Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns. Valerie Traub.
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. xiv + 462 pp. $59.95.

It is good to think with Valerie Traub. It is also good to think with early moderns, particularly about a topic as opaque (both historically and conceptually) as sex. As Traub astutely notes in this meticulously researched and thoughtfully arranged book, sex is rarely one thing, which makes it incredibly difficult to articulate its meanings in the past. Such variance, however, makes the process of "thinking sex" such a richly interpretive endeavor. What is sex? What counts as its evidence? Signified by representation but also understood as bodily experiences, psychic meanings, pleasure, trauma, a set of discrete acts, the basis of an emerging identity, a community set of norms, the definitions of what counts as sex vary greatly from moment to moment and, of course, across time and space. As Traub argues in the introduction, thinking sex requires analytical flexibility, especially when grappling with its histories. Though it offers us pleasurable and frustrating challenges, sex—both what it was and what it continues to be—troubles our histories of early modernity, and that is, as Traub shows us, a very good thing.

The title harkens back to Gayle Rubin's foundational article with the same name, and in doing so, Traub reminds us that queer theory was not always institutionally solidified into a recognizable conceptual field. "Thinking sex" reminds us to query both the "contours of sexual knowledge" and, importantly, the "social, intellectual, and institutional processes" that created them (7). Traub thus begins with the "presuppositional" discursive continuum that has shaped scholarly debates about early modern sexuality: how is the past "like," "not yet like," or "not ever like" the present (10)? Starting with the provocations about historicism that have preoccupied early modern queer studies for the past decade, Traub links these debates to the methodologies that preceded them, tracing how the emergence of queer theory as a domain of institutional knowledge and as a method both emphasizes a "sex-as-knowledge matrix" and sex as a relational practice (3). Traub expands beyond this continuum to grapple with larger methodological quandaries that are embedded in the field: our tendency as scholars to overemphasize revelation or discovery while eschewing the "conceptual, methodological, and archival impasses" that challenge our work (15), particularly the ways that sexual knowledge so often requires an interdisciplinary approach—easily touted but hard to accomplish, assess, and reward in most of our institutions (16).

Across the following eight chapters, organized into three parts, Traub asks a series of related questions: "What do we know about early modern sex? How do we know it? And what does such knowledge mean?" (2). She offers a wide variety of answers; the scope of research is tremendous. Readers of this journal may be most interested in part 2, especially the discussion of Richard Brome's play the *Antipodes* and Renaissance drama's scenes of sexual instructions (chapter 5), the discussion of discursive histories of sexuality in Renaissance *ars amatoria* and in legal histories (chapter 6), and the exploration of gender in relationship to bawdy lexicons in early modern English

poetry (chapter 7). But parts 1 and 3 are worthy of close study, given the ways in which Traub takes up two key debates that have defined queer histories: the debates between historicism and presentism (in part 1), and the need to retain gender as a category of analysis linked to queer history (part 3). Traub stakes her ground and her position clearly, but she also affords her critics ample time in her arguments. Indeed, part of the pleasure of this book is reading her thoughtful engagements with her critics: in doing so, she models how "thinking sex"—even when it is contentious and undoubtedly frustrating—can retain a pleasurable, critical *frissance*.

In the conclusion, Traub reframes these debates in wider terms: pedagogy. The book offers not so much a history of sexuality, or even a historiography of sexuality, but, instead, one of "queer futurity" (321). Whereas the introduction foregrounds scholarly debates about queer methodologies, the conclusion hints at the pressures facing all of us in the academy. If sex is, as she suggests, "a pedagogy of unknowing," then it is also a pedagogy of becoming more aware (and comfortable) with the limits of our own perspective, of what we don't know and perhaps can never know about psychic, sexual, social, historical, and embodied difference. Trenchant, erudite, feminist, witty, perspicacious, and very queer, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* is a tour de force. Traub reminds us that acknowledging our debts to those who came before us and those with whom we disagree allows us (and our students) to embrace a wider arc of meaning: "What we remember, what we forget, what we retain, what we omit, and what we finally acknowledge as our debts—this is no less than history in the making" (81)—and a queer one at that.

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Scholars and Poets Talk about Queens. Carole Levin and
Christine Stewart-Nuñez, eds.
Queenship and Power. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. xxii + 230 pp. $90.

In *Scholars and Poets Talk about Queens*, Carole Levin and Christine Stewart-Nuñez have brought together a rich, interdisciplinary collection of essays by North American scholars about medieval and early modern queens. Interwoven between these essays are separate poems and plays about these women. As Levin explains, "By pairing scholarly essays with contemporary poems and creative pieces about them, the collection intends to demonstrate the on-going relevance and immediacy of these women" (1). This novel approach is successful, reminding the reader of the inspirational qualities of past queens. An essay by Marguerite A. Tassi, for example, on the maternal grief of the mythical queen, Hecuba of Troy, in Golding's 1567 translation of Ovid's