

## Book Reviews

Albrecht, Roberta. *The Virgin Mary as Alchemical and Lullian Reference in Donne*. The Apple-Zimmerman Series in Early Modern Culture, eds. Phyllis Rackin and Carole Levin. Selinsgrove PA and Cranbury NJ: Susquehanna University Press and Associated University Presses, 2005. Pp. 259 + 21 illustrations. \$50.00 cloth.

In her “Introduction: Theological Alchemy” Roberta Albrecht proposes that Donne’s Catholic background influences him to employ “codes,” especially from alchemy, in his poems and sermons. Of special importance are those that apply to the Virgin Mary. She sees Donne substituting a form of Mary that operated within a Protestant framework and that allowed Christians not Roman Catholic to “worship” Mary in another form. Donne believes that names express the essential nature of things and agrees with Ramon Lull that names instruct and express essences. Donne had inherited many images of Mary and employs some in his poems and sermons. Throughout his life he proved her value. In the first chapter, Albrecht says that the Virgin suckling her child was an important alchemical code and that Donne appropriates this emblem. Alchemists had seen a comparison between the birth of the Philosopher’s Stone and the Nativity, especially in the associative alchemical virgin’s milk. Donne knew that the phoenix represented union between Christ and Mary, but he also saw it as alchemical transmutation. He combined these senses to have the phoenix become God residing in the warmth of Mary’s womb. Donne refers to Elizabeth Drury as a hen protecting her chickens and sustaining the world: this image suggests the protective warmth of the Virgin’s womb. Another emblem Donne uses to depict either Mary or Christ is that of the pelican: an important associated symbol is that of the mother who pierces her breast to nourish her children with her blood.

The chapter entitled “Donne’s Doctrine of Mary” further elaborates on Donne’s ideas of Mary and how they and the alchemical “codes” expressing them come from Donne’s Catholic background. Citing several of Donne’s Catholic ancestors and Donne’s familiarity with the work of Lull, Albrecht

argues the strong presence of Catholic influences that appear in his sermons and poems.

The third chapter (“Mnemotechnics in the Sermons and Poems”) argues that Donne wanted to “reconstitute” Mary after she had been “stripped” and “reduced” by Protestants. According to the author, Donne even incorporates her attributes into the Trinity. One model he followed in this technique was Lull, who “wove Mary into a general Trinitarian structure.” When Donne attaches female attributes to Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, and when he attaches attributes of the Trinity to Mary, he is suggesting an Immaculist view—one that his evolving theological alchemy allowed, according to Albrecht. Primary evidence for Donne’s use of Mary in his poetry centers on *The First Anniversary* and *The Second Anniversary*. The “Immortal Maid” of the second poem is the Virgin Mary but also refers to God the Father and to Christ. Albrecht contends that Donne associates his “Idea of Virtue” (mentioned to Ben Jonson), represented by Elizabeth Drury, with specific attributes of the Virgin Mary.

The chapter “*Ars Sacra Poetica*” regards *La Corona* as important in understanding Donne’s sacred art. Albrecht sees Donne employing an emblem of Mary and Christ as phoenix with two hearts joined. His purpose is “to compel his readers to remember fading images from their pre-Reformation past.” In addition, the circular pattern of the work reflects the rosary. Further, Albrecht sees Lull’s idea that reciprocity is written into the contract between Mother and Son reflected in this work. She also emphasizes the importance of “Resurrection,” “Resurrection, Imperfect,” and “A Litany” to perceive fully the extent of Donne’s sacred art using images and ideas from alchemy, Lull, and Paracelsus.

In her “Conclusion: *Schekbina*” Albrecht argues that her study has shown Donne writing England’s pre-Reformation culture into his works. The poem receiving emphasis in this section of the book is “Show me dear Christ, thy spouse.” She contends that, in Lullian terms, Christ represents the attribute of Mercy. He is the one asked to restore the speaker’s vision or memory. Justice, the coessential of Mercy, is the Spouse. She also is Power because she is what all men need, and she is Glory because she is so bright and clear.

Roberta Albrecht succeeds in her specialized study to the extent that she indeed alerts, and ideally stimulates, her reader to respond to more of the pre-Protestant traditions, images, and symbols that obviously were still latent in Donne. The reader can see facets of his writing that are clearly illuminated by Albrecht’s study. To be able to read and understand even

small parts of Donne better is a valuable reward from this book. Certainly there is a limit to which one can apply this inheritance from Donne's Roman Catholic past: the major portion of his work does not reflect the influence of this past at all. So, in a sense, Albrecht's study is not relevant to many of Donne's works. But she does not at all claim this kind of broad application of her study. Obviously, she acknowledges its limited application to some of Donne's art. But scholars and critics of Donne will be indebted to her for the valuable illumination and enrichment of selected works. This is no mean accomplishment in the full storehouse of Donne studies.

Baylor University

Robert H. Ray

Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate. *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378–1417*. University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. Pp. xiv + 240 + 14 illustrations + 2 maps. \$50.00 cloth.

For almost seventy years the popes resided at Avignon on the banks of the Rhone far removed from the diocese of which they were bishops. The return of the pope to Rome in 1376 gave hope that this chapter in the church's life was over and that the *status quo ante* would be resumed. Pope Gregory XI, who bravely brought the papacy back to Rome in the face of much criticism from cardinals and the French nobility, died shortly after his return. The two elections of 1378 produced two claimants to the papal title and the Great Schism. Questions still persist. Who was truly elected pope in 1378—Bartolomeo Prignano, the Italian archbishop of Bari, or the French cardinal Robert of Geneva? Each took a papal name and number: Urban VI, who stayed in Rome, and Clement VII, who returned to Avignon. Then after 1409 another claimant was added to the mix. A contemporary map of Western Europe would have shown a division among these claimants largely upon national lines. The question of the legitimacy of rival claimants soon raised a more practical question: how to resolve the schism? The *via facti* (the use of military force) soon proved impractical. In 1394 the University of Paris gave the opinion that there were only three ways: *via concilii generalis* (by a general council), *via compromissi* (by arbitration), and *via cessionis* (by abdication of the rival claimants). Not until the Council of Constance imposed a solution in 1417 did the schism end. [For the most recent contribution to the literature on this subject see the important article by Daniel Williman, "Schism within the Curia: The Twin Papal Elections of 1378," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59 (2008): 29–47.]

A virtual mountain of literature has appeared on this subject with a considerable amount from the period of the schism itself. Polemicists quickly appeared in the Urbanist and Clementine camps. Their treatises have been the subject of serious students of the schism since the nineteenth century or in some cases, even earlier. Professor Blumenfeld-Kosinski provides us with a study of other, non-polemical literature: visionaries and their "revelations," poets and their allegories, prophets and their apocalyptic views. This material is not generally included in general works on the schism, and her study of these texts is most welcome.

Two things must be mentioned up front. First, as the author points out, large parts of Western Europe are not included here, and, in fact, the book