The most disappointing chapter for the historian of women and gender is Chapter Five ("Funerary Feasting in Early Medieval Gaul and Neighboring Regions," 69-91). Effros devotes most of the chapter to wrangling with Baily K. Young concerning the extent to which funerary feasting and the deposition of foodstuffs in graves even were current practices in Merovingian Gaul at all. She refers to (75), but does not explore the gendered dimensions of, the famous controversy between Ambrose of Milan and Augustine's mother Monica over the latter's desire to stage feasts in honor of the martyrs in Milanese cemeteries,3 and she notes in passing that, at Erstein, "the interred whose graves included foodstuffs were identified as predominantly female" (80). However, instead of actually providing here a solidly researched and argued discussion of the issues, Effros merely concludes, in "Future Directions for Research," that "an assessment of whether all or certain vessels appeared more frequently in men's or women's burials, or in adolescents' or adults' sepulchers, would prove very useful. These distinctions would suggest some of the possible connotations of feasting rites and whether they were directly linked to particular gender- or age-identities" (90).

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Addressing the fraught process of becoming a man in Renaissance Italy, this book is an important study of the ways that cultural and literary texts work together to give gendered metaphors purchase on physical bodies, both male and female. Examining medical, theological, popular, and literary accounts of “engendering,” Finucci explores fears surrounding paternity, particularly the potential of feminine bodies to disrupt fantasies of masculinity tied to reproduction. Because Finucci uses psychoanalytic insights concerning gender and sexuality to read the construction of manly identity in a historically specific moment, she shows that historicizing masculinity is a feminist critical project relevant to contemporary thinking about the ways that men procure and secure power in western cultures. As such, her book will be of interest to scholars in early modern, medieval, and gender studies.

By focusing on gender as masquerade, Finucci emphasizes the difficulties involved in becoming “manly” in Renaissance Italy, at once refusing to grant masculinity a presumption to universal stability, while at the same time
exploring the consequences of this fragility for those bodies considered less than "manly," namely those of women and castrati. The fluidity of the physical body, which required that both sex and gender be performed in unison for "manliness" to be achieved, meant that men could easily slip into effeminacy if either stylized performance or bodily substance missed its mark. The most visibly sure way for a man to give his manliness substance, Finucci demonstrates, was not by acting out a position of power, but rather by producing offspring who bore the stamp of his potency. While the literary texts Finucci uses are from the high Italian Renaissance, including works by Machiavelli, Tasso, Ariosto, and Bibiena, her first two chapters give a historical account of ideas about reproduction that are equally relevant to medieval studies.

The book’s first chapter surveys philosophical and medical discussions to assess the effect of generative fictions on ideas of masculinity in early modern Italy. In a culture that circulates stories about births without fathers or mothers, women’s bestial and self-inseminations, and male pregnancies born of hetero- and homosexual encounters, Finucci convincingly argues that the connection between male generative function and masculine cultural power is not guaranteed. Add to these possibilities the potential for generation from fermentation and putrefaction and one sees what Finucci suggests is always an anxious relationship between paternity and masculinity.

Finucci next takes up the sexual stakes of Machiavelli’s play Mandragola. While she acknowledges that as a comedy Mandragola seeks to satirize the gullible Nicia by exploiting popular associations of women’s poisonous wombs with the deadly power of both the mandrake root and venomous spiders, Callimaco’s use of these cultural myths to gain access to Lucrezia’s body shows that manliness depends upon the ability to “confirm...manhood through offspring” (106-7). Paternity can be a masquerade performance, insofar as Nicia contracts to have another man engender the son who will pass as his own; nevertheless, paternity and thus manliness depends upon contact with the female body, even if that contact is represented as potentially deadly.

The third chapter investigates fears concerning the influence of the maternal imagination on the child she bears, particularly as those cultural anxieties relate to Clorinda’s womanhood and whiteness in Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata. According to theories requiring parental/paternal resemblance in offspring, Clorinda is monstrous not only because she is not black like her Ethiopian parents, but also because her behavior does not correspond to expectations of passivity for white feminine beauty. Finucci uses Tasso’s representation of Clorinda’s recuperation—which can only take place in the etherealized Christian context her death provides—to investigate the ways that the maternal imagination threatens to undermine paternal claims to legitimacy and propriety through monstrous progeny.

Chapter Four focuses on the embedded novella in Ariosto’s Orlando furioso of Astolfo and Jocondo’s sexual exploits, arguing that excessive virile performance, especially when it is non-procreative, actually undermines men’s claims to masculine potency. If men stake their claims to masculine authority
on physical appeal and sexual performance, like Astolfo and Jocondo they can get caught up in a cycle of excessive sexuality, which is not only barren but also ends up being effeminizing.

Finucci argues for the prosthetic construction of sex in Bibiena’s *La calandria*, looking at the moment before the onset of adult maturity when cross-dressing allows young men and women to explore fluid gender arrangements. While the dizzying crossing of identical twins Lidio and Santilla suggests the possibility that sexual organs can be changed or reordered, Finucci relates the discourse surrounding hermaphroditism to the dangers of gender fluidity. Because “to be bigendered was a threat to society” (218), the prosthetic potential of biological sex becomes yet another means to settle in appropriate terms the gender of the androgynous player as youth gives way to adulthood.

The sixth and final chapter deals with the importance of sexual organs as they relate to sexual performance; it does so by looking at the fascination with and suspicion of the castrato from the late-sixteenth century. Examining the papal prohibition of marriage against castrati in 1587, Finucci suggests that the object choice of the castrato was not necessarily limited by his ability to perform in hetero- or homosexual contexts. When the Church prevents castrati from entering marriage contracts, however, it effectively reads sexuality according to generative capacity. Heterosexual sex is reiterated as procreative, and empowered masculinity is defined as reproductive.

It is in this final chapter that Finucci fully explores the insights her historicist account offers for contemporary gender studies. By examining the historical particulars surrounding castration and the production of the castrato in sixteenth-century Italy, Finucci illustrates that the Freudian account of castration anxiety reduces male genitalia to the penis, effectively shifting the indicator of masculinity from the organ of reproduction to the organ of pleasure. The strength of the final chapter, Finucci’s ability to show that historical constructions of gender identities influence current definitions of manliness in relation to feminine bodies, is unfortunately less developed in much of the rest of the book. Medievalists therefore may wish that Finucci gave more space to thinking about how her Italian sources changed the ideas they adopted from medieval discourse. Likewise, gender theorists might wish that Finucci’s book spent more time illustrating the ways that historical figurations of masculinity undermine gender mythologies of the present. That said, either of these reservations are limited in scope, and arise only because the well-defined parameters of Finucci’s study prevent her from pursuing these lines of scholarship more fully. Finucci’s book thus opens up work for both medievalists and feminists, which should make it invaluable reading for the audience of *MFF.*

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