

## **Renaissance Discourses of Desire**

By Renaissance Conference 1990 (University of Michigan--Dearborn)



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Love and sex are pre-eminent subjects of Renaissance literature; however, attitudes toward these topics were hardly uniform. The discourses of desire from this period embrace works as dissimilar as sonnets on frustrated love and libertine invitations to lust. Writers both idealised and demystified sex, alternately equating it with religious transcendence or exposing it as a mere bodily itch. The 15 essays in this volume clarify the sexual beliefs and prohibitions of the Renaissance period and examine the manifestations of those ideas. "Renaissance Discourses of Desire" confronts important questions about the relationship of sexuality and textuality in the period using a variety of critical methods and ideological presuppositions. Some of the essays focus on the intertwining of political and sexual discourse, the difference between men and women as desiring subjects, and the erotics of criticism. The representation of homoerotics and homosexuality is discussed, as is the impact of economic and social ideologies on love poetry and sexual expression. Among the texts explored are works by Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne, Carew, Herrick, Suckling, Burton, Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn and Milton. With their varied approaches, these essays illustrate the richness of the topic and its susceptibility to a number of critical techniques. Illuminating important authors and significant texts, the essays collected here aim to contribute to a fuller understanding of the complexities and range of 17th century discourses of desire, while also helping to chart the outlines of the period's sexual ideologies and anxieties.



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