

Short Notices

Ellinghausen, Laurie, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's English History Plays* (Approaches to Teaching World Literature), New York, The Modern Language Association of America, 2017; paperback; pp.x, 249; R.R.P. US\$24.00; ISBN 9781603293006.

Every year William Shakespeare-related scholarship generates articles and books at a pace too dizzying even for specialists. This volume, devoted to a specific sub-genre—English history plays—features thirty-one contributors who have taught the plays in diverse colleges and universities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. With such a cornucopia of opinions, how merciful of the editor Laurie Ellinghausen to devote the first thirty pages of the book to give us an overview of the field. This is by far the most informative and readable section of the book, in which Ellinghausen reviews all major critical editions and multimedia adaptations of the plays available in the great Shakespeare marketplace.

I do wish, however, that the book had made it abundantly clear that Shakespeare's English history plays are not necessarily a good way to learn about English history. There is much to be said about how the plays have distorted history to perpetuate the official state and church propaganda, as scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt, David Kastan, Leonard Tennenhouse, and David Womersley have reminded us. Ellinghausen herself claims that the plays show us how 'commoners, and the working classes also challenge official narratives of history' and goes on to cite 'Jack Cade's rebellion' as one of the instances (p. 14). But as Richard Helgerson has shown in his acclaimed *Forms of Nationhood* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI* also ridicules the supposedly revolutionary working classes as populist fools and buffoons.

Glenn Odom offers a useful survey of primary sources that Shakespeare draws upon in his history plays. M. G. Aune mentions how students can be encouraged to compare *King John* with various primary sources (available online) to assess Shakespeare's dramatic choices. William A. Oram and Howard Nenner review Shakespeare's political contexts to analyse the character of Richard III. Jonathan Hart focuses on political rhetoric in various history plays. Mary Janell Metzger reads Montaigne to interpret *Richard III* as a sceptical text. David J. Baker focuses on British cartography and ethnic diversity. Barbara Sebek studies how the plays imagine the world beyond Britain to develop a global consciousness. Phyllis Rackin offers illuminating analyses of various female characters. Maya Mathur relies on film and television adaptations to teach the Henry IV plays. Ruben Espinosa draws attention to non-English strangers in *Henry V*. Like many other contributors in this collection Hugh Macrae Richmond writes about using

internet sources to teach Shakespeare. Some contentions aside, the book is a rich pedagogical resource.

RAJIV THIND, *The University of Queensland & University of Canterbury*

Field, Larry F., trans., Lezlie S. **Knox**, ed., and Sean L. **Field**, intro., *Visions of Sainthood in Medieval Rome: The Lives of Margherita Colonna by Giovanni Colonna and Stefania*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2017; paperback; pp. 236; R.R.P. US\$29.00; ISBN 9780268102012.

Visions of Sainthood in Medieval Rome offers the first English translation of twin Lives of the Italian noblewoman and putative Franciscan saint, Margherita Colonna (c. 1255–c. 1280). An edition of these *Vitae* was published by Livario Oligier in 1935 and they have been available in Italian since 2010. Knox and Field also provide an introductory essay that situates Margherita's life and the production of the *Vitae* in the context of the Colonna's territorial, political, and ecclesiastical ambitions, reminding us how intertwined these were in the thirteenth century.

As a girl, Margherita Colonna rejected the life mapped out for her as the daughter of a wealthy, high-ranking Roman family. She decided instead to dedicate her virginity to Christ and serve the poor. She was initially opposed by her brother Giovanni, a Roman senator, but supported by her brother Giacomo, a Franciscan friar, later a cardinal. Eventually permitted to pursue her vocation, she formed a quasi-religious female community at Monte Prenestino outside Rome. After her death, Margherita's community was accepted as a house of the *Sorores minores inclusae*, a Franciscan order. In 1285, the Sisters were settled under Giacomo's protection in San Silvestro in Capite, a former Benedictine monastery, in a part of Rome under Colonna patronage, and Margherita's remains were translated there.

These *Vitae* were written under Colonna family auspices in an effort to establish Margherita's sanctity and build a cult around her memory after her death. *Vita I* is anonymous, but Oligier established that it was written c. 1281–1285 by Giovanni, probably with input from Giacomo, whose spiritual experiences also inform the text. *Vita II* was written c. 1288–1292 by a woman called Stefania, apparently at Giacomo's request. Stefania was a member of Margherita's community, and may have led it after Margherita's death. Her account supplements Giovanni's with additional miracles and offers a first-hand account of Margherita's final years.

This work will interest scholars of late medieval religion, lay sanctity, and gender. It adds to Lezlie Knox's work on the identities and forms of religious life developed by St Francis's female followers, and it contributes another work to the small but growing corpus of lives of holy women by other women that Sean Field has already published on. In its presentation of two Lives of the same subject, one male-authored and one female-authored, it offers further material for analysis of the role of gender in the production of female hagiography.

JENNIFER LORD, *Monash University*

Horníčková, Kateřina, and Michal Šroněk, eds, *From Hus to Luther: Visual Culture in the Bohemian Reformation (1380–1620)* (Medieval Church Studies, 33), Turnhout, Brepols, 2016; hardback; pp. xxi, 323; 8 colour, 50 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. €90.00; ISBN 9782503548050.

This book is the first to extensively study the visual culture stemming from Bohemia during two centuries of denominational pluralism, when the majority of the population participated in non-Catholic sects (with at least five Protestant groups active by the sixteenth century). The sixteen essays that are featured consider the extent to which the reformers valued images (or not), and overall bring much needed attention to a fascinating and lesser-known context of pluralism and shifting alliances.

The chronology encompasses the activities of Czech theologian Jan Hus (1369–1415) and his Hussite followers—which preceded Martin Luther’s Reformation by over a hundred years—through to the defeat of the Bohemian uprising at White Mountain by the Habsburg coalition (1620). This latter event brought to an end a remarkable period of denominational coexistence and experimentation. The contributions in this volume invoke the activities not only of the Hussites, but also the Utraquists, the Unity of the Brethren, and Lutherans. Clearly Bohemia was a region in which the traditionally articulated binary of Catholic vs non-Catholic was far more complex and nuanced than elsewhere in Europe, a pluralist history that in and of itself deserves to be better known.

How this history is manifest in art is of course a complex question, acknowledged by the editors Kateřina Horníčková and Michal Šroněk to often evade a satisfactory answer. As noted in the excellent introduction, the Hussite distrust of images and the iconoclasm perpetrated by extremists are perhaps the facets that the Bohemian Reformation remains most infamous for. There is an acknowledged problem of preservation, and the material culture that does exist is often accompanied by the challenge of determining denominational significance. Still, the forty-eight figures and the eight colour plates included certainly elucidate and counter what the editors describe as ‘the myth that all non-Catholic denominations in Bohemia held a strictly negative attitude towards images’, and the fact that all these denominations ‘just like the catholic church—acknowledged the importance of visual communication and the effect of, and response to, works of art’ (p. 3).

This is an erudite volume that positions itself as forward thinking and generative of new lines of questioning, rather than as a definitive and comprehensive summation. The relationship between the Reformation and visual culture as it pertains to Germany and England has long been a topic of rich discourse and it is high time that the Bohemian example be added to the mix.

ANDREA BUBENIK, *The University of Queensland*

Rosenberg, Samuel N., trans., *Robert the Devil: The First Modern English Translation of Robert le Diable, an Anonymous French Romance of the Thirteenth Century*, University Park, PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018; paperback; pp. 168; R.R.P. US\$19.95; ISBN 9780271080161.

In describing this text, translator Samuel N. Rosenberg describes it as ‘basically the tale of a boy born to a childless noble couple only after the mother has secretly called on Satan to help her conceive’ (p. 1). This dark start, the reader soon learns, is borne out by a week-long labour. While handsome, Robert is a violent child. He is prone to biting while nursing, frightening his teachers, and attacking the poor. The naughty boy grows into a troublesome man, causing the Pope to deny Robert communion and ultimately leading Robert’s father to boot him out of home. Robert then takes to the forest and a career in highway robbery.

As knighthood is seen as a potential cure of his wicked ways, Robert is knighted. Yet while he then tourneys with brutal effectiveness, he remains a malevolent force. Evidencing this is the fact that he does not pray, and a shocking event where he massacres a house of nuns. Only then, with a moment of self-reflection, does Robert question his path in life. Seeking answers, Robert threatens his mother before heading to Rome. There the Pope redirects him to a hermit in the mountains where, with tears and mass, Robert seeks salvation and is put under a strict penitential regime.

Robert must play at being mad, be silent, and fast. And so he does, all the way to the Emperor’s palace, where he becomes a court fool. Which proves just as well, for from there he three times rescues Rome. Incognito, Robert turns the tide of each battle, riding a fine white horse and slipping back into penitential disguise afterwards, observed only by a mute princess whose tale of Robert’s heroics is disbelieved. Throw in a side story of a scheming and disloyal seneschal, and you have the gist of the narrative arc, leading ultimately to a decidedly medieval twist.

Translations should be measured against their purpose, and Rosenberg easily meets his declared intentions. This is ‘a work suitable for recitation, a work whose rhythms and sonorities bespeak the presence [...] of a storyteller’ (p. 5). Whether as teaching aid or pleasure read, this translation of Robert’s tale brings medieval Europe to life with aplomb.

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