David R. Carlson. *English Humanist Books: Writers and Patrons, Manuscript and Print, 1475-1525*. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1993. Pp. x, 275.

Mary Thomas Crane. *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. Pp. x, 281.

Both these books share what has become in recent years a prevailing desire to humanize the humanists, as it were: to remind us that humanists did not live by Ciceronian *sententiae* alone, but required bread and were obliged to develop elaborate strategies of salesmanship in order to secure it. While this unromantic vision of the humanists has always existed — it was first expressed by contemporaries who felt their own social and political franchise endangered — the work of Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, in particular, has provided a fresh impetus to see Renaissance humanism in all its glorious confusion of mixed motives, uncertain results, and scrappy opportunism. Yet neither of the books under review proposes a mere subversion of humanist activity. Rather, both authors complicate the essential tools of the working humanist: the carefully crafted volumes presented to actual or potential patrons; the printed texts that spread an author's fame; the commonplace books that represented years of gathering and framing (seeming mundane techniques that Mary Thomas Crane transforms into something rich and strange). However different their approaches and concerns, Carlson and Crane are immersed in the physical materials of humanist endeavour and it is their concern with "matter" — in more than one sense — that enriches and problematizes their critical projects.

English Humanist Books is "a book about books: why they were made the way they were and how they were used" (p. 1) in the crucial period when print and humanism were beginning to transform the cultural landscape of Europe. For Carlson, the various fabrications of the humanist text illuminate the relations between the hired intellectual and his masters. The elaborations of its physical form — inexpensive manuscripts intended for private circulation, deluxe presentation manuscripts, the range of printed texts and the curious hybrids where print and manuscript mimicked each other — serve as a graded scale on which to construct a sociology of humanist exchange. In this system, social inequities complicated scholarly ones and Carlson explores the ways in which these seekers of employment tried, with varying success, to exploit a patron's sometimes whimsical need to follow intellectual fashion and to engage in acts of conspicuous consumption. For the humanist a well-timed and well-wrought textual gift could be a crucial investment. Since patrons favoured richly appointed manuscripts, there was the inherent risk of any speculative market, but courting a patron empty-handed was simply a non-starter.

Carlson proceeds by means of a series of case studies. Relatively obscure figures like Filippo Alberici, who presented a lovely manuscript to Henry VII that demon-

strated his skills as poet and translator but failed to gain him a position, stand side by side with such titans as More or Erasmus whose collaboration on the *Epigrammata* of 1518, Carlson argues, marked a vital chapter in More's own literary self-fashioning. Whatever their fame, these figures — which also include Pietro Carmeliano, Bernard André, Robert Whittington, and William Lily — are bound together by metaphysical imperative and material means: the need to cast themselves as attractive public figures worthy of preferment; and dependence on the fluid *physis* of book as first gambit in the patronal negotiation.

Carlson is at his best in discriminating the complex material significances of the book. While he builds on an abundance of prior work in this area, his anatomy of the manufacture and the immediate fate of particular books has the always appealing freshness of specificity: even a humanist as ephemeral as Alberici flickers to life as we watch his suit fail and, through a few well-chosen illustrations, feel his palpable gesture towards an indifferent monarch. Moreover, by grounding a good part of his reading in the court of Henry VII, Carlson revises a scholarly bias that privileges the court of his son.

Yet if *English Humanist Books* succeeds in making its readers aware of how certain material objects embodied a humanist's ambitions and in refining our view of an earlier Henrician court, it finally fails in making books or courts sufficiently problematical entities. For all its impressive particularity, the argument is virtually innocent of the kinds of theorizing about the nature of the book, the innovation of print, and the complexities of court mobility that have made these topics so vital in recent years. This is not a plea for theory as such, but a "book about books" that has more than antiquarian interest yet fails to engage theoretical problems of author and text seems, in these days, curiously incomplete. The very materiality of these humanist books, so carefully read by Carlson on one level, surely demands a more self-consciously theorized analysis of their status as aristocratic ornament or collection along the lines of recent work by Patricia Fumerton and Susan Stewart. On a broader scale, some attempt to consider the book as a conceptual entity — as Jesse Gellrich undertook to do for the Middle Ages — would have been welcome. This book succeeds in binding humanists to their writings in a viscerally satisfying way: as subjects defined largely by objects with a real look, feel, and smell; yet it also raises tantalizing questions of how such objects as these are to be understood apart from their seductive material forms.

If Carlson declines to theorize the objects of his investigation — whether books or their humanist authors — Mary Thomas Crane, in *Framing Authority*, immediately engages the question of theory. Indeed, her study is informed by an impassioned desire to prove that English humanism "possessed greater theoretical sophistication, manifested a more complex and problematized ideological stance . . . than has generally been recognized" (p. 7). Yet she also appreciates the difficulty of applying theory to early Renaissance writing and offers her work as a temperate model: "it has nevertheless seemed possible, particularly at this historical moment, to achieve some measure

of internal distantiation, to stand as it were *between* the theoretical systems of our age and the previous one in order to see, however partially, our common past" (p. 11). Borrowing from a host of theoretical sources, while never losing sight of "the English Renaissance in all its otherness" (p. 199), Crane negotiates between different worlds of discursive theory with unfailing delicacy.

Crane proposes to rethink the place and problem of the commonplace, or "saying" (the neutral term she favours over adage, aphorism, sentence, etc.), in early Renaissance England: what were the implications of the humanist obsession with the "gathering" and "framing" of such sayings? For Crane, these common practices imply a theory of reading that envisioned texts like the *Aeneid*, not as the brilliant narrative wholes we modern cherish, but as networks of pithy moral fragments to be culled, collected, and imbibed. Crane reconsiders humanist pedagogy and the fruits of that schooling in the commonplace books themselves to prove her point. Armed with this definition of the humanist reader as a kind of elite hunter-gatherer, she suggests that this self-effacing, communal mode of reading — self-effacing as readers become repositories of discretely generated texts; communal as prospective humanists gather what will become the wisdom of the tribe — subverts the ideal of individualized authorship that has abided in the modern period and against which the various postmodern deconstructions of the Author have been undertaken.

The result of mapping the techniques and ideology of the saying — a journey that leads through logic and rhetoric handbooks as well as commonplace books — is a bifurcated vision of Renaissance authorship that divides along lines of class and culture: a humanist ideal of the author as scholarly conduit, civil advisor, and model of reticent selfhood; an aristocratic ideal of the author as freely self-determined, distinctly individualized, a model of emotional, personalized expression. This broad dichotomy does little justice to the care and insight with which Crane constructs her meticulous scheme of early Renaissance authorship; and, while such radically opposed definitions are important to her analysis, it is the dialectic between them that truly concerns her. Having erected a model of the Renaissance writer sensitive to the specific nature of texts, to differences in class, and to the vexed problem of selfhood, she proceeds to detail its implications for a variety of texts from the documents that were the ammunition in the Grammarians' War to Sidney's *Defense* and *Astrophil and Stella*; and even to trace its influence on William Cecil, Lord Burghley, in whom the ideals of humanist and aristocratic ideology were merged — to the frustration of those who sought his favour. In these various figures, Crane considers how the humanist project "shaped the discursive practices of the period" (p. 115).

While all the readings in *Framing Authority* illuminate familiar as well as unfamiliar texts from a fresh perspective — a few pages on More's *Utopia*, for example, manage to shift the standard terms of the debate over that work — two extended readings stand out. Crane breathes new life into the "drab age" poetic miscellanies that always fall into the cracks of classroom lecture and literary history. Rather than seek for the seeming poetic pearls among largely sententious and

depersonalized verse, Crane celebrates the sententiousness of the sixteenth-century miscellany, revives its humanist roots, and restores something of its original ideological complexity and cultural richness. Her consideration of Sidney enhances his aesthetic and social liminality, read in the shadow of Lord Burghley, *Astrophil and Stella* comes into focus as a political project in which “Sidney uses a quasi-fictional love affair in order both to rebel against Burghley and to forge a version of the aristocratic self that contains, but is not contained by, the humanist ethical frame” (p. 190).

Much of the force of *Framing Authority* lies in its author’s brilliantly successful attempt to recuperate, not only a series of texts, but the very fragments of the textual past that constitute their substance. By investing the saying with a new kind of interpretative weight — by seeing in humble sententiousness a theory of composition, an ideology of selfhood, and a subtle politics of authorship — Crane also effects a complex canonical revision: obscure texts are revalued and familiar texts newly esteemed. Moreover, and not the least of her accomplishments, Crane offers an elegant corrective to the work of Stephen Greenblatt and Thomas Greene: complicating the terms of sixteenth-century self-fashioning by clarifying the humanist concept of the “socially constituted subject” (p. 6); and re-asserting a form of Renaissance *imitatio* largely decried in *The Light in Troy*. It is a measure of her book that it can engage these influential arguments with a complementary subtlety and richness. In Crane, the humanist enterprise, much criticized and even demeaned in recent years, reassumes its seminal status; less as a pedagogical project, political program, or cultural reawakening (though doubtless it was all these), than as a crucial framework for the forging of the modern subject.

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