Elizabeth B. Bearden. *The Emblematics of the Self: Ekphrasis and Identity in Renaissance Imitations of Greek Romance*.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. xiv + 258 pp. $65. ISBN: 978–1–4426–4346–8.

Three quite different interests are brought together in this book: the revival and reception of Greek romances in Renaissance Europe, the structural ability of ekphrasis to shed additional light on the concerns of the text in which it appears, and a model of identity formation based on "passibility" rather than agency that Bearden sees typifying romance's female and foreign characters — what she calls the "subaltern" characters. While the relationship betwen ekphrasis and Greek romance is well known, as is the capacity for ekphrasis to mediate ethos, triangulating the three concerns is an innovative approach with mixed results. Bearden nicely brings out forgotten topical moments of European romance, but her approach occasionally risks homogenizing a historically diverse group of texts to fit the theory.

This is a book of many parts, ambitious in its scope and strategies. A clear and succinct introduction sets out the key terms and their theoretical underpinnings. Chief among them is *passibility*, a term that is later applied to characters, to ekphrasis, and to romance. Following Reiss, Bearden uses it as a "way of imagining identity [within particular circumstances] that allows for adaptation and flexibility without implying that people could act as independent agents able to alter their identities freely in spite of their cultural situations within family, local, and religious communities" (13). From the heightened relevance of passibility in the ekphrastic situations of romance, Bearden adduces in the first chapter a shorthand formulation, the "emblematics of the self." (For this reader, the segue into emblematics for critical terminology adds little to the otherwise strong argument for the "ekphrastic characterization in the romance genre" [46].) This opening chapter also provides a helpful summary of the moral and aesthetic attractions of Greek romance in Renaissance Europe. Chapter 2 uses ekphrasis as a way of arguing for the female first-person narration of both Achilles Tatius's *Clitophon and Leucippe* (by a cross-dressed Melite) and Alonso Núñez de Reinoso's *Clareo y Florisea*, and suggests that the disguised construction of marginalized identity in Tatius's work spoke to

Reinoso's own converso identity. Chapter 3 modifies Mary Ellen Lamb's important argument about the "heroic constancy" (67) of Sidney's female characters in the *New Arcadia* by looking, once again, to the visual negotiation of the house and garden of Kalander and its prefigurings of "gender ambiguity." The relevance of contemporary colonial discourse and encounter add a fascinating new dimension to the next two chapters. Evaluating the complex treatment of *lienze* in Cervantes's *Persiles* "to question standards of cultural Otherness" (102) and the enabling overlap in ethnographic thinking between John Barclay's Neo-Latin romance *Argenis* and his *Icon animorum*, Bearden foregrounds three fascinating (and relatively neglected) texts and shows their centrality to European negotiations of human diversity. A concluding chapter (the book's longest) on the subversion of genre in Mary Wroth's *Urania* argues for Wroth's disavowal of romance's promise of assimilation or resolution of difference.

The book's ambitious range is not without its costs. Loose though the "emblematics of identity" formulation is, it sometimes feels foisted upon texts that have quite different interests indeed. This feels true even in the strongest chapters: those on Barclay and Cervantes. Coining the "emblematics of the self" (or indeed "subaltern characters") as the dominating concern means that the shifting object or emphasis of each chapter — genre, identity-formation or reception — can fall from view. The isolation of ekphrastic instances within these texts necessarily risk misrepresenting the larger concerns of those texts: for all its opportunity, ekphrasis tends not to be either representative or emblematic, even in romance. That said, there are some very subtle and accomplished readings to be found in these chapters, which demonstrate the need for a more searching analysis of ekphrasis than its usual positioning within epic has perhaps allowed. This book will be of interest to scholars of romance and of visuality in different European traditions, and makes an important argument for the flexibility and availability of Greek romance to negotiate changing global geopolitics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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