

Visual Rhetoric and Early Modern English Literature. Katherine Acheson. Material Readings in Early Modern Culture. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013. xi + 174 pp. \$99.95.

The central contribution that this book makes to the interdisciplinary study of the early modern period is found in the unusual combination of little-known visual sources that it brings together. Looking beyond the confines of visual art, Acheson examines the wide range of printed diagrams that form part of many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books, and considers how these neglected images can be understood to body forth underlying “frameworks of thought” (7).

The visual material that is included in this profusely illustrated volume encompasses numerous genres of “illustrations and graphical layouts” (5), and the enlarged view of

early modern visual culture that results provides a useful resource for scholars, particularly in the way that it points toward rich opportunities for further research. Chapter 1 considers diagrams of military strategy and schema for garden design alongside a range of other technical works, observing how all these apparently diverse genres are based upon processes of representational abstraction that derive from the application of geometric principles through land surveying and other branches of practical mathematics. Chapter 2 takes on the widespread but little considered form of the dichotomous table, a verbal diagram that presents a system of ideas by using long, curled brackets to set pairs of alternative concepts in opposition. While the use of this kind of diagram by Peter Ramus and his followers has received scholarly attention, the more general currency of these illustrations remains largely unexamined. Acheson's work in this area is therefore particularly welcome and the range of examples that she illustrates invites further consideration. Chapter 3 concerns the illustrations included in manuals of instruction on drawing, while the final chapter examines images in natural histories, texts of comparative anatomy, and illustrated *Aesop's Fables*.

These chapters contain numerous suggestive and convincing examples of the ways in which visual patterns can offer insights into the patterning of thought. More problematic, however, are the attempts to link these ideas with the writing of particular literary authors. Each chapter begins by surveying its chosen field of visual material before moving on to bring this to bear on a particular author: Marvell as a poet of gardens is juxtaposed with the military and horticultural diagrams treated in chapter 1; Milton's *Paradise Lost* is set alongside the genealogical interests of the dichotomous table; Marvell's "Last Instructions to a Painter" is considered in the context of illustrated drawing manuals in chapter 3; and in the final chapter, Aphra Behn's treatment of animals in *Oroonoko* is juxtaposed with a range of zoological illustrations.

In each case the connections with literary texts appear overstated. The problems that beset these connections might stem from the underexamined concept of "visual rhetoric" itself. This phrase suggests that images use the same rhetorical devices as texts and can therefore be read accordingly. This implicit claim makes it necessary to at least broach the complex dynamics of influence and counterinfluence, rivalry and emulation that attends the relations between words and images during the early modern period. How far might the structures of thought that are expressed in diagrams be borrowed from verbal forms in the first place? In addition, when considering visual rhetoric as an aspect of literary technique, significantly more contextualization is required in the vigorously codified practices of literary rhetoric and their own visual aspects: the need for rhetorical language to appeal to the mind's eye, for example.

A clear instance of this problem arises in the chapter on Milton, where the extensive claims that Acheson makes for the influence of the dichotomous table on Milton's thought are not considered with reference to the many ways that Milton's words and thoughts were patterned by the rhetorical techniques with which he was so consummately familiar. A stronger argument might emerge about the significance of visual patterning for specifically literary habits of mind if diagrammatic thinking could be

placed in the context of a fuller account of the way that rhetorical structures are themselves responsible for the patterning of ideas. More finely tuned literary readings of this kind could do more to illuminate the complex and sometimes uneasy relationship between words and images during the early modern period.

JANE PARTNER, *Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge*