

JULIE PEAKMAN. *Amatory Pleasures: Explorations in Eighteenth-Century Sexual Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. 224. \$102.60 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2017.200

Julie Peakman's *Amatory Pleasures* is a collection of previously published essays surveying eighteenth-century sexual culture. All but two chapters have appeared in academic journals and editions; here they are helpfully collated in one volume that begins with expansive views—practices of and attitudes toward sexual activity in some European countries, their colonies, and parts of Asia—and concludes with the most (literally) ground-level account, a study of English erotic gardens. Along the way, readers alight variously on sensational print culture, London brothels, Neapolitan royalty, and leaky bodies in a series of case studies, each taking up a clearly defined aspect of sexual representation or practice. The volume's strengths and its weaknesses arise from its assemblage of previously published material. The chapters are vivid and focused, bringing archival material to life, but they tend to feel atomized. The chapters also call for critical updating, their footnotes void of recent work published on Cleland, prostitution, and reform movements (Gladfelder, *Fanny Hill in Bombay*, 2014; Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce*, 2006; Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, 2009).

Peakman, though, wards off this criticism, aiming the book at “new scholars” and “intelligent” lay readers and declaring it free of “overtheorizing” (xi, xvi). Her pared-down approach to critical analysis indeed allows archival materials to assume central focus. Her chief contribution is her illumination of primary sources. Peakman works extensively with the British Library rare books collection, and in these essays she offers much in the way of directing readers to titles for further research, covering such topics as sex work, theories of reproduction, sexual violence, and the eighteenth-century equivalent of tabloid culture. (In her 2003 *Mighty Lewd Books*, Peakman closed with a statement on research methods, which were confined to the Private Case of sexual material; I would have appreciated a like explanation of her selection process here.) In this book she is at her best when bringing to life the popular culture around sex, such as prostitutes' presence in print, visual, and performative contexts (chapter 4), or the remarkable social ascent of Emma Hamilton from courtesan to aristocrat to European diplomat (chapter 7). Peakman evocatively reconstructs English gardens designed for sexual play, connecting them in the final chapter to popular literature that metaphorized women's bodies as natural landscape. The extravagance of libertine gardens suggestively departs from the earnest inquisitiveness of the botanical literature, discussed in the penultimate chapter, where plant figuration allows a non-vulgar exploration of anxieties about women's sexuality.

The indifference to scholarly conversation, though, prevents Peakman from teasing out some of the more exciting possibilities presented by the archive. Without rehearsing ground well trod by other academics, she might pay more due to critics she invokes; it is not quite right to argue that “Foucault's vision [of discipline] indicates a show of force from the modern state,” since his paradigmatic emphasis is on internally generated forms of surveillance, forces of self-regulation that would have affected the sexual subjects who populate the volume (42). More importantly, Peakman might allow theoretical insights to showcase some of the marvels in her material. In the chapter on Hamilton, Peakman foregrounds her affective and political bonds with queen of Naples, whom Hamilton claims to “love better than any person in the world” (125). In light of recent work on sapphic bonds in Europe (Lanser, *The Sexuality of History*, 2014), one wonders why, given Hamilton's loudly stated affections, Peakman concludes her heterosexual desire to be “inevitable,” reserved for her aging husband and Horatio Nelson (122). The three famously established a polyamorous relationship, but this unusual formation does not receive much attention. The focus on Hamilton's class ascent and intrepid sociability is suggestive: it seems a woman's entrée into politics necessitated heterosexual performance and, once ascended, she could participate in unconventional

sexual permutations that remained emotionally subordinate to her homosocial bonds. But Peakman declines to advance such interpretations.

Peakman avoids another possibility for feminist analysis in a chapter on prostitutes' autobiographies, which she opens by claiming that women wrote to assert for their right to sexual pleasure, but closes by remarking "how little sex is mentioned" in the texts (98). These engrossing narratives meditate on the contradictions of prostitute sexuality: women crave constancy but engage in sex work; they love and are jilted; they are autonomous but are raped; their sex acts are both public and private. Pleasure is nowhere—and injustice everywhere—so one wonders why Peakman tempts with the promise of a doctrine of sexual freedom. The documents bear out the precise opposite: an account of sexuality that focuses not on bodily pleasure but on the material conditions of gender and class that make women vulnerable to—and valuable within—a pervasive system of sexual commerce.

These questions lead me back to Peakman's title: *Amatory Pleasures*. She works from the assumption that the sexual is the amatory and that the domain of sexuality is also that of pleasure. But her sources show sexuality to be, particularly for women, much more than an arena of diversion. Their bodies are used, read, and tested by commerce, literature, politics, and science, and their social recognition and material livelihood depend largely on their performance of sexuality, whether it be in the form of chastity or commercial sex work—a double bind of which Peakman is at times aware. But a reader new to this field will want to know why, for example, if "[g]irls were expected to remain chaste until marriage" (4), some communities ritualized premarital sexual activity (6). Peakman perceptively detects the peculiar, surprising facets of eighteenth-century attitudes toward sex, but oversimplifies her findings. The biggest of these simplifications is to cast sex as exclusively a realm of pleasure, a move that privileges historical actors like the landed aristocratic men who designed ejaculating fountains—who practiced sex with ease and without much consequence—far above the working prostitutes who risked sickness and incarceration in their trade. These complexities are not mere academic considerations; they are evidence that sexuality evades any one reigning designation—even that of pleasure.

Kathleen Lubey  
*St. John's University*  
[lubeyk@stjohns.edu](mailto:lubeyk@stjohns.edu)

E. M. ROSE. *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 394. \$29.95 (cloth).  
 doi: 10.1017/jbr.2017.201

Figuring out the reasons for accusations of ritual murder against Jews in twelfth-century Norwich (1144)—the first of more than one hundred similar incidents—seems, at first sight, not too difficult a challenge. The “renaissance” of this great century was not only that of intellectual achievements, economic expansion, and the revival of urban civilization: it was also marked by an increased attachment to the cult of saints and by the intensive pilgrimage to holy sites in search of medicinal or spiritual relief. The tombs and relics of innocent boys allegedly murdered by the Jews were part of a host of scared localities that were venerated by members of all classes of society. More difficult is to offer an explanation to the persistence of allegations throughout the nine centuries that followed, and to describe how it became one of the most shameful features of Western civilization. In *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*, E. M. Rose avoids discussing this second issue. Rose is not satisfied, however, with explaining the emergence of the five first “blood accusations” exclusively in the framework of the cult of saints. Instead, Rose looks beyond