Protestant) human condition.

In an essay that compares English with Continental stage developments, Jane Tyler attends to female spaces (like Gertrude's closet) and female passions. She is convincing on French and Italian theater, which (according to her) receives a new boost from "its explicit engagement with women as both characters and as actresses" (p. 266), but perhaps less so in her remarks on English theater that follow her somewhat axiomatic sentence, "Needless to say, very different categorizations must apply in Shakespeare's case, for he wrote in an England without actresses" (p. 267). Timothy Hampton, finally, writes a detailed semasiological study of the word *alteration* and its offshoots, first as a term of Galenic humoral medicine (*alloiousthai* in Greek), denoting physiological change. He shows very interestingly how the early modern French word *altéré* (thirsty) is related to it, and how *alteration* gradually loses its ties to humoral medicine, appearing in Rabelais as denoting specifically cultural change.

I would like to add three comments to this attempt at a summary: (1) While most of these essays are impressive, I found the three categories under which they are presented here ("Early Modern Scripts," "Historical Phenomenology," and "Disciplinary Boundaries") neither evident nor helpful. (2) As I have already indicated, I wonder about the appropriateness of the term "early modern," so boldly put forth by the editors, if some of the best essays here show (in the words of Timothy Hampton, the final contributor) "the mutual imbrication of bodies and selves" (p. 293): as long as these bodies are conceived in Galenic terms, the term "modern" seems questionable. (3) While these are unquestionably important contributions to an understanding of "passions," much more needs to be explored. Not surprisingly, about half of the contributors refer to Thomas Wright's *Passions of the Mind* (1604). I happened to write this review at a public library that does not have this book (Bibliothèque Municipale de Bordeaux), but whose catalog lists under "Sur les passions" more than a dozen books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not referred to by these authors—and this does not

even include such "big guns" as Vives and Melanchthon, who surely had something to say on the "passions."

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Robert L. Martensen. *The Brain Takes Shape: An Early History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. xvii + 247 pp. Ill. $49.95 (0-19-515172-0).

The subject of this book is the emergence of what the author calls the "cerebral body." Robert Martensen maintains that the notion that full personhood is dependent on the integrity of the solid portions of the brain is of relatively recent provenance: he dates its inception to the turbulent context of mid- to late seventeenth-century England. This would make the cerebral body the product of the same epoch in which the foundations of modern natural philosophy were laid. There was indeed a notable overlap in personnel between those involved in formulating new ideas of the relation of mind and brain and the founders of the Royal Society of London. Both developments were, moreover, caught up in the social and political upheaval that convulsed England during this period. There was a "crisis of the body" as well as a crisis of the state and of the conscience.

Even before these developments, Western culture had already experienced a crisis of representation. Thanks largely to the work of Vesalius, the assumption had become grounded that the body was a legible text whose truth could be revealed only through immediate ocular investigation. That truth could, however, be transmitted through texts that contained the *likeness* of the structures that anatomy had uncovered: scientific illustration had been born. What was uncovered by these means stood in an uneasy relationship with ancient understandings of the workings of the body. In particular, classical notions of the seat of the intellect and the passions came into question. The issue was not purely theoretical: untrammeled "enthusiasm" was by the middle of the seventeenth century perceived as the major source of disorder at the social as well as at the personal level. The quest to determine the physiological foundations of human behavior thus took on a novel urgency.

It might be argued that René Descartes was the instigator of the cerebral body; Martensen notes that almost all the illustrations in *De homine* are devoted to the brain and nerves. Descartes, however, still conceived of the brain as composed primarily of fluids and ventricles. The decisive shift to the solidist concept was the work of the English physician Thomas Willis (1621–75). Willis did not work as an individual, but as part of a team, each member contributing different skills. The illustrations to Willis's *Cerebral Anatomy,* for instance, were the work of Christopher Wren. These depictions of the brain were crucial to the rhetorical strategy