

Joachim Knappe. *Poetik und Rhetorik in Deutschland 1300–1700*.

Gratia: Bamberger Schriften zur Renaissanceforschung 44. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006. viii + 228 pp. index. illus. bibl. €68. ISBN: 3-447-05273-2.

Numerous publications have established Joachim Knappe as an authority on the subjects of literature (fictional and historiographical) and literature about literature (poetics, rhetoric, and criticism) in late medieval and early modern Germany. *Poetik und Rhetorik in Deutschland 1300–1700*, which is based on the author's consultation of material collected at the Warburg Institute in London, displays Knappe's customary erudition, albeit without the balance found in some of his other, longer works. In his prefatory remarks, Knappe speaks of "sketches" intended to frame the works under discussion *im Lichte neuerer rhetorischer Kategorienbildung*. Consequently, the study offers the benefits and disadvantages of a somewhat ambulatory mode of discourse: remarks, though often illuminating, are always brief and await further elaboration.

*Poetik und Rhetorik* consists of three parts examining how, out of medieval Latinity, a body of language theory in German emerged. Addressing himself to the concerns of recent scholarship across the humanities, Knappe stresses the importance of printing technology, visual culture, and the performative dimensions of language for our understanding of the transition from a scribal order of discourse centered on the monastic world to systems of learning and knowledge-production incorporating the vulgar tongue, mechanical reproduction, and humanist ambitions to return to ancient practices of eloquence.

In the first section, Knappe shows how from the middle of the fifteenth century on, the written word and the vulgar tongue increasingly served as touchstones for reflections on language. The practical demands of early modern systems of political administration (in particular, letter-writing) and the emergence of a class of religious reformers propelled a process of *Vertextung*, as well as the displacement of the *Gelehrtencode Latein* in favor of German. Consequently, the first object of German language theory was prose. Poetry, Knappe observes, did not provide an item of analysis and discussion until the seventeenth century, when Martin Opitz, following Latin and French models, established a framework for literary creation and

criticism that definitively supplanted the native, non-written tradition of the *Meistersinger*, whose practices were rooted in medieval *Minnesang*. This, the strongest section of the study, benefits from a discussion of the early modern iconography of poetry and persuasion; oddly, however, none of the images reproduced in *Poetik und Rhetorik* present the discoveries one might have hoped the author to have made in the archives of the Warburg Institute.

The second part examines Sebastian Brant's best-selling *Narrenschiff* (1494), the most significant German *Originaldichtwerk* until the seventeenth century. Knappe has already treated Brant and his oeuvre in several publications (including a 1992 monograph), so this section of *Poetik und Rhetorik* serves less to provide new information than to illustrate the issues that the preceding part of the study discusses in more abstract terms. Readers unfamiliar with Knappe's analyses of Brant elsewhere will find his concise remarks here useful, in particular the observation that Brant, who was involved in all aspects of the production of the *Narrenschiff* (including printing), represents the *Prototyp des neuen "Schriftstellers."* Brant, Knappe demonstrates, was both author and entrepreneur, and the illustrated and lavishly produced *Narrenschiff* an artifact cannily designed to reach (or, indeed, create) a new market.

The third, and briefest, part of *Poetik und Rhetorik* reviews the epochal shift in German reflections on language and literature that occurred in the first half of the eighteenth century, summarizing the stakes of polemical exchanges between Johann Christoph Gottsched, whom scholars have traditionally viewed as the *Figur des Abschlusses älterer Entwicklungen*, and his contemporary Johann Jakob Breitinger, whose reflections represent *einer der Schritte hin zu einem epistemologischen Umschwung, weg von der Poetik hin zu Hermeneutik und Literaturwissenschaft*. At this juncture, Knappe argues, a decisive shift occurs: a concentration on reception replaces the focus on production, and soon, with the publication of Alexander Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750–58), modern criticism begins.

Joachim Knappe's *Poetik und Rhetorik* provides a handy appendix to his longer studies and an indication of terrain to be explored in coming publications. The illustrations, in particular, handsomely complement the text and provide a welcome resource for scholars. On the whole, however, this comparatively thin book is a bit too slight to stand on its own.

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