Kenneth Gouwens. *Remembering the Renaissance: Humanist Narratives of the Sack of Rome*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998. Pp. xix, 232.

If few studies today would celebrate Renaissance works of art as reflections of the greatness of their times this is not due to a waning interest in the Renaissance, but to a growing interest in the fact that the first perpetrators of the Renaissance myth were the Renaissance writers and artists themselves. Kenneth Gouwens's book assesses how four humanists attached to the court of Clement VII — Pietro Alcionio, Pietro Corsi, Jacopo Sadoletto, and Pierio Valeriano — tried to make sense of themselves and their times in the wake of the Sack of Rome. Like a telescoped version of the much-lamented rupture attributed by the humanists to the barbarian invasions of late antiquity, this event encouraged humanists to submit their own culture to that heady mix of analysis and myth-making that they had refined in their study of ancient culture. In constructing the immediately preceding period as a golden age, Gouwens argues, these writers anticipated and set the tone for a long historiographical tradition to follow, a tradition that we perpetuate when we use the term "High Renaissance." This is, at least, the strong take on the book's point. In fact, the argument belongs more to the introduction than to the body of the book, where the literary mechanics of memory is less a driving concern than a recurring theme, and good, solid presentation in the manner of Trinkaus prevails. The book is best approached as a scrupulously researched and yet lively account of the careers and of some of the central concerns of four humanists whose social and intellectual world, for all its renown, remains insufficiently understood.

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