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**Raiswell, Richard (ed.) with Peter Dendle. The Devil in Society
in Premodern Europe**

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Raiswell, Richard (ed.) with Peter Dendle.

The Devil in Society in Premodern Europe.

Essays and Studies 28. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012. Pp. 568 + 20 ill. ISBN 978-0-7727-2124-2 (paperback) \$37.

On reaching the end of this book the reader might be permitted a slightly uncharitable thought. In his well-judged introduction, Richard Raiswell tells us that the premodern Devil was not a single entity but a heterogeneous cluster of context-governed configurations—“a succession of inter-related, overlapping concepts” (49). What follows is a collection of seventeen interrelated, overlapping essays, each of which considers one of these (potentially endless) configurations. The thought is this: has the collection’s own heterogeneity been fashioned to suit this kind of Devil or is it the other way round? Raiswell certainly delivers his side of the equation, arguing well for a loosely defined medieval Devil, even among theologians, answering to logical characteristics that were often incoherent and contradictory. This probably underestimates the degree of almost cliché-driven uniformity displayed by demonology in later centuries, but it does leave the way clear for Raiswell’s and Dendle’s contributors to concentrate on the concrete, the momentary, and, above all, the experienced, with their Devil(s) constantly being “made and remade in response to context and circumstance” (24).

The demonstration of this diversity, however, does not give the book enough coherence. Some thematic order appears with the use of headings—“The Devil’s Identity,” “Recognising the Devil,” “Physical and Cultural Spaces of the Demonic,” and “Control, Restraining and Adjuration”—but, with the possible exception of the last, these are so capacious and porous that many of the essays could qualify for each. An epilogue to the volume tries to plot formalistically the axes and quadrants of the more general traits of demonic power and malevolence emerging from the preceding essays; yet on the whole, the book needs greater pre-emptive editorial direction to pull its different sections together. With 90 original contributors to the 2008 conference on “The Devil in Society in the Premodern World,” and a few of the chosen authors unable to address anything much beyond their immediate radar, this was always going to be difficult to achieve. The danger is nevertheless considerable: a topic of enormous complexity, geographical range, and temporal extension (from the first to the seventeenth century) risks being dealt with in a series of miniatures.

One is left with the task, therefore, of looking for qualities intrinsic to each essay, above all the ability to rise above the immediate context (sometimes micro-context) and confront the more general issues that surround the cultural history of the Devil. Unfortunately, the very first essay in the collection is a shapeless and badly under-edited study—“rambling,” as even the author, Audrey Meaney, admits (96)—on Anglo-Saxon notions of demonic disease. The other early essays by Martin Chase (on the diabolization of the Old Norse *miðgarðarormr*) and David Ross Winter (on the reference to Satan’s mother in an anonymous twelfth-century pastoral writing), while interesting in and for themselves, make only a slight contribution to studies in demonology: the pastoral moralization turns out to be directed at evil counsellors. These three essays—the only ones in the section on “The Devil’s Identity”—have little joint impact on a potentially very rich topic. Further on, essays lack a central focus on the demonic, or read like papers from the authors’ research rather than discussions of the book’s main themes. Again, the topics are interesting but divergent. Erika Gasser’s essay on late sixteenth-century English possession cases is a skilful analysis of the gendering of *discretio spirituum*; Kirsten Uszkaló’s on the ephemera surrounding “Mother Shipton” is really about “representations of the prophetic, the monstrous, and the malefic” (286) and only semi-demonological; and Michael Ryan’s on Nicolau Eymerich’s apocalypticism concentrates on the issues surrounding divination, scarcely confronting the demonic even in connection with the Antichrist.

Nevertheless, there are some excellent contributions that combine fascinating case-studies with intelligent, productive thinking at a more general and interpretative level. The fraught question of the corporeality of demons is given a refreshing twist in Andreea Marculescu’s reading of fifteenth-century Passion Plays, while Gary Waite draws yet further implications from his exciting work on the parallels between anti-Anabaptist and anti-witchcraft rhetoric. In a superb essay, Jolanta Komornicka demonstrates how something as precise as demonic contamination of the trial by ordeal illuminates broad intellectual and epistemological changes between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, and Richard Kieckhefer is predictably impressive on false necromancy as a measure of demonic illusion. Perhaps the best group of essays is the last, thanks to its more focused theme and contributions of sustained quality and broad implications from classicist Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe, cultural historian María Tausiet, and medical historian Nadine Metzger. Guido Dall’Olio rounds this uneven

collection off with an expert reading of Italian cases of demonic possession and exorcism in the context of Counter-Reformation legal institutions before the promulgation of the *Rituale Romanum*.

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Richardson, Todd M.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Art Discourse in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands.

Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. Pp. xi, 268. ISBN 978-0-7546-6816-9 (hardback) \$119.95.

Todd Richardson's book makes a number of contributions to the currently burgeoning field of Bruegel studies—and to the discussion of northern Renaissance art in general. His most important inquiry, perhaps, has to do with notions of the vernacular in Flemish art, a concept introduced by scholars like David Freedberg and Mark Meadow. Richardson offers a nuanced examination of two written texts that have figured heavily in this discussion: a Latin eulogy to Bruegel by his friend, the well-known cosmographer Abraham Ortelius, and a Flemish invective against a “certain painter” by the polyglot poet and artist Lucas de Heere. Richardson convincingly shows that neither document should be taken as evidence of a local/Italianate divide in the art theory of the Low Countries. Richardson profitably examines the status of Netherlandish poetry by Lucas de Heere and Jan van der Noot, its two most sophisticated practitioners who quite self-consciously attempted to fashion compelling vernacular verse. The author points to their study of Clément Marot and the poets of the *Pléiade*, especially Pierre de Ronsard and Joachim Du Bellay, who had earlier set about transforming the French language into a suitable vehicle for poetic expression. All of these writers saw the relation between vernacular and Latin verse to be subtle and complex, much more than a simple opposition. Richardson brings these findings to his discussion of de Heere's invective, demonstrating the improbability that the poet intended a reductive opposition between a local Flemish style of painting and a grand Italianate manner. According to Richardson, de Heere does not criticize this “certain painter” because “his style