Booknotes Notes de lecture

Betty S. Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott, ed. *Female and Male Voices in Early Modern England: An Anthology of Renaissance Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. Pp. xvii, 411.

If it happened, the “renaissance” for women occurred in the late twentieth century, largely through the archival and editorial work of feminist scholars. Editor, author, and archivist Betty S. Travitsky, whose ground-breaking editions include *A Paradise of Women: Writings by English Women of the Renaissance* (1980) and *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon* (ed. with Anne M. Haselkorn, 1990), is one of the major contributors to this field of study. In *Female and Male Voices*, Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott address the ongoing need for texts that counterbalance the canon while avoiding the ghettoization of women's voices in rooms and canons of their own. The editors have responded admirably to these challenges by producing an anthology that juxtaposes early modern female and male writings. Texts are creatively paired in terms of shared themes or generic traditions and then grouped under section headings: Domestic Affairs; Religion (with subcategories: A Medley of Christian Religious Poetry and The Jewish Question in Early Modern England); Political Life and Social Structures; and Love and Sexuality. While the anthology reinforces assumptions about the distinct, though multivocal, female and male literary traditions, its inclusion of select homoerotic texts does draw attention to “gender's more complex possibilities.”

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Marc Bizer. *Les Lettres romaines de Du Bellay*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2001. P. 304.

La correspondance littéraire jouit d'un regain d'intérêt dans la critique universitaire. M. Bizer le montre en consacrant son ouvrage à la place qu'occupe la lettre dans les cercles d'humanistes de la Renaissance européenne et en soulignant la dimension épistolaire de la poésie française au milieu du XVI^e siècle. Pour ce faire, il divise

son étude en trois parties : suivant une approche générique, il rappelle les modalités de la lettre (l'épître en vers latins, en vers français puis en prose) ; il montre les enjeux de l'épistolarité dans les *Regrets* de Du Bellay ; et il dégage de ce recueil la communauté littéraire et politique qui fut celle du poète angevin qui, au moyen du sonnet, entretient une correspondance assidue avec divers milieux.

Une substantielle bibliographie (p. 255–97) et un *Index rerum* complètent cet ouvrage très riche.

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Mitchell B. Merback. *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Pp. 351.

Most modern viewers of late medieval altarpiece representations of Calvary are appalled and horrified either by the bloody and painful images they present or by the guilty fascination they provoke. In either case, these works, particularly those from the German-speaking regions, seem to underline a barbarous and inhuman vision. They seem to place the “medieval” in opposition to much that we consider essential to civilised values and behavior. In this challenging book Merback firmly links the torments, particularly of the two thieves on either side of Christ, to both the penal practices and the penitential culture of the late Middle Ages. He shows convincingly that the twisted thieves, with their broken and bloodied limbs, were visually convincing representations of contemporary executions, many of which included horrific and painful violence to the body of the offender before he was exposed to the elements, often still alive, on an elevated wheel. In doing so, the author humanises his subject even as he recognises the discomfort it provokes in modern audiences.

Merback argues that the need for penance as well as penitence in order to earn or deserve salvation made devotional concentration on the pain and horror of physical atonement readily assimilable to penal practice. The “Good Thief,” especially, embodied in his pain an earthly penance that made his rapid ascent into heaven fully comprehensible and his atonement exemplary.

The implicit tension between good and bad thief echoes the images of virtue and temptation in *ars moriendi* books and is here sensitively related to a variety of religious, social and judicial contexts. Careful to avoid simplistic explanations, Merback suggests a number of ways of explaining the images he addresses and the changes they underwent over time. He may have overextended himself in linking the particularly bloody inverted images produced in the late fifteenth century in Bavaria and Austria to Mariolatry and anti-Jewish violence, but he nowhere implies simple or tidy explanations. His discussion of the decline of images of pain and suffering is likewise well-considered; the Reformation does not serve as a *deus ex machina*.