

H. James Jensen, *The Muses' Concord — Literature, Music and the Visual Arts in the Baroque Age*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976. 320 pp., illus., \$12.95

David L. Bershad

Volume 5, Number 1, 1978

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077335ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077335ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Bershad, D. L. (1978). Review of [H. James Jensen, *The Muses' Concord — Literature, Music and the Visual Arts in the Baroque Age*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976. 320 pp., illus., \$12.95]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 5(1), 80–81. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077335ar>



FIGURE 1. Engraved by Philippe Galle after Maarten de Vos, *Manesah in his Affliction*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes. Cf. Verheyen, fig 52.

though it was never as systematically – or contemporaneously – recorded as the Galerie François I^{er} at Fontainebleau (cf. *Revue de l'Art*, nos. 16-17, 1972), Verheyen shows what can be made of commonly known documentation hitherto used exclusively, or wrongly. The implications of the Heemskerck sketchbook in Berlin bear witness to this, as does the proof of the use of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* in the Sala di Psiche (discussion, pp. 116-19). Illustration has of necessity been severely compacted, although its very arrangement gives some real idea of the solutions envisaged, modified, or altogether abandoned (legends on figs. 3 and 4 reversed, however); it complements a text supported by many years of articles and notes on specific queries, here reduced to the bone for effortless comprehension. Sufficient photographic details are given to appreciate the nature and original purpose of the decorative schemes, while the excellently scaled and oriented plans permit a reader who has never been to Mantua to visualise the problems involved. In this way, one of the better functions of the critic – to provide a verbal structure which distils the controversies surrounding objects so that future readers may exercise their capacities at a significantly higher level – is satisfied with exemplary disinterestedness. Not all evidence does speak for itself, but close reasoning and a matter-of-fact presentation assume that readers should be capable of coming to grips with facts, concepts, and even the governing and omnipresent abstractions. *A bon entendeur, demi-mot . . .*

A phenomenon has then been reconstituted in laboratory form for both the general reader and art historian. (The reviewer, for example, is more than struck by a certain similarity between the *Arcturus* setting over the sole window in the Sala dei Venti and an engraving by Philippe Galle after Maarten de Vos (here Fig. 1; cf. Verheyen, fig. 52). Its appended text, combined with the orienting inscriptions in this chamber and the loggia of the Grotta might help to allay Gombrich's concern over the 'disturbed' sequence of the *Arcturus* scenes.) In any event, this initiative is most welcome and should do much to restore art history from the preserve of simple erudition it has become. What a pity that this should be the last art book published by the Hopkins Press. How rewarding for the discipline that it should not be simply another monograph.

W. MCA. J.

H. JAMES JENSEN *The Muses' Concord – Literature, Music and the Visual Arts in the Baroque Age*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976. 320 pp., illus., \$12.95.

The question of concord between the various art forms is one which has interested writers through the ages. Ever since Wincklemann evolved the concept of the 'art period,' it has become apparent that the characteristics of each of these arbitrarily named 'periods' are also reflected in other than visual art forms. The chronological correspondence is not always exact, but development will generally follow along somewhat parallel paths. The extent of the Baroque age is variously considered by some to be as short as 20 years, and by others as long as 150; however, there certainly appears to have been some correspondence between literature, the visual arts, and music during the seventeenth century. In his book, Jensen attempts to show just how much, and why, this is so. The author, however, would have been wise to heed the warning of Arnold Hauser, who writes: 'one-dimensionality and two-

dimensionality, linearity and spatiality, simultaneity and successive-ness . . . are used, in the different arts, to signify such utterly different perceptions that their transposition from the visual arts into music and *vice versa* must appear precarious from the very start' (*Philosophy of Art History*, 1958, p. 263).

Jensen dogmatically states that all of the seventeenth-century art forms are built upon a faculty psychology and a rhetorical process – an assumption that few modern scholars would accept and one that Jensen never adequately defends. In an 'Afterword' (which the reader would be well advised to read *before* the text), Jensen very clearly sets out what his intention has been: 'Whereas the general Baroque idea is that the artist pleases or delights to make his instruction or great end palatable, I have tried to instruct to enhance pleasure.'

This constitutes a clear warning that we are to take the medicine before we receive the proverbial spoonful of sugar. Dryden was correct when he said that 'Sweet is pleasure after pain.' Painful is perhaps an unkind way to describe a scholarly book which has clearly involved its author in an incredible amount of reading and research, yet it must be stated that much of the text is extremely ponderous. The didactic purpose of the book would have been much better served if the plethora of notes and references had been controlled differently. The text is riddled with parentheses, with a resulting vitiation of whatever argument the author attempts to develop. Many of its numerous quotations are from books such as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and consequently we find ourselves wrestling with quaint old English phraseology and spelling. It is impossible to resist quoting from one of the more obscure of these to illustrate the point: 'Whenas any difficulty ariseth and opposeth itself to the desire or the concupiscible, [the irascible] comes presently to succour it; and enflaming the blood, excites choler, hope, courage, or some other like passion . . . to make him surmount the difficulties which cross the contentment of the soul.' In this case translation, though tedious, is not impossible; but I defy the average reader to make any sense of the following of Puttenham's transla-

tions of homeopathic devices in *The Arte of English Poesie*: 'the fleering frumpe' for 'micticismus,' and 'the privvy nippe' for 'charientismus.' All this is not to deny the fascination of the study of archaisms, but the reader may prefer to have his references served up to him in a more readably digestible form.

It is evident that a book which purports to relate literature, music, and the visual arts may well be of interest to scholars, musicians, and artists. Very often an expert in one of these areas may have only a passing knowledge of the others. Perhaps understandably the author, being a professor of English, frequently presupposes in his readers an acquaintanceship with works of English literature which I suspect they may well not possess. For example, there may be others who, like myself, are not conversant with Jensen's *Silent Woman* and consequently are unable to appreciate the relevance of whatever 'assorted humours' are displayed by the characters in this play.

So much for the manner. As to the matter, there can be no doubt that the subject has been deeply researched, and the continual bombardment of references undoubtedly tends to trigger a certain reader response. We find ourselves thinking of other examples of muse correspondence which might have been included. When Jensen refers to Lomazzo, who 'points out how the motion of the hair signifies, for example, a station of life or a passion,' the art historian may well think that a wonderful opportunity has been missed in not citing the example of Bernini's mistress, the passionate Costanza Buonarelli. The musician may think that there should be some mention of François Couperin (le grand) and his ability to conjure up musically the most detailed scenes as in his *Les Matelottes Provençales*, in which, synaesthetically, he suggests the smell of the sea breeze as it ruffles the frills of the ladies of La Rochelle walking jauntily along the promenade. The painter may wonder whether the inclusion of the four putti in Domenichino's *Last Communion of St. Jerome* may in fact be an example of the apostrophic in painting.

The inclusion of translations from the French is good, and printing the original French version,

though space-consuming, is truly valuable for the benefit of those whose knowledge of French enables them to appreciate the nuances which may be lost in translation. Perhaps in some cases it might also have been useful to have included a translation of certain English words, such as anaphoras, antimetaboles, and prosopopeias. However, as Jensen says, 'if we can ascertain artistic intentions through the conventions used to convey these intentions, we can understand what someone from another age is saying, not only to his own time but to us as well.' A very worthy sentiment and one which, if fulfilled, will be more than sufficient *raison d'être* for the book.

Perhaps more information on the correspondences between colour and mood would have been interesting, although, in the century between Lomazzo and Couperin, certain sophisticated changes took place in the interpretation to be placed on each, as may be seen by comparing Lomazzo's Book III: *A Tracte Containing the Arts of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge and Building* with the cast of the characters from Couperin's *Les Folies Françaises* (Pièces de Clavecin, Book III).

It must be sadly admitted that the first eight chapters of Jensen's book are incredibly tedious, as the author goes to great lengths to tune our minds to the proper appreciation of the various art forms. But then comes the surprise. Suddenly, in his last chapter, all is lucid and his three ways to approach comparisons of the arts appear to make sense. Further, his examples are well chosen and his arguments developed smoothly without the intrusion to any great degree of references and quotations. Jensen makes the point that during the Baroque age the conscious mind was conditioned in a certain way and this influenced each artist in his approach to the creative process. From this point until the completion of his work each will interpret the imagery using the technique appropriate to his medium. Thus the poet may resort to rhetoric, the painter may rely on figural gestures to evoke the desired response to his work. The composer might rely on the doctrine of affections to put his point across.

Although the author makes endless references to a variety of

sources, he has totally omitted citing any of the articles dealing with similar problems in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. For example, there is no discussion of Buker's article, 'The Baroque S-T-O-R-M' (xxii, 1964), R. Welck's 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship' (v, 1946), R. Daniells's 'English Baroque and Deliberate Obscurity' (v, 1946), nor H. Hatzfield's 'The Baroque from the Standpoint of the Literary Historian' (xiv, 1955), to list but a few. Jensen omits to mention one of the basic sources on the Baroque, W. Weisbach's 'Barock als Stilphänomen,' *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 1924.

All things considered, the greatest advantage that the book offers is that it will provide an excellent reference tool for literary works of the period. Just as in an earlier age, the artist's public was expected to have a basic knowledge of iconography to understand fully his work, so in the Baroque age a basic knowledge of a different kind was required. An acquisition of this knowledge should be one of the aims of the reader of *The Muses' Concord*.

DAVID L. BERSHAD
University of Calgary

H.H. ARNASON *The Sculptures of Houdon*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1975. 294 + x pp., 393 illus., \$54.75.

Comme Thomas Jefferson, qu'il admira tant et dont il contribua à diffuser l'image, Jean-Antoine Houdon (Fig. 1) vécut une extraordinaire séquence de mutations sociales, politiques et culturelles. A sa naissance à Versailles, en 1741, l'Ancien Régime était encore bien en place. À sa mort, survenue peu de temps après celle de Jefferson, en 1828, le souffle révolutionnaire avait transformé en profondeur esprits et contextes: le monde moderne était né, sous le double signe de la république et de l'industrialisation. On comprend que les hommes de cette génération aient fasciné — et continuent de fasciner — les chercheurs. Le livre récent