

Thomas P. Anderson and Ryan A. Netzley, eds. *Acts of Reading: Interpretation, Reading Practices, and the Idea of the Book in John Foxe's Actes and Monuments*.

Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2009. 306 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$65. ISBN: 978-0-87413-081-2.

This collection of essays reflects current scholarly interest in the history of the book and the ways in which early modern material print culture shaped reading practices. John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, an encyclopedic compilation of generic

types — history, biography, letters, legal examinations, sermons, to name a few — serves as a model text for the contributors' investigation of the interaction of the book and the reader. One of three sections, the first group of essays explores the effects of digital reading, revealing how the CD-ROM version (2001) and the online variorum edition of *Actes and Monuments* (2006) disrupt and disclose the ways in which Foxe shapes his reader and the reader the text. Observing that scholars who undertook the John Foxe Project focused on the origins of the *Book of Martyrs*, Thomas P. Anderson calls attention instead to its futurity, designating Foxe's work as an archive that anticipates its transmission and reincarnation in time. In a discussion of the reading practices inspired by these cyberspace editions, Richard Cunningham argues that the online edition invites "discontinuous reading" (51), a practice that may, in fact, enable many of our students to profitably read this formidable text. His essay includes two fascinating responses written by his students that describe their experiences as readers of the online edition of *Actes and Monuments*. Moving between narrative account and editorial commentary that directs the reader to thematically related segments of Foxe's book, these students, in effect, created their own versions of the text, replicating the discontinuous reading practices of early modern readers.

The second group of essays examines early modern rereading and rewriting of Foxe's text. Affirming what has now become a commonplace of Foxean studies, both John King and Susannah Brietz Monta attest to the malleability of the *Book of Martyrs*, the multiple editions of which elicited diverse interpretations and appropriations and engaged a wide variety of readers. John King's account of Foxe's readers cites a sociological table included in the 1631–32 edition in which its clerical author lists potential readers, identifying them by class, age, gender, and vocation. The table directs them by means of an index to reader-appropriate selections, enjoining a discontinuous reading practice. While an entire essay could be devoted to Foxe's female readers, King indicates that a copy of *Actes and Monuments* was often part of a widow's legacy from her husband, and suggests how several early modern women used the *Book of Martyrs* as a devotional text, a theological and confessional reference, and a source book of useful anti-Catholic polemic. Monta analyzes a section of *Actes and Monuments* that counters the generic expectation of the martyr's end, celebrating miraculous preservations. Selecting Foxe's narrative of the escape of the Protestant Duchess of Suffolk to the Continent during the reign of Mary Tudor as a test case, she shows how Foxe trains his readers to read providentially. Monta discusses a number of appropriations of the duchess's story, arguing that they escape Foxe's coercive control, undermining his teleological account designed to enforce a seamless Protestant history. For example, *The Duchess of Suffolk*, Thomas Drue's stage version of the duchess's story, valorizes the lower social orders and supports a militant Protestantism, setting the city against the court. While many of these essays are very ambitious and necessarily incomplete — Sarah Covington proposes three strategies for reading Foxe's interrogation scenes — her excellent observation that the examiners are often fair-minded and patient in their treatment of heretics invites further study of the literary devices and editorial interventions by which Foxe

fashions his interpretations of the consistory court interrogations and trials, convincing the reader of the satanic cruelty of the examiners as agents of Antichrist.

The two essays in part three of this collection move beyond language. Liz Koblyk argues that ineffable meanings must be supplied by the elect reader; Ryan Netzley uncovers the meaninglessness of Foxe's apocalyptic calculations. I highly recommend each of the essays in this collection as essential reading for both Foxean scholars and students of early modern print culture.

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