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Review Essay: Sebald, Hans. *Der Hexenjunge. Fallstudie eines Inquistioonsprozesses*

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audience, are of necessity placed on the outside of the process and become readers watching readers. This genderization of the act of reading thus become 'part of the rhetorical design', an extension of the cross-values in the stories themselves (p 60).

Beecher's edition of Riche's *Farewell to Military Profession* is a significant contribution to Renaissance studies, providing a text heretofore virtually inaccessible as well as a provocative and intelligent excursus into that text.

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Sebald, Hans. *Der Hexenjunge. Fallstudie eines Inquisitionsprozesses*. Diagonal-Verlag, Marburg 1992. 115 pp.

Over the last decades the study of witchcraft has been of major concern for historians, theologians, and cultural anthropologists alike. Particularly Carlo Ginzburg's various analyses of inquisition reports have led the way towards a more comprehensive understanding of fundamental concepts involved in witchcraft. In *Der Hexenjunge*, Hans Sebald approaches the question in a similar manner by investigating a document from 1629, located in the Cornell University Library (Witchcraft Documents from Bamberg), containing the confessions of a nine-year-old boy about his alleged association with demons and witches. He was accused by the inquisitional authorities in Bamberg, Germany, where during his reign archbishop Johann Georg II pursued an extraordinarily brutal and inhumane witch-hunt.

Sebald paraphrases the confessions from its seventeenth-century German into modern German, although a simple transliteration would have been preferable and would have satisfied both the lay audience and the scholarly community. The author provides access to the manuscript and offers an interpretation of the boy's possible motives in coming up with some of his statements. Many of the boy's claims fit stereotypical images prevalent at his time, such as having been baptized by the devil, having travelled through the air on a fork to the witches' sabbath, or having enjoyed sexual contacts under the protection of the devil. Others, such as his report that on one of the rides his friend fell off into water and was transformed into a mouse, are unique. Apparently the boy reflected the general perceptions of witches prevalent in his society. Some claims, however, turn out to be simple crimes committed by the accused and other members of a gang to which he belonged.

For Sebald, the key to a proper understanding of the fanciful statements rests in the typical mythomania often found among prepubertarian children. Taking into account the boy's long imprisonment before his process, his obvious fear of torture, and his total submission under the authorities, the fabulous nature of his confession might be easily explained. But the adult inquisitors shared the same prejudices and superstitions and thus promoted, through their behavior, the boy's perception of the alleged events. In the last chapter, Sebald, analyzing on a different level, notices that various memories from the boy's childhood, as well as his experiences in the gang of young boys before he was apprehended, might have formed

the basis for the boy's account. In further examining these phenomena, the author presents a number of theories as to why the boy believed in his own words. He was certainly, as Sebald comments, an amazing actor and largely in control of his own interrogation.

This is a well-written and fascinating study that sheds new light on witchcraft and the witchcraze in seventeenth-century Germany. Sebald develops a host of potential avenues for approaching the confession, including the psychological concept of mythomania, but he shies away from working towards concrete conclusions. These could have been derived by way of comparisons, but Sebald is almost too fascinated with this one case to widen the basis for his study and to present it in its exemplary nature.

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Del Sera, Beatrice. *Amor di virtù: Commedia in cinque atti, 1548*. Ed Elissa Weaver. Longo Editore, Ravenna 1990. 286 pp.

This carefully prepared edition of a sixteenth-century convent play will interest Renaissance scholars for at least two reasons: (1) it brings to light a fine example of a neglected Italian dramatic tradition, the 'teatro claustrale', and (2) it offers an intriguing psychological view of feminine religious experience. In the same years that Ariosto, Machiavelli, Bibbiena, Trissino, and Aretino wrote their well-known secular plays for educated, courtly audiences, behind the walls of monasteries and convents flourished an equally vital tradition of sacred and religious drama. Largely unpublished, these plays have drawn little attention from modern scholars. Elissa Weaver's critical edition of *Amor di virtù* by the Dominican sister Beatrice del Sera helps to fill this lacuna.

Intended for performance by the nuns of San Niccolò a Prato in Tuscany, *Amor di virtù* draws its story and most of its characters from Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. In her excellent introduction (pp 9–73, in Italian), Weaver explains Del Sera's skillful reduction and reorganization of Boccaccio's long narrative to adapt it for the stage. The play's original title, *Amor di virtù, opera fatta da una donna fiorentina sopra il 'Filocolo', nella considerazione d'uno animo valoroso nelle virtuose imprese; il quale deliberadamente cercando il fine dell'aurata beatitudine, perviene alla cognizione di Dio*, states clearly the intended Christina allegory. Weaver's sensitive reading of the play's additional themes, however, reveals an autobiographical subtext that mixes worldly, secular concerns with the spiritual. In the motifs of imprisonment and the power of money, Weaver finds a strong criticism of the forced vocation of young women. Del Sera was herself a victim of this practice, common among Florentine families who could not maintain their wealth and social station and at the same time provide adequate dowries for their daughters. In the love story of Aurabeatrice, Del Sera's *alter ego* and the play's protagonist, Weaver finds both an allegory of the soul's unison with God and a dramatic, psychological exploration of the romantic experience impossible to the author in real life.