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Introduction

This volume explores different subjective strategies used by early modern women – poets, philosophers or artists – who subverted conventional expressions of body, gender and senses. If the body and its sensations are most present, and sometimes viewed in contradictory ways – expressed, visualized or rejected – in early modern art and literature, women have most often served as the objects for these representations (O'Rourke Boyle 1998; Hairston and Stephens 2010; Loh 2019). Furthermore, for male artists, philosophers and poets, they have incarnated the highest good as well as the most sinful vices. Certainly, the troubles of being torn between desires of the flesh and the soul have roots in Christianity, Platonism and the aesthetic expressions of, for example, Petrarch and Dante (Falkeid 2015). Neoplatonists eagerly sought to split body and soul and disregarded what they classified as the lower senses (touch, smell, taste) in favour of the intellectual senses (seeing and hearing). Let us take a famous example: while both the art and love poetry of Michelangelo are partly expressed through Neoplatonic ideals (Saslow 1986, 1991; Francese 2002), we find a strong focus on sensibility and a longing to touch or be touched, physically or emotionally, in his expression. The same tension can be found in Sperone Speroni's philosophical dialogues, and as we will see in this volume, in Gaspara Stampa's poetry, as well as in the art of Titian, Lavinia Fontana and Artemisia Gentileschi. Similar interest in corporeal experience and the role of the senses can be discerned throughout early modern Europe, as shown recently in works such as *Affective and Emotional Economies in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Marculescu and Morand Métivier 2018) and *Gender and Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder* (Broomhall 2018).

Polyphonic Epicureanism

Another key to this early modern focus on the senses can be found in the rediscovery of Epicureanism in the Renaissance. The legacy of this ancient school has been well explored. It has been argued that one of its main sources, the recovery of Lucretius' hexameter poem *De rerum natura* by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417, entailed a “swerve” that implied a “cultural shift at the origins of modern life” (Greenblatt 2011, 11). However, if we became modern in this “swerve” in the sense of rational pleasure-seeking and autonomous agents, in other words modern subjects, in our present era this “self-fashioning” seems to be in crisis. Indeed, many

of Greenblatt's claims have been seriously criticized, not least his idea that classical culture was lost before the Renaissance. In this volume we argue that women writers and artists appropriated the long legacy of Epicureanism not only for their own purposes but in ways that have new resonance in our present era beyond the idea that we have never been modern (Latour 1993).

In other words, with this volume we seek to propose a female Epicureanism that is polyphonic, and we argue that early modern women took part – as agents – in the early modern formation of new ways of conceiving the body and its senses as well as the world and the self, actualizing the significance of Epicureanism as a female philosophy, and at several moments even as a queer philosophy.

In this way the volume also highlights the diversity of early modern subjectivity, giving due attention to European women artists and writers that in unconventional ways responded to the period's two main intellectual and philosophical attitudes – Stoic or rational; and Epicurean or libertine – towards the body, gender and the senses. These attitudes not only intersect in the period's discussions of virtue and other moral phenomena, but are central in many European women's reception of classical culture. Furthermore, by following this legacy in a transnational perspective, from Italy and Spain to France and Sweden, it becomes possible to discern other forms of subjectivity than the early modern period's dominating subjectivation of female bodies, thinking and desires.

In seven chapters moving from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, the volume traces the development of Epicureanism and makes an attempt at characterizing the differences between Italian, Spanish, French and northern European appropriations of this legacy. As the chapters show, Epicureanism plays different roles in these contexts, beyond the chronological development from a stress on the control of passions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to a more open-minded attitude towards them during the so-called enlightenment. The volume proposes to see this standard narrative in a new light by emphasizing how early modern women use Epicureanism in particular and classical philosophy in general to express their subjectivity. We argue that when they do this, they also in various ways challenge or even undermine the idea (or ideal) that man is a sovereign subject in control of his body and his desire. Or to paraphrase Richard Shusterman, that it perhaps makes more sense to speak about body-mind experience than of experiences through body *and* mind (Shusterman 2006). By the same token, we as modern readers could reconsider Epicureanism as a queer and female philosophy. We could even rethink early modern philosophies in light of how these women use them as a way to queer the canon.

Queer Moments

The seven contributions to this volume all discuss how the body and the soul, the carnal and the divine, the senses and the mind, could be represented as intertwined and dependent on each other. According to Sara Ahmed, expressions of “queer pleasures,” forbidden or regulated desires, open up a re-configuration of bodies that might “impress’ differently upon the surfaces of social space, creating the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple” (Ahmed 2004, 165). Such representations consequently imply re-configurations of gender and of philosophical ideas on the constitution of humans and their perception of the world around them. We construe “queer” in the broadest sense given it by Ahmed, who explains queer lives as “maintain[ing] a discomfort with the scripts of heteronormative existence” (Ahmed 2004, 151), thus the aesthetic expressions of “queer pleasures” can, for example, be related to the revival of Epicurean ideas within early modern philosophical discussions on gender configuration and on the knowledge of love. Furthermore, bodily senses, which are essential to Epicurean thinking, were in many ways viewed as subversive during the early modern period, due to the dominance of Christian moral and other philosophical schools.

Early modern artists and writers were certainly living and practising within a set of power relations embedded in existing social and cultural discourses, as well as aesthetic rules regarding genres and forms. However, as Judith Butler argues, the possibility to act, speak and create cultural expressions in transgressive ways “emerges precisely as an improvisational possibility within a field of constraints” (Butler 2004a, 15). The centrality of the body, touch and related affects mediated in early modern art and literature underlines critical relations between emotions, perception and reason. Such expressions can, accordingly, be viewed as attempts to negotiate philosophical ideas of the human as an individual, hegemonic ideas striving to separate body and mind, and prevalent boundaries for gender configuration. Hence, this volume presents a variety of early modern cultural expressions in literature and art that embody views on how “knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation,” for “knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world” (Ahmed 2004, 171).

Thus, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Neoplatonism and Christian philosophies of the early modern period offer paths for women to explore desires and bodily experiences usually reserved for men. Early modern women’s need to embody their experience in writing, the very embodiment of their text and art works, is of importance for a better understanding of their different appropriations and rewritings of the canon. For instance, the engagement with heroism in early modern literature by

women demonstrates a redefining that transgresses dominant norms of feminine subjectivity. Other examples give sensory experience a poetic or artistic authority that turns woman's conventional weakness into a strength that could be seen as a "practice that seeks to yield artistry from constraint," to quote Butler's comment on Foucault's idea of a possible critical agency counteracting hegemonic control through stylization (Butler 2004b, 321).

Our Volume

In Eleonora Cappuccilli's discussion of the prophetic discipline of the body and soul in Dominican tertiary Domenica da Paradiso (Domenica Narducci, 1473–1553), a re-configuration of corporeal experience takes place within a Christian discourse. Domenica, who in 1511 founded La Crocetta, a Dominican convent in Florence, was both inspired by and critical of Dominican reformer Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), and championed her own reforms for female Dominicans. Behind the condemnation of worldly affections and passions upheld by doctrinal thinking, stands the recognition that the body is the material and impure part of the creature. However, in Domenica's experience the female body is not only the locus of imperfection but also the medium through which the woman prophet can receive God-given visions and convey His message. In order to be able to do so, the woman prophet must be a clean vessel both in the body and the soul. Thus, her five senses should be like "doors" through which one can perform "good works and receive divine treasures." Domenica was devoted to the medieval prophet and canonized saint Birgitta of Sweden (1303–1373), whose *Books of Heavenly Revelations* focus on the interaction between body and spirit, as "the flesh obeys the spirit and the spirit guides the flesh toward every virtue" (*Revelations* I.33.9). Based on the analysis of Domenica's sermons, visions and letters, this chapter explores her ideas on the necessary bodily and spiritual discipline that the woman prophet should adopt and shows the Birgittine influence on such ideas. As a result, it aims to highlight women's prophetic contribution to the shaping of the early modern subject as a troubled and conflicted union of a sexed body and soul.

This conflict can be related to the incorporated dismissal of women in, for instance, Neoplatonic ideas where the (female) body is connected to low and dangerous love in opposition to the ennobling and virtuous love of (male) souls. However, this consequent dismissal in the philosophical discourse is repeatedly questioned by early modern women writers, poets and painters. In her chapter, Johanna Vernqvist explores the influence of Epicureanism, reintroduced mainly through the discovery of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, in the works of three Italian women

of the sixteenth century: the poet, philosopher and courtesan Tullia d'Aragona (c. 1501–1556), the Petrarchan poet Gaspara Stampa (c. 1523–1554) and the artist Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614).

Vernqvist argues that d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinità di amore* (*Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*) (1547), Fontana's *Mars and Venus* (c. 1595) as well as *Nude Minerva* (1613), and Stampa's *Rime* (1554) embody views on the interrelation between bodily sensations and intellectual knowledge and, further, that their subversive representations of the body and the senses show awareness of "bodily habits and feelings that express [. . .] domination, so that they, along with oppressive social conditions that generate them, can be overcome" (Shusterman 2006, 6). Thus, Vernqvist sheds new light on the works of the three women by showing how Epicurean views can indeed be traced in their philosophical discourses, not least as relates to their ideals of love. They all express how the body, and all its senses, play a central role in striving to reach intellectual and philosophical knowledge and, consequently, that both women and men could make sense of the senses.

Epicurean views are also present in writings of intellectual women in Counter-Reformation Spain. In her chapter, Karine Durin explores the influence of Epicureanism and Stoicism in the philosophical project developed by Spanish philosopher Oliva Sabuco de Nantes y Barrera (1562–1622). Through her father, philosopher Don Miguel Sabuco y Alvarez, she became acquainted with classical and contemporary philosophy as well as medicine. With her collection of treatises, *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre* (Madrid, 1587), she became a pioneer of psychosomatic medicine. In spite of the conventional humility declared by the author, the five treatises comprised in this fictitious dialogue reveal a deep and complex philosophical erudition. Sabuco proposed a naturalistic approach to morality, and sought to demonstrate the usefulness of natural history for self-knowledge and ethical living. Durin argues that the originality of Sabuco's philosophical reflection comes from the fact that Stoicism remained closely linked to Epicureanism in her work, especially as regards her ideas about human nature. Durin addresses the way in which Sabuco's text deals with the controversial issues of Epicurean doctrine (such as divine providence and immortality of the soul), and the difficulty of separating Stoic and Epicurean doctrines in light of the medical experience presented in the book. Nonetheless, the search for inner harmony led the author to consider ways of improving human existence in the world. Durin analyzes how the experience of nature (natural spaces and animal species) contributes to define a new interpretation of subjectivity. She demonstrates how Epicureanism becomes a key reference for Sabuco's understanding of the world and the self and how it inspired a political reflection that led Sabuco to go beyond the generally accepted doctrines that she had initially integrated, in order to point out their limitations.

In France as well we find women writers who in different ways engaged with Epicureanism. In her chapter, Nan Gerdes traces Gassendi-inspired Epicureanism as a distinctive feature in Antoinette Deshoulières' (1637–1694) literary production. Antoinette du Ligier de la Garde (1638–1694), her name before she married the Seigneur des Houlières at the age of thirteen, belonged to a privileged nobility. She received her education in her home through the libertine Jean Dehénault, who introduced her to Epicureanism as well as to the new philosophy of Descartes.

In her works she became a critic of the Stoicism that had had a considerable impact on Renaissance philosophy in France, and thus, also of a certain understanding of virtue and heroism revered in the Renaissance. Needless to say, Descartes also embraced this heroic attitude in his philosophy. In order to formulate a critique of heroism aimed at her own age, Deshoulières was selective in her choice of ideals from the classical past. After discussing Deshoulières' Epicurean materialism, as signaled in her poem *Imitation de Lucrèce*, Gerdes connects her poetry with her tragedy *Genséric* by bringing her pervasive critique of heroism to the fore. In doing so, she considers Deshoulières' identification with libertine values, freethinking, and religious scepticism before the poet reconciled with the Catholic Church in 1683. Furthermore, Gerdes relates *Genséric* to the environmentalist assault on man's destructive pursuit of heroic ideals that, with inspiration from the Renaissance tradition, emerges in the poems to counteract the idea of human superiority over nature in rationalism and Christianity alike. While a positive ethics seems absent in the tragedy, the chapter demonstrates how Deshoulières in *Genséric* enhances her critique of man's ambition for mastery in a dawning post-heroic age.

Also pursuing this freethinking vein in early modern France, Sofia Warkander examines the subject of physical constraint and emotional transport in Madame de Villedieu's *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* (1672). This French writer, born Marie-Catherine Desjardins (1640–1683), took her pen name Madame de Villedieu from her first lover, Antoine Boësset, sieur of Villedieu. Celebrated in her own time, she was marginalized in the works of literary historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but is enjoying a literary revival in our day.

In the epistolary novel, the eponymous heroine is frequently confined by external powers, who seek to control her liberty of movement and the passion she inspires in others. Henriette-Sylvie uses all her might to reject her confinement as well as other physical limitations. In her chapter, Warkander demonstrates how the heroine – acting on her own body – circumvents the actions of the world on her body. Furthermore, Henriette-Sylvie continually works to destabilize and dismantle a fixed idea of the truth, be it through her bodily disguises, or through her use of an ironic and playful tone in her narration. In other words, she makes use of narrative strategies that transcend her own body while being simultaneously di-

rected by it, as her agency in creating her own unprecedented life is coupled with constant reminders of her subjugation to those with greater material power. The chapter also draws cursorily on other depictions of physical constraint, such as Guilleragues' *Lettres portugaises* (1669) and Madame de Lafayette's novels, where the figure of the convent as a frame or external law for inner unruliness and passions is a recurring theme. Through this comparison, Warkander highlights how physical enclosure serving to exalt emotional transport – making emotional ardour a substitute for physical freedom – functions as a key to the emotional register and attitude to confinement found in Madame de Villegieu's work.

By tracing the reception of this southern European philosophical and literary discourse in the North, and more specifically in the writings of Christina Queen of Sweden (1626–1689), Carin Franzén reassesses her famous deviations from what was expected of a female regent. The Swedish queen has an established place in European cultural history. In most historical biographies, Christina's abdication in 1654 and her conversion to Catholicism are underlined and seem to have left scholars with a need to establish the "true" reasons for her unconventional actions and a corresponding need to determine her undetermined identity. Through a reading of Christina's maxims in *Les Sentiments Héroïques* and *L'Ouvrage de loisir*, Franzén suggests that they can be regarded as a heroic search for an art of existence that articulates itself on the one hand as a Stoic form of self-control and, on the other, as a questioning of a rational self through a more sceptical and Epicurean attitude towards reason. In addition to maxims that can be placed in the wake of humanist analysis, there are also Christian maxims that sometimes accord with but also contradict this mainly Greco-Roman tradition. These three main veins – Christian, Stoic and Epicurean – create a movement of indetermination in her maxims that the chapter highlights as a characteristic trait of Christina's heroism as well as of her freethinking. In addition, the chapter proposes to conceive of her maxims as a discursive space used in a cultural practice that with Foucault (1990, 38) could be seen as "the art of not being so governed." The conclusion is that Christina's heroism derives from a drive to find her own way through the period's dominating forms of subjectivation by an exploration of the short form as a genre that invites an ongoing reading and an unfinished writing.

Moving into the eighteenth century, Matilda Amundsen Bergström reconnects to the conflict between soul and body by discussing the physical experience of grief in Swedish poet Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht (1718–1763). This celebrated Swedish poet was engaged to be married to the mechanic Johan Tideman (1710–1737), whose philosophical naturalism made a great impact upon her. The engagement was, however, broken by the early death of Tideman. In 1741 she married the chaplain Jacob Fabricius (1704–1741). This marriage has been described as a happy love match, but was soon followed by his death. Thus, this second bereavement, only a

few months after the wedding, made her retire to a cottage outside Stockholm to mourn, where she wrote the poetry collection *Den Sörgande Turtur-Dufwan* [The grieving turtle dove] (1743). In “Jag strider med mig sjelf” [I struggle with myself], the opening poem of the collection, the female poetic speaker declares herself unable to write poetry. The conventional aesthetic repertoire of eighteenth-century poetry, full of “empty words,” can offer her no tools to articulate the “waves of sorrow” that have flooded her heart and mind after the sudden death of her beloved. In her grief, poetry as conventionally conceived has lost its meaning-making potential. Nonetheless, the poet continues speaking, chronicling in an additional eight poems a grief that it seems possible to describe only at the level of bodily surface, through attention to physical experience – insomnia, trembling, crying, burning. The result: a collection of poems usually considered the first Swedish example of sentimentalism. Amundsen Bergström argues that, significantly, *Den Sörgande Turtur-Dufwan* is also an example of sensationalism, in the philosophical meaning of the term. In her chapter, she explores this sensational aspect of Nordenflycht’s lyrical description of grief, discussing it not as “queer pleasure,” but as a form of “queer sorrow” holding the potential to open up an ethical as well as aesthetic space where the experience and expression of mourning may be re-configured.

Thus, the collection of chapters brings together early modern women who, in a variety of ways, infused traditional spaces with a more polyphonic discourse. Some of these women worked to transform existing spaces, while others destabilized the very structure of the discourse itself. All of these women are both transgressive and innovative in their own right, and reading them together creates a multi-layered network of women writers whose contributions have not yet been adequately appreciated or studied. The volume does not offer a summary of the development of Epicureanism but through these examples from Italian, Spanish, French and Swedish women writers, we can see how Epicureanism in particular and early modern philosophies in general play various roles in these different but also similar contexts (women’s place in a patriarchal order has a strong tendency to repeat itself) between 1500 and 1700. In this way we also make a new contribution to the understanding of body, gender and senses that has been and will always be at the core of the formation of subjectivity in every place and time. By the same token, the volume offers a way to queer the canon.

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