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

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## Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

**Anderson, Thomas P. and Ryan Netzley (eds.).**

***Acts of Reading: Interpretation, Reading Practices, and the Idea of the Book in John Foxe's Actes and Monuments.***

Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010. Pp. 306. ISBN 978-0-87413-081-2 (hardcover) n.p.

In *Acts of Reading: Interpretation, Reading Practices, and the Idea of the Book in Foxe's Actes and Monuments* (2010), editors Thomas P. Anderson and Ryan Netzley argue that the rich publication history of the *Book of Martyrs* (to use its more familiar designation) makes Foxe's Protestant martyrology an ideal case study for the history of reading. Taking the recent production of an online variorum (<http://www.johnfoxe.org>) as its starting point, and addressing work on material print culture and the history of the book, the volume features studies on assorted textual and paratextual elements of the *Book of Martyrs* as well as lively dialogue on theories of early modern reading and interpretation.

If we follow the editors' example in seeing parallels between early modern and modern modes of reading, we might apply the question whether early modern readers consume texts in linear or discontinuous fashion to the modern practice of reading collected editions. That is, how often do we read such volumes beginning to end? Do we not commonly cull, or at least prioritize, selected material, and approach critical editions discontinuously, even as we set about reading primary sources start to finish?

Curiously, reading this particular collection front to back, as it were, would mislead the reader into believing the book intended principally to promote the online variorum. Organized so that the section "Reading Digitally" precedes "Rereading and Rewriting Foxe in Early Modernity" and "Reading, Martyrology, and the Limits of Language," Anderson and Netzley flag their enthusiasm for the digital format; the first two essays of the book, by Anderson and Richard Cunningham, candidly endorse the online publication. Drawing insights from the increasingly robust and critically engaged field of digital humanities might

have fortified those essays' analyses of the medium and enriched their particular contribution on Foxe's work.

To their credit, however, the editors have invited contributors to address both their own ideas and one another, so the initial apologetics for digital media is tempered, if not countered, in due course by more qualified claims supported by detailed evidence. Any work on Foxe is indebted to the meticulous archival research of John N. King, whose *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (2006) set the standard for studying the production and reception of Foxe's work. King's scholarship is duly and frequently cited throughout the volume, and King himself contributes an essay on the social, intellectual, and educational diversity of Foxe's readers at numerous instances of publication.

Indeed, as the collection's other contributors analyze assorted editions of *Actes and Monuments*, the volume cumulatively supports the editors' additional opening contention, following King, that studies in material print culture and the history of the book would benefit from taking a more diachronic approach. Some of these essays examine isolated features of selected editions of the *Book of Martyrs*, and reflect on ways to relate the part to the whole. Erin Kelly, for example, demonstrates how Foxe's use of red ink in Kalenders included in the 1563 and 1583 printings — tables represented in facsimile form in the digital edition — reforms both Catholic and Protestant precedents so as to compel Foxe's readers to view his text in dialogue with other Reformation publications. Drawing attention to the ostensible contradiction that Foxe's vast, rhetorically urgent work is peopled by voiceless martyrs, Liz Koblyk situates Foxe's representations of ineffectual speech in the context of Protestant ideas concerning suffering and the elect, arguing that readers are prompted to pronounce their faith actively upon witnessing the martyrs' oratorical passivity. Other contributions, such as Nova Myhill's analysis of how two 1620 stage plays interpret "A Table of the X. First Persecutions of the Primitive Church," offer new formulations of the *Book of Martyrs* in light of fresh additions to the text's reception history. That so many essays in *Acts of Reading* engage the views of the book's editors and its other contributors is a testament to Anderson and Netzley's commitment to using Foxe as a vehicle to reconsider *in toto* the nature of transactions between reader and text.

The *Book of Martyrs* that emerges from this reading is a paradox: both exceptional, by virtue of its vastness and variety, and representative, for much the same reason. That is, if there is an aspect of early modern print culture

or reading you are studying, Foxe's volume is likely to include an example of it. *Acts of Reading* provides scholars with a variety of thoughtful models for interpreting Foxe's numerous and expansive publications and other early modern texts.

GWYNN DUJARDIN, *Queen's University*

**Ascoli, Albert Russell.**

***A Local Habitation and a Name: Imagining Histories in the Italian Renaissance.***

New York: Fordham University Press, 2011. Pp. x, 387. ISBN 978-0-8232-3429-5 (paperback) \$35.

This volume is a substantial study of themes that have preoccupied Ascoli for most of his career. As the Terrill Distinguished Professor of Italian at the University of California, Berkeley, Albert Russell Ascoli has made a place for himself in Italian literary studies based upon thought-provoking interpretations of Petrarch, Dante, and Ariosto. This volume is no different. *A Local Habitation* gathers nine essays from across Ascoli's career (1990–2011) and presents them as a meditation on six major themes or literary preoccupations. At the core of this volume is Ascoli's self-described "enduring obsession with the relations between 'the literary' and 'the historical'" (7), which is played out through investigations of important literary works and their authors' own personal obsessions.

The first essay, entitled "Petrarch's Middle Age," examines Petrarch's evocation of Augustine and Dante as a portal through which to discern the place, be it real, fictionalized, memorialized, or constructed, of this volume's title. However, as with most of these essays there is a greater issue blurring the edges of his argument. Ascoli strives to present Petrarch's own vision of himself while examining the modern identification of Petrarch as the canonical first modern man. This essay embodies one of the volume's major themes: revealing how modern critical discourse has presented certain authors as emblems of historical periods.

Another complementary theme appears in the second essay, entitled "Boccaccio's Auerbach: Holding a Mirror up to *Mimesis*." Here Ascoli focuses