

Erminia Ardissino and Elisabetta Selmi, eds. *Visibile teologia: Il libro sacro figurato in Italia tra Cinquecento e Seicento*.

Temi e Testi 101. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2012. xxvi + 464 pp. €68. ISBN: 978-88-6372-409-7.

Literary scholars Ardissino and Selmi turn our attention to the figurative dimension of post-Tridentine devotional literature, poetry, and sacred theater to focus on the important premodern nexus of memory, internal visualization, and heartfelt prayer for which images became important tools. These twenty-five essays take up the entwined skills of reading and viewing, negotiating tightly woven associations among images, visual descriptions, suggestive poetry, and editorial strategies for visually organizing the movement through texts. They point to the illustrated book as the stimulant for associated memorized texts, turning one book, functionally, into an entire library, so that every book, transformed through a reader's rhetorical skills, can become a manual for memory, prayer, or meditation. Illustrated books, dense and evocative verbal descriptions, poetry, prose, and verbal exhortations all aimed at harnessing the distracted minds of those who might stray from the righteous path.

Giuseppe Mazzotta's keynote paper from a 2011 conference at Yale University ("The Baroque Page: Image and Text"), introduces this volume, drawing out the comparison, in Tasso's *Il Mondo Creato*, between the painter's visual experience of God's creation, exterior to him and which he depicts, and the poet's act of creation, pulled forth from his own interiority, forcing him to find God in himself. The book's multifaceted discussion of the role of the book of nature and of graphic and descriptive images in fashioning and guiding interior image-making extends from this: "We have tried to probe the semiotic process of the visual act and the hermeneutics of the sacred image, the rapport between text and image, the rapport between material, mental, and verbal image, the relation between memory and the sacred image, but also between the will and the affections, the functions and the reception of images" (x).

The essays that follow investigate the use of images in the context of their ritual, textual, and historical frames, alongside acts of personal devotion, as aids in spiritual meditation to cue memory, increase affective charge, and stimulate verbal description. The ability and desire to know God are closely associated with the visual, beginning with the incarnation, when the invisible God is made visible on earth. The precepts of the Council of Trent, earlier conventions for devotional literature, and the Inquisition provided institutional frameworks within which this literature kept perceptive faculties limber as readers educated in scripture were encouraged to compare themselves to saints and sinners. The complex spatial reading exercises discussed here engaged readers in nonlinear ways through verses, images, dialogues, and didactic prose, as authors and publishers worked every available literary convention on behalf of the faithful, whose souls were battlegrounds for devils, Jews, Turks, and Protestants, and whose interior selves were available through immersive reading, viewing, and recall.

Certain names appear often: Lina Bolzoni, who introduced modern readers to the overlapping modes of reading and looking engaged in and enjoined by preachers and authors, is often present here. Another is Jerome Nadal, whose illustrated treatises relied on these habits to bring Ignatius Loyola's spiritual exercises to the entire globe. Several essays focus on Jesuit emphases on visual description in novel ways, including an essay by Carlo Fanelli discussing the syncretism between theatrical experience, religiosity, and antique culture that framed Jesuit theatrical experience, showing how the Jesuits understood the role of the spectator and visual perception in creating knowledge from the senses. The role of the senses is also central to Andrea Torre's vivid contribution addressing the psychological dimension of pictures and descriptions together through the authority of tears as proof of emotional register. Gabriel Paleotti's *Discourse* is discussed as a literary as well as prescriptive work, and Selmi's original essay on theories of the sacred image introduces a section on the role of the spectator and spectacle, opening out the previous discussions of readers, publishers, and authors into another productive and suggestive vein.

Since authors' affiliations are never given, readers decide what disciplinary questions prompted their research into the visual as a dimension of knowledge creation. Together the essays bring Counter-Reformation books to life as active agents in rituals from personal prayer to public plague processions, showing us a world of active readers, writers, and publishers, for whom books agitated in the internal realm targeted by post-Tridentine devotional publications.

EVELYN LINCOLN
Brown University