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Frelick, Nancy M., ed. The Mirror in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: Specular Reflections

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Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533): Faith, Antiquity, and the Witch Hunt

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Frelick, Nancy M., ed.

The Mirror in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: Specular Reflections.

Cursor mundi 25. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016. Pp. xi, 293 + 15 ill. ISBN 978-2-503-56454-8 (hardcover) €80.

At once material object and metaphor, the mirror is imbued with properties and functions both real and imagined. The present volume, which assembles selected papers from the Medieval Workshop at the University of British Columbia in 2012, is a welcome addition to existing scholarship on this polysemic instrument. Contributions by both seasoned and emerging scholars of literature, history, and art history offer a kaleidoscopic view of the theoretical, practical, and figurative uses of the mirror from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century. Of the twelve essays, two extend beyond the boundaries of Western Europe in their engagement with Byzantine and Persian traditions.

In a rich survey of the multiple and even antithetical characterizations of the mirror and the sense of sight, Nancy M. Frelick's introduction situates the instrument within the history of vision to highlight its complex relationship to knowledge and representation. This overview provides the requisite background for the reader unfamiliar with visual theories and instruments while offering valuable insight and bibliography for those well-versed in the matter. Among the myriad lines of inquiry made possible through Frelick's synopsis of the mirror and its significance, three are particularly noteworthy: for alone or in combination, they emerge as common threads that transcend the volume's chronological organization to weave together the individual contributions across periods and traditions.

In addition to documenting the prevalence of extramission through the seventeenth century, Berthold Hub's study of the bloody mirror explores the implications of the viewing subject's agency through the notion of the "performative gaze" that acts upon its viewed object. Following this thread, other essays entwine agency with self-knowledge and self-fashioning, be it of human subjects, domains of knowledge, or of the mirror itself. Suzanne Conklin Akbari proposes alternative narratives to the mutual gaze and Narcissus's mirror in her analysis of works by Chaucer and Christine de Pizan in which the gaze and the mirror (of history or of the mind) enable the subject's constitution of herself in solitude. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu's comparison of the mirror and portrait texts in seventeenth-century France extends the agency of the individual female

subject. When portraits of illustrious women are also penned by women, female intellect and authority move to the foreground, fashioning both the author and a community of female readers and subjects through an amplified mirror-effect. Ulrike Feist's contribution connects the mirror sundial in the Palazzo Spada to Cardinal Bernardino Spada's self-promotion as a patron of the sciences. It also elaborates the cardinal's decision to commission the complex scientific instrument in light of the mirror's symbolic and metaphorical value. In a similar vein, the dialogue Sergius Kodera establishes between Giovan Battista Della Porta's inventions and Giordano Bruno's metaphysical ideas affirms that the mirror's real and philosophical functions mutually influence and transform one another. Anna Dysert's analysis, too, showcases an advantageous alliance with the mirror, demonstrating that the inclusion of both practical and theoretical matters in alchemical mirror-texts appropriated the instrument's duality as both *ars* and *scientia* to gain legitimacy within the Scholastic reclassification of knowledge.

Hélène Cazes's commentary on Erasmus's *Adagiorum Chiliades* implicates writing as a reflective surface and depicts the relationship of self and other as one akin to friendship. The images and rhetorical figures of affinity and doubling within and among adages also expose a more general preoccupation with specular language or structures, one shared by other essays in the volume. Alison Beringer's poignant reading of the riddle in the Byzantine romance of Semiramis and Alexander compares the distinction between reflection and object to the one between signifier and signified. Specularity also prevails in Ronsard's *Amours* as Tom Conley draws attention to the reflections and sight-lines that permeate the structural, thematic, and rhetorical levels of a text that he characterizes as both *isolario* and *imago mundi*.

Conley's cartographic reading also elucidates the mirror's association with space. Like the subsequent edition of the *Amours*, which represents a more turbulent political climate, David Napolitano's examination of Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* relates the specular surface of the page to its context. Napolitano's reading of one particular manuscript suggests that Latini's "mirror of magistrates," conceived by the Florentine exile while in France and written in Old French, reflects an altogether different political orientation when translated into Old Italian by a scribe who adapts the text to an Italian, and especially Pisan and pro-imperial, reality. Mirrors also emerge as points of contact or separation between spaces. In the Sufi poet's quest for oneness with the divine,

as explored by Leila Rahimi Bahmany, the poem-as-mirror is the portal that leads beyond the material world. To gain access to this other space, the viewing subject must polish the reflective surface by deciphering the multiple layers of meaning in the text's highly figurative language. Elizabeth Black's reading of the woodcuts and texts in Corrozet's *Blasons domestiques* is instead anchored in the physical realm. Problematizing Corrozet's project, Black demonstrates that the very windows and mirrors that were to serve as boundaries between public and private, to safeguard against the anatomization and objectification of the female body, in reality transform the woman into the object of the poet's (and reader's) lustful gaze.

Through these threads, and indeed many others, the volume invites dialogue with students and scholars across disciplines and periods, including those who engage with traditions not featured therein. The strength of the volume resides precisely in its resemblance to a hall of mirrors. Rather than exhaust the complexities of the study, the multiplicity of reflections within and across contributions illuminates ideas, approaches, and theoretical frameworks, generating new points of consideration and serving as a reminder of why the mirror continues to fascinate.

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Goldberg, Jonathan.

Saint Marks: Words, Images, and What Persists.

New York: Fordham University Press, 2019. Pp. xvi, 170. ISBN 978-0-8232-8207-4 (paperback) US\$32.

I have always been fascinated by the work of art historians: how T. J. Clark tackled the myth of modernity through the paintings of impressionists, or how David Rosand explored the imagery through which Venice developed its foundational myths over time. Naturally, I was drawn to Jonathan Goldberg's work on Venice and his analysis of several sixteenth-century paintings of St. Mark for the Scuola Grande di San Marco. I discovered immediately that Goldberg's *Saint Marks: Words, Images, and What Persists* is not an ordinary presentation of a historical narrative of these paintings, but rather a quest for