

Allie Terry-Fritsch and Erin Felicia Labbie, eds. *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.

Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. xxv + 270 pp. \$104.95. ISBN: 978-1-4094-4286-8.

As the author of several studies on images of sexual pursuits of women in early modern Italy, I found the present anthology of special interest. Similarly, as a scholar of spectators' familiarization with public paintings, reliefs, and statues featuring representations of "heroic rapes" in Ducal Florence, my view on the conception and perception of violence in the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque has already been expanded by this book, which will undoubtedly carry the same impact for other readers.

W. J. T. Mitchell's foreword is as illuminating as the eleven chapters that follow, each of which is briefly summarized and evaluated in the introduction by the editors, Erin Felicia Labbie and Allie Terry-Fritsch. It also defines the term *beholding* as applicable not only to the visual arts, but also to literature — a definition

that is exemplified, for example, in Wordsworth's line "Once again do I behold / These steep and lofty cliffs."

The contributors' respective approaches to "beholding violence" may be gleaned from the purposes of their studies. Terry-Fritsch, who reexamines Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* (Florence, Uffizi) explores "other ways in which medieval and early modern individuals were asked explicitly to witness pierced bodies in their daily lives." Matthew G. Shoaf, who reinterprets Giovanni Pisano's pulpit in the Pisa Cathedral, purports, among other things, that the artist transforms "the tortures of Christ into a spectacle of his torments and viewers' responses to it." And Labbie's rereading of Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac* serves as a vehicle for "reframing a concept of beholding as an aesthetic experience that produces historicity."

Some of the most intriguing ideas that deserve special mention, in my opinion, include Elina Gerstman's study, which focuses almost entirely on medieval miniatures portraying the encounter between the three living and the three dead. Rather than investigate or reinvestigate the subject or the figures themselves, she takes issue with the empty space in which the latter appear, arguing that it becomes "a site of anxiety and passive violence." Galina Tirnanic analyzes another especially interesting concept: addressing specific medieval icons of saints, she argues that the horrific tortures that the latter endured are not registered in the countenance and facial expressions and that as a result the viewers might have imagined this violence as more frightening and horrifying.

I wish that I could at least highlight the innovative interpretations of every author. However, a review of a collection of essays is unlike that of a monograph; within the limits of space, it must tackle not one subject but many. On the other hand, I can state with conviction that all the essays are infinitely intriguing and that every one of them is based on exemplary research.

Let me remind the reader of this review that it is more personal than most of those I have written. The only misgiving that I have is that some important studies on conceptions and perceptions of violence in art and literature have not been mentioned, not even in the introduction. It is a shame, in my view, that among other articles and books, Diane Wolfthal's groundbreaking analyses on images of rape (and, to a lesser degree, those portraying Jews) have been overlooked. Moreover, and judging from the writing itself, I believe that several chapters are easier to comprehend than others. I am, therefore, quite sure that although the volume will be greatly welcomed by scholars, PhD candidates would benefit only from the ones that are written more clearly.

In sum, if "beholding violence" characterizes the viewer, the reader, and those who write about them, I confess that despite my research on especially gruesome rapes, such as that of Philomena, I have responded to the volume not only with great interest, but also sheer horror at the subjects explored.

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