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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

MAY 2023

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Thank you for reading the third volume of *Dies Legibiles*! We've had an exciting semester, as our core editorial team was composed entirely of students who were new to the journal. Though this came with a certain amount of trial and error, it also brought a sense of passion and drive that served us well: we received more submissions this year than ever before. Many of our submissions came from outside Smith College and the Five College Consortium—including several international submissions! We are thrilled to expand our outreach and cover a wider array of perspectives and topics.

This year, we continued the tradition of including a variety of compositions in *Dies Legibiles*, including three book reviews and two artworks. The accepted works span the range from the twelfth century to the early seventeenth century.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who submitted to *Dies Legibiles*. The work of bright, upcoming scholars is crucial to the survival of the field. It is an honor to share the work enclosed in these pages!

The *Dies Legibiles* Team  
We proudly present: *Dies Legibiles* Volume III

# SYMBOLISM AND DESIRE: THE MEANING OF HOMOEROTICISM IN DONATELLO'S BRONZE *DAVID*

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Donatello's bronze statue of David (Fig. 1) is one of the most puzzling artworks of the Italian Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Established facts about its provenance are scarce—the first free-standing work in bronze produced since antiquity, we know that it was displayed in the courtyard of the Palazzo Medici, but we do not know who commissioned it or when.<sup>2</sup> The role of homosexual desire in the creation and interpretation of the work has been the subject of much scholarship in recent decades. In this paper, I engage extensively with scholarly debate surrounding the meaning of this enigmatic work, and argue in favour of a homoerotic interpretation. I begin by introducing the classic case for homoeroticism, alongside an alternative, secular-civic reading of the work's iconography. Next, I develop a close formal analysis in which the erotic dimension is brought to the fore. I then examine a possible synthesis of the political and homoerotic interpretations through the humanist iconography of tyrannicide, before concluding with a contextual discussion of homosexuality in Renaissance Florence. Donatello's *David* shows us how a Renaissance artist could incorporate homoeroticism into his work as one dimension of meaning among many; the visual language of desire, including homosexual desire, could coexist with other aesthetic modes. Our readings of this work and others must be attentive to this semiotic pluralism.

The first art historian to suggest a homoerotic interpretation of the *David*, in 1957, was Horst W. Janson. In a short but highly influential passage of his critical catalogue of Donatello's oeuvre, he presents an argument based on two premises.<sup>3</sup> The first is that Donatello was himself homosexual. He cites a sixteenth century publication, a collection of *Facetiae* (vulgar jokes and stories) compiled in the 1470s by a member of the Medici court; Albert Wesselski has attributed it to

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<sup>1</sup> Donatello, *David*, c. 1426–1455, bronze, 158 cm, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

<sup>2</sup> John Shearman, *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Horst W. Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 85.

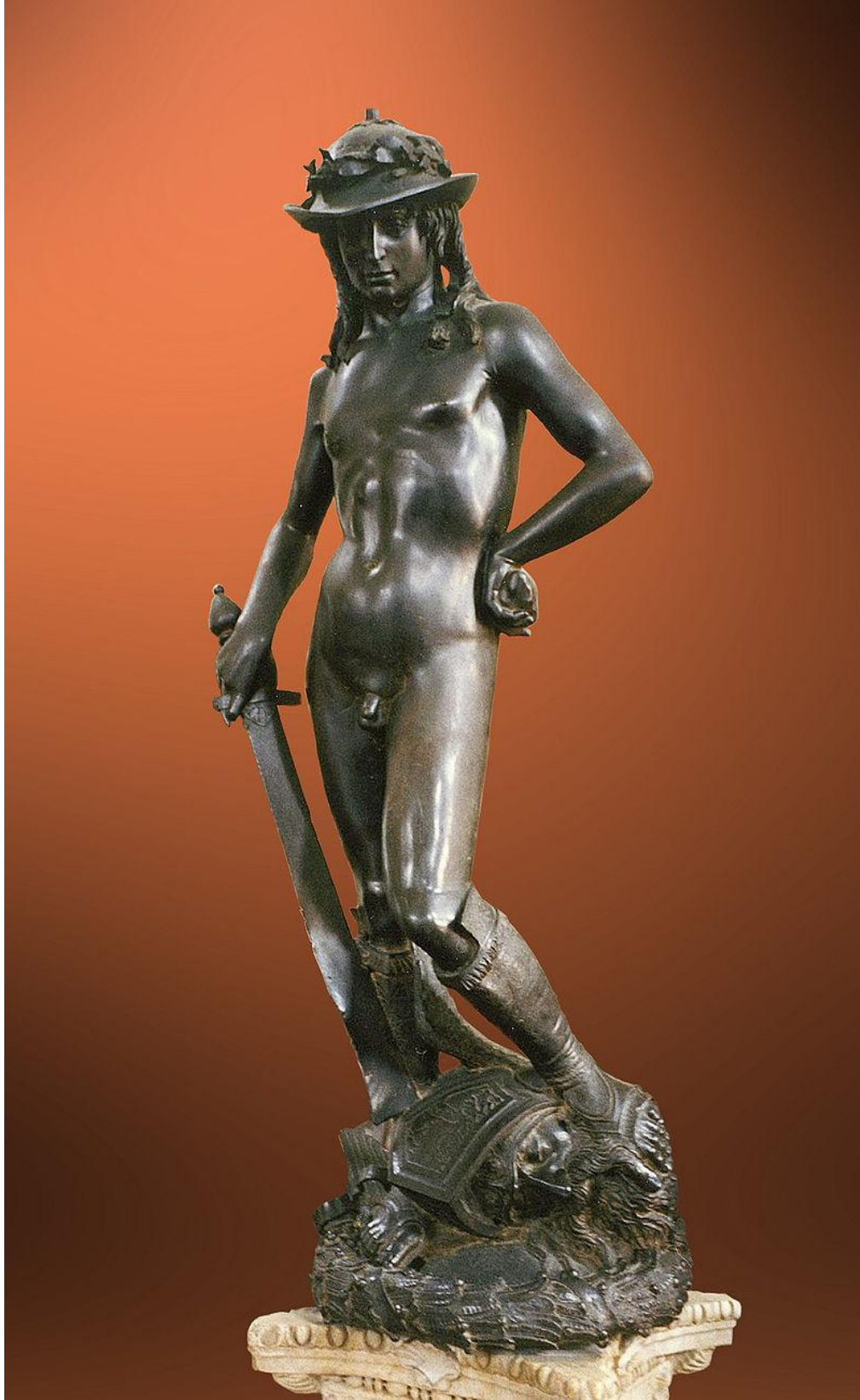


Fig. 1: Donatello. *David*. c. 1428-1455. Bronze, 158 cm. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

the humanist poet Agnolo Ambrogini (known as Poliziano).<sup>4</sup> Three anecdotes in this source, concerned with the artist's amorous pursuit of his beautiful apprentices, suggest strongly that Donatello was reputed to be a homosexual in his own time and in the circles in which he moved.<sup>5</sup> The second premise, more firmly within the remit of the art historian, concerns the erotic character of the work itself. In a memorable turn of phrase, Janson describes Donatello's David as "*le beau garçon sans merci*," the beautiful, pitiless boy, "conscious only of his own sensuous beauty."<sup>6</sup> For Janson, eroticism is writ large on the sculpture's body:

He is not the classical *ephebos* but the "beautiful apprentice"; not an ideal but an object of desire, strangely androgynous in its combination of sinewy angularity with feminine softness and fullness.<sup>7</sup>

On these bases Janson argues that the work really is an expression of the artist's own sexual desires. This theory has proved influential, especially against the background of change in the discipline as recent generations of art historians have worked to assert the place of sexuality as a legitimate object of scholarship in their field.<sup>8</sup> In particular, it is his formal analysis that has guided most investigation into the erotic character of the work—with, as we shall see, some exceptions.

On the other hand, commentators who have opposed Janson's interpretation have tended to offer iconological readings of the work. At the beginning of the Renaissance, the figure of David, an important character from the Old Testament, already had a great deal of religious significance. Some of the most compelling iconological analyses of Donatello's rendition, however, emphasize the work's secular and civic iconography. These interpretations highlight David's role as tyrant-slayer. Christine M. Sperling has discovered a manuscript attesting that in the fifteenth century the *David* was inscribed with the following message:

The victor is whoever defends the fatherland. God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe.  
Behold! a boy overcame a great tyrant. Conquer, o citizens!<sup>9</sup>

Sperling locates these words in the broader political context of early quattrocento Florence. The Republic had recently emerged from a series of wars in which it defended its autonomy from the expansionist and autocratic power of the duchy of Milan, which under the Visconti was militarily the strongest state on the peninsula. In the study of Florentine art produced against the backdrop of this conflict, David's brave defence of his people against a superior force, has been widely interpreted as

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<sup>4</sup> Albert Wesselski, *Angelo Polizianos Tagebuch* (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1929). The work was originally published in 1548.

<sup>5</sup> Janson, *Sculpture of Donatello*, 85.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism and Art* (Oxford: Oxford History of Art, 2007); Edward-Lilly Smith, *Sexuality in Western Art*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Christine M. Sperling, "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and the Demands of Medici Politics," *The Burlington Magazine* 134 (1992): 218–219.

personifying “Florence’s dedication to [...] republican liberty.”<sup>10</sup> Sperling argues that Donatello’s sculpture was commissioned by the Medici in or shortly after 1428, in honour of the favourable peace they had negotiated with the aggressors in that year.<sup>11</sup> This early dating is not uncontroversial; regardless of the specifics, however, political readings of the *David* enjoy wide support.<sup>12</sup>

The *David*, after all, is not a work of pornography; a strictly erotic reading would be inadequate. By the same token, however, I suggest that interpretations that downplay or dismiss the sexual dimension of the piece likewise fail to be, in John Shearman’s words, “consistent with everything the bronze itself can tell us.”<sup>13</sup> The work has certain formal attributes for which de-eroticising iconological analyses struggle to account. To illuminate these characteristics, we might compare Donatello’s *David* to that of one of his near contemporaries. Verrocchio’s *David* (Fig. 2), completed circa 1474, is in many ways strikingly similar to our sculpture in its medium, its elegant *contrapposto*, the youthfulness of its model, and its placement of Goliath’s head beneath the boy’s feet.<sup>14</sup> Representing the same figure in similar contexts, the two works share (or nearly share) an iconography.<sup>15</sup> But no one would be likely to describe Verrocchio’s piece as *sensuous*, and still less *erotic*. By focusing on the peculiar attributes that distinguish Donatello’s *David* from his more conventional double, we can develop a formal analysis that more closely attends to the artwork’s unique characteristics. Such an analysis, I suggest, gives support to the homoerotic interpretation.

The most strikingly odd feature of Donatello’s sculpture is its attire—the clothes the boy lacks as well as those he wears. The modern viewer’s attention is immediately drawn to David’s elaborate hat. As Janson points out, it is a conventional piece of fifteenth-century traveller’s headgear that would not have struck contemporary viewers as out of the ordinary or particularly flamboyant.<sup>16</sup> It would certainly have been unusual, however, to wear such a hat with military boots *and nothing else*. The hat and boots call our attention to the fact that he is unclothed; David, as John W. Dixon cleverly describes him, is not “nude” but “naked.”<sup>17</sup> Peter Weller takes this as an argument against the erotic interpretation, juxtaposing this “angular adolescent” with the beauty of the classical nude.<sup>18</sup> I would like to examine this idea more closely, in the context of broader discussions on the meaning of these two concepts of nudity and nakedness.

The nude, of course, is one of the central themes in Western art. Correspondingly, it has produced a wide art-historical literature. In modern times, Kenneth Clark’s 1953 work on the subject

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Butterfield, “New Evidence for the Iconography of David in Quattrocento Florence,” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 6 (1995): 116. For a particularly influential voice in propagating this reading, cf. Frederick Hartt, “Art and Freedom in Quattrocento Florence,” in *Essays in Memory of Karl Lehmann*, ed. L. Sandler (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 114-131.

<sup>11</sup> Sperling, “The Demands of Medici Politics,” 222.

<sup>12</sup> For the controversy around the dating of the work, see Janson, *Sculpture of Donatello*, 81. The matter has not been resolved since his time.

<sup>13</sup> Shearman, *Only Connect*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Andrea del Verrocchio, *David*, c. 1473-1475, bronze, 125 cm, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed iconological discussion of the relationship between sculptural representations of David in Florentine culture, see Butterfield, “The Iconography of David.”

<sup>16</sup> Janson, *Sculpture of Donatello*, 84.

<sup>17</sup> John W. Dixon, “The Drama of Donatello’s David: Re-examination of an ‘Enigma,’” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 92 (1979): 6.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Weller, “A Reassessment in Historiography and Gender: Donatello’s Bronze ‘David’ in the Twenty-First Century,” *Artibus et Historiae* 33 (2012): 56.



Fig. 2: Verrocchio, Andrea del. *David*. Circa 1473–1475. Bronze, 125 cm. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.



has been especially influential. He conceives of nudity as an ideal state of being, and nakedness as a worldly one:

To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word 'nude', on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed.<sup>19</sup>

It is to Clark's critiques, however, that we should turn to make sense of the nude/naked distinction in the case of the *David*—especially to feminist critics such as Leslie Bostrom and Marlene Malik, who detect something sinister in this uncoupling of idealised and material forms. For them, the idea of the nude serves to mask the basic reality of the studio, in which the artist is clothed and the model is unclothed.<sup>20</sup> Part of what is masked is sexual desire, which normally comes into play when one person disrobes in front of another; through Clark's *re-forming* of the body, through its reduction to pure forms, this element can be suppressed, or side-stepped altogether. Nudity, in other words, is a conceptual device for de-eroticising nakedness.

In applying these concepts to the work at hand, we are again well served by a comparative analysis, with yet another Florentine David: that of Michelangelo (Fig. 3).<sup>21</sup> Executed in marble between 1501 and 1504, this work could without exaggeration be termed the exemplary Renaissance nude. Clark describes it as “the visual form of Michelangelo's aspirations”; by this he means that it fully embodies the artist's ideals of classical purity and perfection.<sup>22</sup> The *David's* heroic stature, its distant gaze, its mathematical proportioning and anatomical precision, all render it remote from the viewer, situating it in “the realm of nonattachment.”<sup>23</sup> Not so Donatello's sculpture. The figure's conspicuous nakedness grounds the work in the here-and-now; we encounter not an idealised form but a living, breathing youth captured in bronze. The suppression of eroticism, characteristic of the nude, does not take place. This is the fault in Dixon and Weller's argument: it is precisely *because* the *David* is “neither beautiful nor classical” that its erotic dimension can express itself.<sup>24</sup> Our attention may be called to the artist's gaze upon his model, the “privileged and peculiar” dynamic described by Bostrom and Malik.<sup>25</sup> We may recall Donatello's reputation for desiring the young men working in his studio, one of whom may plausibly have been the model for the piece; in light of this, Janson's characterisation of David as the “beautiful apprentice” is quite convincing.<sup>26</sup> A formal reading of the sculpture's attire thus leads us, persuasively in my view, to a homoerotic interpretation of the work.

Another feature of the piece that defies iconological interpretation is the pair of wings rising from Goliath's helmet (Fig. 4). These peculiar feathers, not metal ornaments but “live wings” which

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Leslie Bostrom and Marlene Malik, “Reviewing the Nude,” *Art Journal* 58 (1999): 43.

<sup>21</sup> Michelangelo, *David*, c. 1501–1504, marble, 517 cm, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

<sup>22</sup> Clark, *The Nude*, 48–63.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>24</sup> Weller, “A Reassessment,” 56.

<sup>25</sup> Bostrom and Malik, “Reviewing the Nude,” 43.

<sup>26</sup> Janson, *Sculpture of Donatello*, 85.



*Fig. 3: Michelangelo. David. Circa 1501–1504. Marble, 517 cm. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.*





Fig. 4: Donatello. *David*. Detail: leg with feathers.

seem to be quite out of place in the context of the giant's armor, draw the viewer's gaze as they sweep up the inside of the boy's right leg.<sup>27</sup> The sensual quality of this gesture, the invitation to imagine the tactile sensation of soft barbs against sensitive flesh, is very clear. This artistic choice, in Laurie Schneider's view, "must have been erotic in intent."<sup>28</sup> She extends this argument further, perhaps, than it ought to be extended, linking Goliath's head to the apotropaic winged phalluses of Roman antiquity via a Freudian correlation between decapitation and castration.<sup>29</sup> The logic is tendentious, and depends in part on a conception of homosexuality that strikes the twenty-first century reader as outmoded. We do not, however, have to indulge in such psychoanalytic flights of fancy in order to recognise the erotic physicality of that wing. There is even something tender in the way this extension of the slain man's body caresses the boy's thigh; we may go so far as to wonder whether this David, like Judith (Donatello's statue of whom was also displayed in the Medici palace), has vanquished his enemy by seducing him.<sup>30</sup>

The meaning of a work of art is necessary plural; this is especially true of one as ambiguous as the *David*. In the quattrocento as in our time, Francis Ames-Lewis has suggested, Donatello's piece "was in all probability able to stimulate a variety of interpretations."<sup>31</sup> A formalistic, homoerotic reading of the work is not inherently incompatible with any of the possible iconological readings. In fact, meaningful (if somewhat obscure) connections can be drawn between the work's iconography and its homoeroticism.

We may look for this connection in fifteenth-century humanist scholarship. David, as we have seen, functioned as a powerful symbol of the Florentine Republic's resistance to foreign tyranny. Schneider identifies a possible connection to same-sex desire via the writings of Plato. The *Symposium* is a philosophical dialogue on the subject of *eros*, romantic or sexual love. In Pausanias' speech we find extensive praise of love between men, and in particular between mature men and youths.<sup>32</sup> For Pausanias, the virtue of this form of desire has political ramifications—like philosophy and physical exercise, it engenders "great thoughts" and "strong friendships" and is thus inimical to tyranny.<sup>33</sup> He illustrates his point through the example of Aristogeiton and Harmodius, two lovers celebrated as tyrannicides for their attempt on the life of the Athenian dictator Hippias.<sup>34</sup> Sarah Blake McHam considers these two figures to be of particular importance to the iconography of Donatello's work. The anti-tyrannical inscription on the base of the *David* links it, in her view, to the famous classical Athenian sculptures of the two assassins known as the *Tyrannicides* (Fig. 5), which are similarly inscribed.<sup>35</sup> The Medici court could plausibly have known about the sculpture group from

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>28</sup> Laurie Schneider, "Donatello's Bronze David," *The Art Bulletin* 55 (1973): 216.

<sup>29</sup> Laurie Schneider, "Donatello and Caravaggio: The Iconography of Decapitation," *American Imago* 33 (1976): 79–83.

<sup>30</sup> For a comparative discussion of these two works, see Sarah Blake McHam, "Donatello's Bronze *David* and *Judith* as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence," *Art Bulletin* 83 (2001): 32–47.

<sup>31</sup> Francis Ames-Lewis, "Donatello's Bronze David and the Palazzo Medici Courtyard," *Renaissance Studies* 3 (1989): 238.

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato, Volume II: The Symposium*, trans. R. E. Allen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 120–125.

<sup>33</sup> Plato, *The Symposium*, 122.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>35</sup> Kritios and Nesiotes, *Tyrannicides*, c. 477 BCE, marble (Roman copy after Greek bronze), Museo Nazionale, Naples; McHam, "Donatello's Bronze *David* and *Judith*," 37.



Fig. 5: Kritios and Nesiotes. *Tyrannicides*. Circa 477 BCE. Marble (Roman copy after Greek bronze).  
Museo Nazionale, Naples.

descriptions in classical texts.<sup>36</sup> As Aristogeiton and Harmodius overthrew Hippias (and as Florence defeated Milan), David slew Goliath; perhaps Donatello took from these classical exemplars, and represented in bronze, the notion that homosexual desire and the defence of civic liberty are connected.

Dixon objects to this line of reasoning, pointing out that the first Latin translation of Plato, that of Marsilio Ficino, was not completed until 1468, well after the creation of the statue.<sup>37</sup> I am unconvinced by this objection. Two manuscripts of Plato's complete writings are attested to have arrived in Florence in 1424.<sup>38</sup> Even if Donatello could not read these texts himself, he moved in humanist circles in which classical ideas had great currency. It is entirely plausible that he was exposed to Platonist philosophy through discussions with scholars at the Medici court. We can even imagine that, if Donatello indeed had a reputation as a homosexual among his learned contemporaries (the attribution of the collection of *facetiae* referenced by Janson to Poliziano suggests he was), he might have been specifically introduced by his friends to those key homophile passages of the *Symposium* in which he could have been expected to take a particular interest—though this, of course, is only speculation.

Against the force of formal evidence, some scholars opposed to the homoerotic interpretation have advanced a contextual argument based on the premise that such a reading would have been considered “simply indecorous” to the artist's presumably homophobic contemporaries.<sup>39</sup> However, a closer examination of intellectual and social life in Renaissance Florence undermines the credibility of this claim. Expressions of homoerotic desire were not, in fact, an unthinkable response to works of art for Renaissance intellectuals. In a poem of circa 1550, Antonio Francesco Grazzini praises one of Donatello's most famous works: his *San Giorgio*, displayed in a niche outside the Orsanmichele building (Fig. 6).<sup>40</sup> Grazzini calls the sculpture his “beautiful Ganymede,” declaring it preferable to a live boyfriend—no less charming, but unmarred by inconstancy, temper, and jealousy.<sup>41</sup> There is no reason to suppose that such a response should not have been possible for an observer of the quattrocento—even if no poet expressed such sentiments as directly as Grazzini. Indeed, explicitly homoerotic literature was published in Tuscany in Donatello's lifetime. The humanist poet Antonio degli Beccadelli's *Hermaphroditus*, published in 1426, describes sex between men explicitly; it was dedicated to Cosimo de Medici.<sup>42</sup> Homosexual desire had its place in elite culture in the Florentine Renaissance.

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<sup>36</sup> Among these texts is Pliny's *Natural History*, which describes the *Tyrannicides* as one of the first bronze statues; perhaps Donatello saw a connection between these first classical bronzes and his own, the first of modern times. Cited in McHam, “Donatello's Bronze *David* and *Judith*,” 38.

<sup>37</sup> Dixon, “The Drama of Donatello's *David*,” 10.

<sup>38</sup> R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 483.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Williams, “‘Virtus Perfecitur’: On the Meaning of Donatello's Bronze ‘David,’” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 53 (2009): 217. See, for example, Christopher Fulton, “The Boy Stripped Bare by His Elders: Art and Adolescence in Renaissance Florence,” *Art Journal* 56 (1997): 35.

<sup>40</sup> Donatello, *San Giorgio*, c. 1415–1417, marble, 209 cm, Orsanmichele, Florence; Lex Hermans, “Going Local: Three Sixteenth-Century Florentine Views on Donatello's St. George,” in *The Transformation of Vernacular Expression in Early Modern Arts*, eds. Joost Keizer and Todd Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 113.

<sup>41</sup> Antonio Francesco Grazzini, “Capitolo in Lode della Statua di San Giorgio di Mano di Donatello a Orsanmichele in Firenze,” in *Le Rime Burlesche ... di Anton Francesco Grazzini*, ed. Carlo Verzone (Florence: 1882), 526–529.

<sup>42</sup> Antonio Beccadelli, *Hermaphroditus*, trans. Eugene O'Connor (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001).





Fig. 6: Donatello. *San Giorgio*. Circa 1415–1417. Marble, 209 cm. Orsanmichele, Florence.

More broadly, detractors overlook Florence's contemporary reputation as a "modern Sodom."<sup>43</sup> Michael Rocke has established that homosexual relations were pervasive in quattrocento Florence.<sup>44</sup> One statistic is particularly indicative: in the seventy-year period between 1432 and 1502, of a population of 40,000, the city judiciary accused 17,000 people of sodomy—a significant number of Florentine men in the later quattrocento were thus incriminated for homosexual activities.<sup>45</sup> Though it was persecuted, homosexuality clearly played an important role in Florentine culture; it is unreasonable to claim that these dynamics had no impact on high art.

To ask *if* homoeroticism was present in the artistic culture of the Italian Renaissance is to begin our scholarship with the wrong question. Same-sex desire exists in all societies; the task of the art historian is to investigate *how* it expresses itself in art. Donatello's *David* offers us an answer to this question. Confidently homoerotic, the work blends sexuality with a complex program of political iconography. The piece demonstrates that, for Renaissance artists and patrons, homoeroticism could function as one aspect of a work's meaning among many. That he enabled such a slight and introspective figure to express so much is testament to Donatello's genius.

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<sup>43</sup> Wesselski, *Angelo Polizianos Tagebuch*, xxxi f.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.



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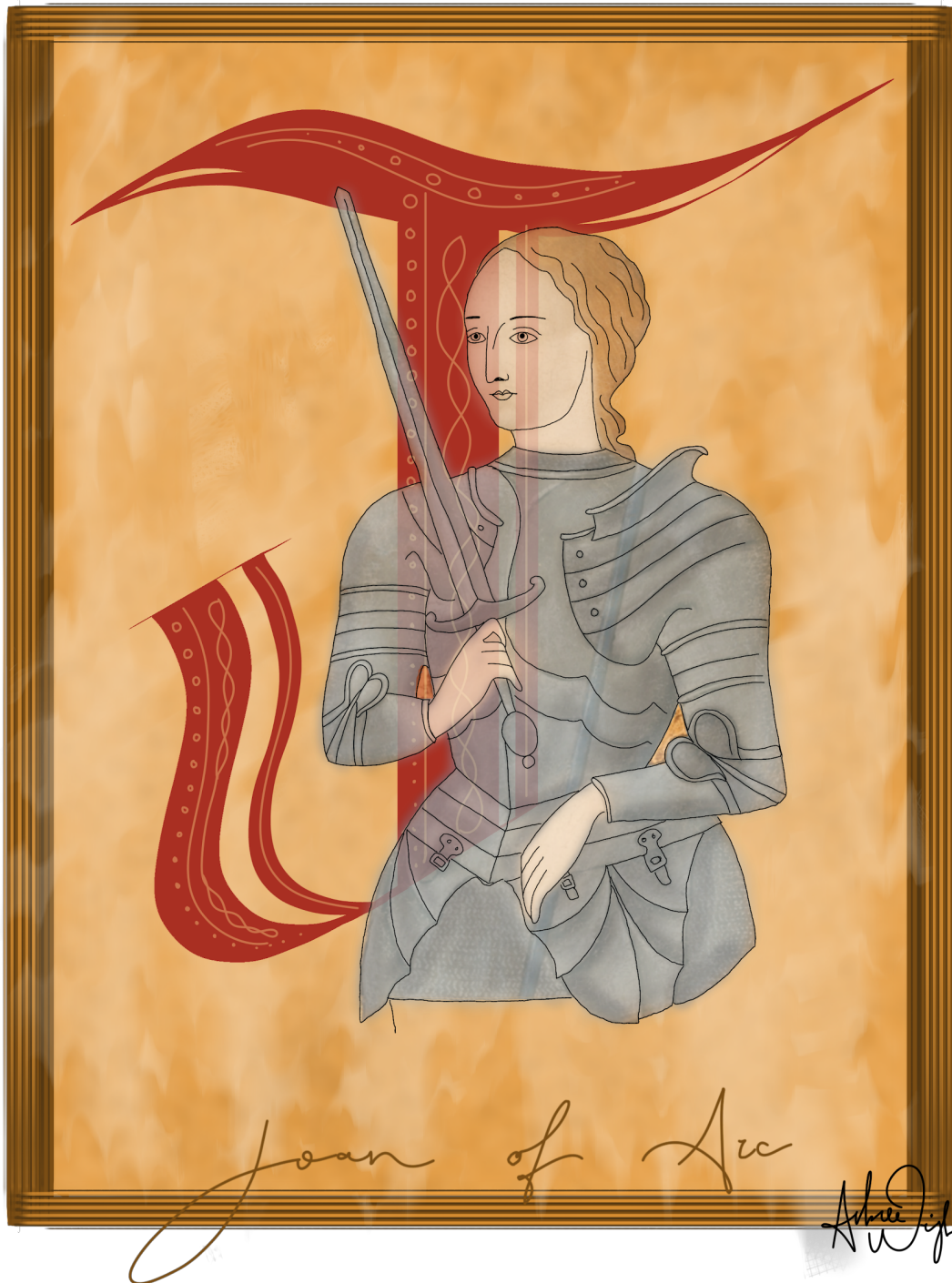
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## REPLICATION: *JOAN OF ARC*

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Digital Art based on Anonymous French or Flemish. Joan of Arc. Second half of the fifteenth century. Parchment. Musée de l'Histoire de France. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.15669188>.

# BOOK REVIEW ON *A FEMALE APOSTLE IN MEDIEVAL ITALY: THE LIFE OF CLARE OF RIMINI*

*Ella Wieggers*  
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Jacques Dalarun, Sean L. Field, and Valerio Cappozzo, *A Female Apostle in Medieval Italy: The Life of Clare of Rimini*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. 175 pages.

Clare of Rimini (c. 1260–c.1324–29) was one of many women of the mid-to-late medieval period who lived and embodied the *vita apostolica* outside of the cloister, without a direct allegiance to an established religious order. Existing at an intersection of holiness, heresy, literary transformation, and changing saintly definitions, Clare is both a fascinating figure and one who is too little known. Her *vita*, written almost concurrently with the time of her death, was not translated into English before the publication of *A Female Apostle in Medieval Italy: The Life of Clare of Rimini*. As Clare appears as an example in a great deal of the secondary scholarship on lay penitents and quasi-religious, quasi-Franciscan women in medieval Italian communes, and as her *vita* is one of the first Italian saints' lives written in the vernacular as opposed to Latin, this translation is a welcome addition to the literature.

The team behind *A Female Apostle in Medieval Italy* is an impressive one. Jacques Dalarun authored one of the only monographs dedicated solely to Clare; Sean L. Field has written extensively on the lives of quasi-religious women living at the same period as Clare; and Valerio Cappozzo has a number of publications on the translation and interpretation of medieval Italian vernacular literature. Together, they present an English version of Clare's anonymous *vita* that is a pleasure to read, with pertinent contextual notes. The authors/translators chose to focus the notes and contextualisation for each chapter around specific themes, using the hagiography as a window into a general picture of medieval life. The format here is somewhat unconventional, as the contextual information takes the form of an essay appended to each chapter of the *vita*, and endnotes are limited to basic citations and glosses of terms.

This unique formatting is the work's greatest weakness and its greatest strength. As one would expect from the editorial/authorial team, the essays contextualise each chapter to help the reader better appreciate the hagiography's unique elements and the complex

socio-religious world of medieval Northern Italy. However, the essays are largely distinguished from the medieval hagiography via margin size, as opposed to font changes or clearly delineated headings. This can make it difficult to discern when the *vita* text ends and the chapter's essay begins. I found myself wishing for an essay title following each *vita* chapter in order to delineate this divide more clearly as I read.

Similarly to the muddled formatting, the intended audience for this book is somewhat unclear. The authors assume a baseline knowledge of medieval religion, and the contemporary writing is academic in nature, as opposed to devotional or popular. However, I have difficulty imagining this being of particular use to an expert audience already versed in the lives of female lay penitents and Franciscan mystic traditions. It is a slim volume largely focused on presenting the *vita* clearly and informatively to its readers, and exploring medieval Italy through an unusual lens. For this reason, it would likely be of use in an undergraduate classroom.

I could see this text being particularly helpful as a way to teach medieval women's religious cultures and mysticism to an undergraduate class at an intermediate or introductory level. The same sort of historical survey course on medieval Christianity that might assign *The Book of Margery Kempe* or another "canonical" mystic could easily use this as assigned reading, as Dalarun, Cappozzo, and Field solidly ground the work in its historical period. As the translation seeks a scholarly audience that lacks some familiarity with the basics of mysticism studies and Italian history of the medieval period, an undergraduate audience would benefit from studying a primary source translation presented in this format. Ultimately, *A Female Apostle in Medieval Italy* will, due to its timely publication and accessible presentation of its material, certainly find its audience and inspire a new generation of undergraduates to investigate lay mystic women and their complex worlds and spiritualities.

# LES FEMMES TRAGIQUES: UNE ANALYSE DU CORPS FÉMININ COMME OUTIL POLITIQUE DANS «LES MISÈRES» ET «FERS» DANS *LES TRAGIQUES* D'AGRIPPA D'AUBIGNÉ

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*Les Tragiques* (1616) est une épopée d'Agrippa d'Aubigné (1552–1630) qui se concentre sur les effets véritablement tragiques de la guerre de religion, spécifiquement sur les protestants. La guerre de religion était une guerre civile et sanglante qui a commencé en 1560 et qui a duré presque quarante ans. D'Aubigné était un soldat pendant cette guerre pour l'armée de sa religion, l'armée protestante (contre l'armée catholique qui était aussi l'armée royale). Les tensions en France étaient exacerbées à cause de la régence de la Reine catholique et italienne, Catherine de Médicis, et à cause de la conversion d'Henri de Navarre (Henri IV). Ces conflits comprenaient les sièges des villes et ont culminé avec le massacre de la Saint-Barthélemy. Après le massacre, Henri IV a déclaré une politique de « l'oubliance », dont le but était que « la mémoire [de la guerre] ... demeurera éteinte et assoupie, comme de choses non advenue. »<sup>1</sup>

*Les Tragiques* est un témoignage poétique et métaphorique de la guerre de religion basé sur les propres souvenirs de l'auteur et le chagrin et la souffrance des protestants qui était écrit comme outil politique contre l'oubliance. Dans son œuvre, d'Aubigné décrit les détails des batailles et des actions entreprises par les chefs de guerre qui sont des thématiques masculines par essence. D'Aubigné fournit une description détaillée de

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Frisch, *Forgetting Differences: Tragedy, Historiography, and the French Wars of Religion*, Edinburgh Critical Studies in Renaissance Culture, 2, 12.

plusieurs types de femmes—on peut citer, par exemple, la mère-meurtrière, ou la femme qui tue ses enfants, la France comme mère, les femmes bibliques, et les femmes mythologiques. Ainsi, on peut se demander de quelle manière d'Aubigné se sert du thème du corps féminin comme révélateur de la politique et de la transformation de la France. Premièrement, je parle du corps féminin qui devient renversement de la nature. Puis on va discuter du corps féminin décrit comme corps animal, notamment le loup. Finalement j'analyserai les métaphores des femmes bibliques et mythologiques qui assurent une évolution en sens inverse des femmes, une évolution qui va à l'encontre de la chrétienté.

Dans des « Misères » et des « Fers, » le corps féminin est le site d'un renversement de l'ordre naturel. D'Aubigné force le lecteur à examiner les effets des actions des catholiques. Pour cela, il utilise le corps féminin. Dans un exemple de renversement, la femme est premièrement une construction à Paris, et finalement elle est la destructrice de la ville. Il écrit une description de la transformation de Catherine de Médicis :

« ...[L]e serpent captieux  
Entra dans cette Reine et, pour y entrer mieux,  
Fit un corps aéré de colonnes parfaites,  
De pavillons hautains, de folles girouettes....  
Enfin d'un tel projet que sont les Tuileries. »<sup>2</sup>

Et plus tard, il dépeint la destruction de Paris à cause de la Seine dans une forme féminine :

« Seine veut engloutir, louve, tes édifices :  
Une fatale nuit en demande huit cents,  
Et veut aux criminels mêler les innocents. »<sup>3</sup>

Avec une allusion biblique au serpent qui entre Catherine (« cette Reine »), d'Aubigné montre la corruption de cette Reine catholique par le serpent malfaisant du Jardin d'Éden. En plus, l'acte « d'entrer la reine » est quelque chose de perversement sexuel, et ajoute à l'idée que Catherine de Médicis a créé la dégénérescence dans la France. L'allitération en « T » dans cet extrait ponctue les descriptions des Tuileries, le château construit par Catherine de Médicis. Le son dur du « T » nous montre qu'après avoir été enterrée, Catherine devient l'endroit de la cruauté et l'édifice d'oppression. Cela peut être une référence au contrôle du pape sur la vie des catholiques, statut royal ou non ; comme ce qu'Aubigné décrit, les caractéristiques de la construction (« les colonnes parfaites, » « les pavillons, » etc.) sont de la Renaissance et d'origine italienne. Mais quand même, elle est une construction féminine de France, comme le Louvre ou les autres parties de l'héritage de la royauté.

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<sup>2</sup> Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, éd. Frank Lestringant (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1995), 234.

<sup>3</sup> Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, 253–254.

Comme les autres édifices parisiens, la Seine, le fleuve si essentiel à Paris peu de vers après, détruit les Tuileries. La référence à la « louve » est courante dans ce texte et normalement fait référence à une femme protestante qui est polluée par la violence des catholiques et devienne violente elle-même. La rime entre « cents » dans huit cents et « innocents » peut nous montrer la violence non discriminante des femmes, après qu'elle ait été rendue malveillante par l'homme. Cela montre également que la violence de la Seine n'est pas dirigée—les femmes ne font pas leurs propres déclarations politiques. La Seine, en tant que femme complètement affligée par la violence répandue par les catholiques, est une force destructrice et irréflechie. Mais Catherine, affligée par la pénétration du serpent masculin, est devenue un outil de son mal politique, mais peut-être pas un outil irréflechi. Certes, ce doit être une destruction de ce qui n'était pas récemment construit (les Tuileries). La rivière féminine détruit l'architecture féminine qui vient d'être construite. Le fleuve, l'élément vital d'une ville, a été transformé en son destructeur. La destruction d'un ordre normal est ponctuée par le désir sanguinaire de la femme devenue louve devenue rivière.

Un plus profond exemple du renversement de la nature est quand d'Aubigné dépeint une rupture dans la relation entre mère et fils avec la description d'un infanticide. Le chapitre « Les Misères » se concentre sur un siège qui a déclenché une famine et qui force une mère à avoir recours à l'infanticide. Avec cet exemple, d'Aubigne met au lecteur l'inhumanité de la situation, et il porte un discours politique dans laquelle le corps féminin est un outil pour les deux côtés.

« La mere défaisant pitoyable et farouche  
 Les liens de pitié avec ceux de sa couche,  
 Les entrailles d'amour, les filets de son flanc,  
 Les intestins brûlants, par les tressauts du sang,  
 Le sens, l'humanité, le cœur ému qui tremble,  
 Tout cela se détord, et se démêle ensemble[...]  
 Et dit à son enfant (moins mère qu'affamée)  
 Rends misérable, rends le corps que je t'ai fait :  
 Ton sang retournera, où tu as pris le lait,  
 Au sein qui t'allaitait rentre contre nature ;  
 Ce sein qui t'a nourri sera ta sépulture.  
 La main tremble en tirant le funeste couteau,  
 Quand pour sacrifier de son ventre l'agneau. »<sup>4</sup>

Dans cet extrait, d'Aubigné dépeint la mère-victime qui devient l'auteure de la violence. Le corps physique est le site de la corruption de l'ordre naturel. Au début, le champ lexical est celui de la victimisation de la mère, avec des mots la décrivant comme « pitoyable, » « pitié, » et « le cœur ému qui tremble. » Mais il y a un changement à un champ lexical qui illumine les viscères et les fonctions humaines pour créer un sens d'horreur

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<sup>4</sup> Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, 91.



absolu. Avec son utilisation de mots crus comme « entrailles, intestins, sang, sein, ventre, » il oriente le lecteur vers les ravages de la guerre sur le corps. Ce contraste entre ces deux champs lexicaux, celui de la pitié et de l'horreur fait part du désir de l'auteur d'humaniser cette mère même dans sa décision difficile et « contre nature. » Nous devons avoir pitié d'elle pour ne pas la blâmer—ni elle ni les protestants. Au lieu de cela, nous blâmons ceux qui ont créé les conditions qui ont amené à ce qu'elle ait recours à une telle violence.

Il y a une instance de renversement dans son discours à son enfant quand elle dit « rends misérable, rends le corps que je t'ay fait » : l'acte de reprendre ce qui a été donné. Comme elle l'a mis au monde, il retourne à son estomac ; alors qu'elle a utilisé son corps (et son lait) pour le nourrir, il nourrira le sien. Cela donne un sens déformé à la citation biblique « cendres en cendres, poussière en poussière, » pervertissant Dieu comme la nature maternelle est pervertie. La rime entre « laict » et « fait » montre la mère comme créatrice, ce qui souligne davantage les horreurs de l'acte de sa trahison de la nature et de son enfant—il vient d'elle et il retourne à-t-elle. Même si elle reconnaît que son enfant est « misérable, » son corps poursuit ce rituel macabre (« détord »), tremblant (« la main tremble »), et horrifiée par elle-même alors même qu'elle commet l'acte. Ces deux femmes incarnent les impacts sociaux de la guerre, au-delà des batailles gagnées et perdues. Dans le discours politique de d'Aubigné, sa transformation perverse est un moyen de comprendre la transformation de la France—le corps féminin est la victime et aussi la continuation de la politique catholique.

Juste après l'infanticide, la transformation de la mère culmine lors de sa mutation en louve. Cette transformation est intéressante puisqu'on peut la comparer avec la transformation des hommes-loups quelques lignes plus tard—pourtant cette transformation métaphorique est bien différente pour ces deux genres. Alors que la femme qui se change en louve, l'homme qui se transforme en loup représente l'infection des femmes. Alors que la transformation des femmes en loup est marquée par la contrainte, du sacrifice maternel et de l'horreur, celle des hommes est causée par une soif de pouvoir tyrannique.

« Quand pour sacrifier de son ventre l'agneau  
Des pouces elle étreint la gorge qui gazouille  
Quelques mots sans accents croyant qu'on la chatouille :  
Sur l'effroyable coup le cœur se refroidit :  
Tout est trouble, confus, en l'âme qui se trouve  
N'avoir plus rien de mère, et avoir tout de louve...  
Des baisers changez en avides morsures. »<sup>5</sup>

Et la depiction des hommes-loups :

« Combien sont ignorans

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<sup>5</sup> Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, 92.

Ceux qui pour être rois, veulent être tyrans  
Ces tyrans sont des loups, car le loup quand il entre  
Dans le parc des brebis ne succe de leur ventre  
Que leur sang par un trou, et quitte tout le corps.»<sup>6</sup>

Dans ces extraits de *Tragiques*, les différences dans les descriptions des deux demi-loups sert à illuminer l'infection de violence que le roi transmet à la mère—elle s'est transformée avec la transformation de la France. La mère tue son enfant, à sa propre horreur (« trouble, confus »), et mute en louve. La superposition de l'amour avec de la violence montre à quel point ce moment frénétique interrompt la narration du meurtre et implique une relation aimante entre la mère et son fils. Par exemple, « restreint » a deux significations : doux ou dangereux. Mais dans cette connotation, « étreint » veut dire une étreinte douloureuse et est le contraire de « chatouille » qui est le mot attendu par le lecteur. Aussi, « baisers » et « morsures » sont en opposition pour décrire l'acte de la mère-louve contre la nature. Elle s'est transformée en animal à cause des politiques catholiques.

En revanche, les hommes, les rois, sont déjà des loups (« sont »), avec de mauvaises intentions (« tyrans »). Rien n'a changé ; rien n'est causé. Leur violence est pire que la violence des femmes—ils sont des gaspilleurs, car ils sont les loups les plus vampiriques. Il « ne succe de leur ventre/Que leur sang... et quitte tout le corps »—mais comme on a vu dans la partie précédente, les femmes-louves sont affamées. Là où le crime de la mère montre sa contrainte et son sacrifice (« sacrifier ») et elle consume sa chair (« avides morsures »), celui du roi est inutile, « ignorant, » et gaspilleur. La gourmandise et l'avarice du roi-loup consomment son troupeau (le Peuple). Notre pitié pour la mère-loup l'absout, blâmant ceux qui l'ont affamée jusqu'à ce qu'elle devienne une bête. Comme d'Aubigné se concentre sur les rois, il donne une description des rois du passé, qui n'étaient pas les tyrans (les loups).

Dans une échelle plus grande, les rois se sont transformés de bienveillants à cruels (bien avant la guerre), et après cette transformation, l'esprit cruel du loup est alors devenu une qualité essentielle du roi. Les déchets que le loup laisse sur son passage illustrent les extrêmes de cette transformation. À cause de la nature des rois, la femme aussi doit faire cette transformation par contamination. Le corps de la mère a repris ce qu'elle avait fait, mais peut-être que son infection peut s'aggraver au point de la détruire de manière effrénée. Si elle continue sur le chemin du loup, elle devient la destruction de la France.

D'Aubigné a nombreuses allusions aux deux classes différentes de femmes métaphoriques—les femmes bibliques et les femmes mythologiques classiques gréco-romaines. En général, les femmes mythologiques sont des agents de guerre ou de mort qui sont rhétoriquement liées aux femmes catholiques dans le pouvoir. Les références aux femmes bibliques sont des modèles de foi et de dévotion même si elles font les mêmes sortes de violences.

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<sup>6</sup> Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, 93.

La première référence à une femme dans « Les Misères » est à Melpomène, la Muse grecque de la tragédie. D'Aubigné écrit :

« J'appelle Melpomène en sa vive fureur...  
[D]es tombeaux rafraichis, dont il faut qu'elle sorte  
Affreuse, échevelée, et bramant en la sort...  
[Q]u'elle éparpille en l'air de son sang deux poignées  
Quand épuisant ses flancs de redoubles sanglots  
De sa voix enrouée elle bruiira ces mots :  
“ O France desolee ! O terre sanguinaire ! ” »<sup>7</sup>

Elle annonce ensuite le destin de la France à travers la métaphore d'une mère : la trahison, la faim, et les ravages de la France. La muse grecque est laide, sanglante, et surtout violente. Elle verse son sang et incite à la violence en France. La « terre » est « sanguinaire »—et en raison de l'assonance avec les sons « eeh, » dans « éparpille, » « terre, » et « sanguinaire, » et en raison de la répétition de sang et sanguinaire, il semble que Melpomène arrose la terre avec son sang, aiguisant son appétit pour plus de sang.

En fait, la femme mythologique est en effet la fondation de la louve et les femmes catholiques sont ses disciples. Par exemple, dans « Fers », d'Aubigné montre une description de Bellone, la déesse romaine de la guerre :

« Le premier vous présente une aveugle Bellone  
Qui s'irrite de soi, contre soi s'enferonne,  
Ne souffre rien d'entier, veut tout voir à morceaux :  
On la voir déchirer de ses ongles ses peaux,  
Ses cheveux gris, sans loi, sont grouillantes vipères  
Qui lui crèvent le sein, dos et ventre d'ulcères,  
Tant de coups qu'ils ne font qu'une plaie en son corps !  
La louve boit le sang et fait son pain de morts. »<sup>8</sup>

Cette forme d'auto-cannibalisme (ponctuée par la grammaire de « s'irrite de soi, » « soi s'en véronne ») présente encore la violence. Les descriptions physiques de leurs corps sont celles de la décomposition dégoûtante des femmes de l'Antiquité. Il les présente comme des femmes dégoûtantes (gris, dos et ventre d'ulcères, déchirant ses peaux !) pour montrer le côté horrible des vieilles formes des fausses religions. Il a aussi trouvé Catherine de Médicis, et des femmes catholiques dans ce milieu de violence, inappropriées et laides. Par exemple, dans les vers 930–936 de « Fers, » d'Aubigné écrit que le ciel verse du sang et des âmes sur les cheveux des princesses catholiques.<sup>9</sup> Il écrit aussi qu'elles rient aux pénis des protestants morts sous leurs balcons. Les couvrant de sang et de mort, il relie

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<sup>7</sup> Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, 238.

<sup>9</sup> Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, 255.

rhétoriquement ces princesses et les femmes mythologiques—elles sont grossières, sales, et perverses. Même si d'Aubigné utilise le mot « louve, » il fait référence aux loups-tyrans. Ces femmes se réjouissent dans le gaspillage et dans le sang, comme le faisaient les rois-loups.

Les femmes dans les allusions bibliques, par contre, sont honorables. Par exemple, il y a une allusion à Judith, une veuve juive qui a séduit et tué le général Holoferne qui a mené un siège de la ville juive de Béthulie.

« Comme on voit en celui qui prodigua sa vie  
Pour tuer Holoferne assiégeant Béthulie,  
Ou, quand les abattus succombaient sous le faix,  
La mort des turbulents donne vie à la paix. »<sup>10</sup>

Premièrement, il est important de noter qu'il utilise les pronoms masculins. En utilisant le mot « celui, » d'Aubigné fait une référence historique à un homme qui a tué un général qui a monté un siège contre les protestants.<sup>11</sup> Contrairement aux fausses déesses du passé et du faux dieu des catholiques, les actes de violence de la femme biblique et de l'homme qui est sa comparaison sont honorables et nécessaires pour la paix. Il nous montre que ses actes de la destruction ne sont pas à cause de l'infection des rois-tyrans comme elle est comparée à un homme. Son nom n'est jamais écrit ; peut-être, cet effacement est une façon d'explorer la violence qui est juste parce que la violence de la guerre est compréhensible quand c'est un homme qui la fait. Le corps féminin est évident dans ces strophes—il garde littéralement ses mains propres de meurtre. La mort personnifiée est quelque chose qui n'est pas mal et est excusable. Elle, la mort comme femme, est la mère qui « donne vie » à la paix.

La femme et en particulier le corps féminin, dans la forme de la destructrice ou la protectrice, était les outils politiques des hommes qui veulent le pouvoir. Le pouvoir en question est le pouvoir politique ou le pouvoir pour la création du récit commun. D'après d'Aubigné, le corps féminin est un site de la politique pour les horreurs du catholicisme ou pour la production d'une victimisation universelle des protestants. L'espèce liminale des femmes dans l'œuvre montre leur complexité dans l'imaginaire d'Agrippa d'Aubigné. Le corps féminin est entre humain et animal, victime et tyran, créatrice et destructrice, présente et absente. C'est aussi la situation de la France en ce moment—entre guerre et paix, souvenir et oubliance, le roi entre protestant et catholique, la reine entre française et étrangère, et l'auteur dans sa lutte interne.

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<sup>10</sup> Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, 239–240.

<sup>11</sup> Valerie Worth-Stylianou, *Agrippa D'Aubigné's Les Tragiques* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2020), 283.

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# ACRYLIC REPRODUCTION OF A LATIN MANUSCRIPT

Jasmine Zhou

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Reproduced with quill on animal skin with acrylic paint.

# BOOK REVIEW ON *THE MINERAL AND THE VISUAL: PRECIOUS STONES IN MEDIIEVAL SECULAR CULTURE*

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Brigitte Buettnner, *The Mineral and the Visual: Precious Stones in Medieval Secular Culture*,  
University Park: Penn State University Press, 2022. 272 pages.

Today, the Crown of the Holy Roman Empire sits motionless behind a glass vitrine at the Imperial Treasury in Vienna. However, in *The Mineral and the Visual: Precious Stones in Medieval Secular Culture*, Buettnner invites the reader to imagine it in action. Laden with 116 gemstones and around 200 pearls, the decidedly maximalist crown once shimmered in candlelight when rulers wore it during coronation ceremonies. The goldsmiths placed holes behind the raised settings of the gemstones, allowing light to stream inward and making the stones appear to glow from within. Buettnner concentrates on this beguilingly tactile crown and others like it in Part I of *The Mineral and the Visual*. She demonstrates that these gem-heavy objects also carried substantial conceptual heft. The significant mineral presence in royal crowns was not merely ornamental. Rather, jewels enacted the ideology of medieval kingship, transmitting in visual form the monarchy's transcendent sovereignty.

In Part II, Buettnner turns to the genre of illustrated lapidaries (texts that describe the characteristics of stones) and the active role of precious stones in knowledge production during the Middle Ages. Part III looks towards the advent of capitalism and colonialism, using illustrated travel accounts to examine how Western Europeans manufactured the economic value of gems imported from China, India, Persia, and other exoticized locales. Throughout, her guiding aim is to show how precious stones worked in the cultural sphere of the Middle Ages. In doing so, she consistently draws out the keen insight of the medieval visual idiom, which has at times been denigrated for its lack of pictorial illusionism. For instance, she evocatively describes a ca. 1400 illumination of fifteen different stones as foreshadowing Rosalind Krauss' concept of the modernist grid. Similarly, in a

depiction of a gem-encrusted emperor, she sees a medieval recognition of what postmodern scholars call hybridity, a kind of “becoming-mineral.”

Through its focus on lithic agency, *The Mineral and the Visual* positions itself within the material turn of the humanities. This theoretical shift challenges the conception of materials as passive receptacles upon which humans inscribe symbolic meaning. Furthermore, the term “secular” in the book’s subtitle issues a challenge to art history’s methodological impulses. The discipline’s traditional reliance on iconography can render gem-centered artworks illegible, yet Buettner suggests that art historians simply need to use different tools to analyze these kinds of objects. Therefore, while *The Mineral and the Visual* focuses on Western Europe in the Middle Ages, its broader approach may prove generative for art historians whose specialties lie in diverse geographies and time periods. As Buettner illuminates, the medieval mindset held that stones could do anything from the minor, like preventing a bad hangover, to the major, like warding off demonic assault. Thus, *The Mineral and the Visual* will also be a fascinating read for students interested in questioning the divide between culture and nature.

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# WENDISH CRUSADES: AN IMPERIAL CONQUEST OF THE BALTICS

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The Elbe River has long been considered an untouched gem of Europe: a true image of pristine nature with high, rocky mountain peaks overlooking the windy river and lush pine forests full of abundant wildlife. In the thirteenth century, when Crusaders from the Holy Roman Empire approached the land East of the Elbe River, it was a pastoral vision with stone castles and small villages scattered amongst the glades and marshlands. The Slavic people who resided within the landscape lived simple lives, tilling their land with wooden tools and herding their animals. Similar to the scenic wonder of recent snowfall, there is something notably seductive about being the first to make a mark—to take a piece of nature and claim it for oneself. One could imagine that this is how the Crusaders saw themselves as they advanced on pristine Slavic lands—that they would be the first footprint in a field of unblemished snow. While this was hardly the case, as the Wends had long occupied the land, the Crusaders saw themselves as using the land for its God-given purpose: to better and profit Latin Christendom.

This essay will argue that the Wendish Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries uniquely demonstrate an evolution of crusading ideals to accommodate the Baltics' religious, economic, and political domination on behalf of the Holy Roman Empire. The literature surrounding the Medieval Crusades tends to interchangeably use the terms “Wendish Crusades,” “Northern Crusades,” and “Baltic Crusades” to refer to the twelfth and thirteenth-century military campaigns directed against the Wends, a non-Christian Slavic peoples residing east of the Elbe River in present-day northeast Germany and Poland. However, for ease of reading, I will only use the term “Wendish Crusades” in this essay to refer to the same military campaign.

One primary goal of the Wendish Crusades was the religious conversion or missionizing of the pagan Wends to justify the Northern military campaign as a righteous religious cause deserving of a shift of focus from the First Crusade in the Holy Land. These crusades differed from the First Crusade in many ways; however, the most considerable difference lies in the Wendish Crusades' emphasis on conversion rather than combat. Before the thirteenth century, conversion was not a

crusading ideal of the Crusades.<sup>1</sup> So, those who took part in the Crusades to the Baltics had to face the sudden religious and ethical dilemma associated with integrating a pagan population into a Christian society. Therefore, the Wendish Crusades marked a shift in the Holy Roman Empire's crusading ideals to accommodate the missionizing of their conquered subjects.

The belief in God was not exactly something Crusaders could force onto unwilling people; however, they made an exception for those who came to God willingly, even if it was through coercive (or fatal) measures. In the 1147 *Proclamations of Northern European Crusades*, Bernard of Clairvaux argued that the conversion (or death) of pagan people was necessary to uphold the moral rightness of Latin Christendom. He used hostile language in his letter, comparing the Baltic pagans to an evil serpent ready to strike: "He has raised up evil seed, wicked pagan sons, whom, if I may say so, the might of Christendom has endured too long, shutting its eyes to those who with evil intent lie in wait, without crushing their poisoned heads under its heel."<sup>2</sup> Bernard's wrathful words made it apparent that forced conversion was the only mercy available to the Baltic people at the will of the Holy Roman Empire, and their only alternative would be extermination. The significance of this jarring proclamation was the foundation laid to not only permit but to encourage forced conversion of the Wends.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, the permissibility of forced conversion only grazed the surface of the Church's ethical dilemma. Once in the Northern lands, the military campaigns had to decide to what degree of coercion would maintain the validity of the conversion. Forced conversion remained a genuine concern to those in the Baltic region at the time of the crusade, as it was a central topic in *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia* and Helmold's *Chronicle of the Slavs*. While baptism by treaty was considered a baptism by force, it was not the same as dunking an unwilling soul into baptismal waters.<sup>4</sup> This moral distinction made by Crusaders avoided force within the actual performance of the rite and, therefore, maintained the victory of conversion. However, it seemed this sanctified distinction made little difference to the Baltic peoples. For example, in Henry's *Chronicle of Livonia*, the Wends would accept baptism in exchange for the building of fortified walls, only to ritually rinse themselves of the baptism once the construction of the walls was complete.<sup>5</sup> The conversion of the Baltic pagans to Christianity throughout the Wendish Crusades proved less fruitful than the Holy Roman Empire first anticipated. However, in contrast, the Christian settlement of Baltic lands supplied the Holy Roman Empire with spoils of conquest unrelated to the religious domination of the Baltic peoples.

In an economic sense, the Wendish Crusades promised settlers abundant resources and land that had yet to be exploited by the Wends and were ripe for the taking by the Germans of the Holy Roman Empire. Moreover, the bountiful material resources within the Baltic lands, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Pegatha Taylor, "Moral Agency in Crusade and Colonization: Anselm of Havelberg and the Wendish Crusade of 1147," *The International History Review* 22, no. 4 (2000): 757–784.

<sup>2</sup> S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, ed., *The Crusades: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 258–261.

<sup>3</sup> Kurt Villads Jensen, "Holy War – Holy Wrath!: Baltic Wars Between Regulated Warfare and Total Annihilation Around 1200," in *Church and Belief in the Middle Ages: Popes, Saints, and Crusaders*, ed. Kirsi Salonen and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 233.

<sup>4</sup> Burnam W. Reynolds, *The Prehistory of the Crusades: Missionary War and the Baltic Crusades* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 102.

<sup>5</sup> Allen and Amt, ed., *The Crusades*, 263–266.

highly-desirable furs, were incredibly alluring to the more technologically-advanced and merchant-oriented Holy Roman Empire. The economic commerce between the eastern Baltic and the North German towns centered around the fur trade and likely played a prominent role in promoting the Baltic region's invasion, Christianization, and colonization.<sup>6</sup> The Crusaders possessed evident economic interests in the untouched Baltic land since they did not have the same reservations as their nature-worshipping counterparts to exploit the region's vast forests and wildlife for material gain.

The Christian West evoked imagery of the Baltic lands being a promised land of sorts, a land of vast economic potential but did not stop at the imagery of abundant wildlife. The undeniable appeal of the untainted wilderness drew in the interest of those who praised its pure nature, resembling a clean slate. The *Poem Describing Cistercian Settlement* illustrated the Baltic lands of modern-day Poland in the state that twelfth-century Cistercian monks came upon it:

For the country was wooded and without farmers, And Poland's poor people were not  
industrious; They plowed the sandy soil with wooden plows, not iron, And with no more  
than two oxen at a time. Throughout the land there were no cities or towns, But only castles,  
country markets, swamps, and chapels. They had no salt, no iron, no coins, No metal, no  
good clothing, and no shoes. They simply herded their animals. Such were the delights the  
first monks encountered. And yet the monks brought in all these amenities, And filled the  
land with them, making everything possible.<sup>7</sup>

Between the lines of the poem, it is clear the sense of paternalism held by the German settlers regarding the Slavic peoples' displacement from the unexploited land further justifying their eastward expansion. The fourteenth-century narrator praises the pioneering monks for their strength in the harsh environment and, more importantly, for introducing the Baltic peoples to technology, saving them from their laggard ways.

The introduction of Western technology and economy profoundly impacted the Baltic peoples, as this catapulted them into an unfamiliar realm to which the Western settlers were more adapted. The more technologically advanced Crusaders overwhelmed the indigenous Baltic population, and upon the failure of the peaceful conversion of the Wends, the native economic structures became dependent on the Crusade for their expansion and survival.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the economic dominance of the Western settlers over the indigenous Baltic peoples arose from the introduction of technology and economic systems that benefited the Holy Roman Empire. German settlements were quick to begin extracting economic gains from the Baltic lands. In the *Charter to German Settlers* of 1106, Bishop Frederick of Hamburg contextualized the obligations and taxes required of the German settlers wishing to settle in Slavic lands but also assured his similarly-aligned audience that the economic stakes were unmistakably in their favor:

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<sup>6</sup> James A. Brundage, "Hunting And Fishing In The Law And Economy Of Thirteenth-Century Livonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 13, no. 1 (1982): 3–11.

<sup>7</sup> Allen and Amt, ed., *The Crusades*, 257–258.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Spence, "Pope Gregory IX and the Crusade on the Baltic," *The Catholic Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (1983): 1–19.

These men came to us and earnestly begged us to grant them certain lands in our bishopric, which are uncultivated, swampy, and useless to our people. We have consulted our subjects about this and, considering that this would be profitable to us and to our successors, have granted their request.<sup>9</sup>

The grant established German occupancy in Slavic villages, increasing the financial gain they were able to extract from the acquisition of the Slavic lands.<sup>10</sup> The colonization of the Baltics served a specific economic purpose for the Holy Roman Empire. By exploiting the region's land and resources, the Holy Roman Empire advanced and strengthened its own economy.

The Wendish Crusades shifted the crusading ideal from a show of religious piety to a show of political virility on behalf of the Holy Roman Empire. In past crusades, the warriors sent to distant lands often sought pilgrimage to a holy Christian site, such as the shrines in the Holy Land. While the Wendish Crusades could not be justified as pilgrimage because there were no sacred shrines to visit, the papacy still provided religious justification.<sup>11</sup> In a letter to the Archbishop and Clergy of Magdeburg in 1199, Pope Innocent III offered total forgiveness of the sins of anyone who weathered the pilgrimage crusades to the Baltics.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, this was not the first time the papacy had permitted the commutation of a pilgrimage vow in exchange for joining a crusade, but it does signal the start of a routine, widespread use of the papacy's authority to do so, a development that would fundamentally alter the crusading enterprise during the thirteenth century and later.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the Letters of Pope Innocent III indicated the use of papal power to fulfill a political and military agenda set forth by the Holy Roman Empire. Although there was not a concrete religious benefit for those making the journey to the Baltics, the papacy likened the strengthening of the Holy Roman Empire to that of religious piety, which justified why the papacy could grant forgiveness in the case of the Wendish Crusades.

This evolving vision of a solid and ever-expanding empire was a vision fulfilled by the Wendish Crusades and its unification of diverse lands and peoples under Christendom. *The Travels of John Mandeville*, which depicted the likely fictional Christian kingship of Prester John in the Far East, posits a worldview that aligned with the desires of the fourteenth-century Holy Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup> The legend and popularization of the story of Prester John indicate the Christian West's awareness of precisely what the military conquest of distant lands could provide the empire in the realm of imperial power and expansion. *John Mandeville on Prester John* romanticized the idea of the Eastern empires, which proved themselves as self-sufficient and powerful, with the source of their power drawn from the subordination of other kingdoms.<sup>15</sup> In the story of Prester John, the Holy Roman

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<sup>9</sup> Allen and Amt, ed., *The Crusade*, 256–257.

<sup>10</sup> J. A. Perkins, “Dualism in German Agrarian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 (1986): 287–306.

<sup>11</sup> James A. Brundage, “The Thirteenth-Century Livonian Crusade: Henricus de Lettis and the First Legatine Mission of Bishop William of Modena,” *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 20, no. 1 (1972): 1–9.

<sup>12</sup> Allen and Amt, ed., *The Crusades*, 216–220.

<sup>13</sup> Brundage, “The Thirteenth-Century Livonian Crusade,” 3.

<sup>14</sup> Allen and Amt, ed., *The Crusades*, 364–366.

<sup>15</sup> Marianne O’Doherty, “Imperial Fantasies: Imagining Christian Empire in Three Fourteenth-Century Versions Of ‘The Book Of Sir John Mandeville,’” *Medium Aevum* 86, no. 2 (2017): 323–349.

Empire saw a glimpse of its future: a powerful Christian empire that went far beyond the bounds of Western Europe.

At the beginning of the Wendish Crusades, we see the development of a problematic concept take hold: religious righteousness extending into imperialist colonialism. While the Holy Roman Empire stood on the grounds of moral authority and civilized society, they took more resources than they offered to the Slavic peoples, making one reconsider who was assisting who. Within the study of colonialism, we see empires claim to use their wide-reaching success to help less fortunate societies, but how fortunate can the conqueror be if their success depends on the resources of those they conquer?

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# BOOK REVIEW ON *BOTANICAL POETICS: EARLY MODERN PLANT BOOKS AND THE HUSBANDRY OF PRINT*

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Jessica Rosenberg, *Botanical Poetics: Early Modern Plant Books and the Husbandry of Print*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. 376 pages.

In the beginning of her book *Botanical Poetics: Early Modern Plant Books and the Husbandry of Print*, Rosenberg explains that in the mid-sixteenth century, in a tradition dating from Aristotle, plants were understood to have life in every part of them. That explained plants' ability to grow from grafts, slips, and seeds even after being cut, gathered, and spread. She writes that colonialism led to an increase in this understanding, as it led to increased global traffic in plants and plant materials. Rosenberg's central argument posits botanical poetics as a dominant form of thought in the early modern period that placed texts in the same category as plants: materials defined by their plurality, their capacity to circulate in parts, and their potential future reuse. "Plant books" demonstrate this connection. This is a term Rosenberg uses to refer to texts that comprised the popular trend of having botanical terminology such as *Forest*, *Arbor*, or *Nosegay* in their titles. The purpose of this, or to otherwise incorporate botany in design or content, was to indicate their intended function: to be taken in hand, used and reused, and propagated in whole or in parts. Botanical poetics, too, determined form as these plant books were often small and portable, or contained collections, lists, or indented poetry that could be spread as fragments separate from the whole.

The first part of *Botanical Poetics* defines plant books and their features in both form and content; poetic anthology, horticultural metaphor, and floral designs all demonstrate an engagement with botanical poetics. These plant books would also demand skilled readers, as successful gardens require skilled gardeners, in order to reap value from the text. This section of *Botanical Poetics* ends with a case study of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, examining how this textual philosophy is

reflected in the play, primarily through the multitude of small objects that have a vegetable capacity for movement and growth. The second part of *Botanical Poetics* focuses on materials from what Rosenberg calls “the long 1570s,” when plant books experienced peak popularity. Here she examines how botanical poetics governed access to and affected the perceived value of texts, particularly poetry. This section also ends in a case study on the metaphorical representation of pigs as bad readers, which presents books as gardens despoiled. The third section examines the poetic couplet as a botanical form, easily able to be cut, gathered, and spread, and utilized by authors such as Thomas Tusser to convey horticultural advice. The volume concludes with an epilogue looking at the ways in which the vegetal-textual philosophy lingered into the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

*Botanical Poetics* is in conversation with Joshua Calhoun’s 2020 book *The Nature of the Page*, which examines book history in Renaissance England through both environmental and bibliographical analysis. This represents a trend in book studies scholarship of considering the importance of plant materials to bookmaking. *Botanical Poetics* also belongs to the developing field of critical plant studies, which takes a vegetal lens to philosophy and literature, exemplified by the work of Michael Marder, Natasha Myers, and Jeffrey T. Nealon. Building off of this scholarship, the historical philosophy identified in *Botanical Poetics* could be developed as a non-anthropocentric model for textual survival that centers neither posterity nor preservation but views books, like plants, as things that “might persist or decay” naturally.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, Rosenberg has written a successful inquiry into the poetics of sixteenth century English publishing. She uses field-specific terminology which makes *Botanical Poetics* best suited to an audience already acquainted with book history. The work serves as an elegantly written argument for the existence of a philosophy that linked books with plants primarily through their ability to spread. This concept could inform future thinking about the nature of texts over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Rosenberg, *Botanical Poetics: Early Modern Plant Books and the Husbandry of Print* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023), 8.