

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Prodan, Sarah Rolfe. Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism: Spirituality, Poetry, and Art in Sixteenth-Century Italy

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Volume 38, Number 1, Winter 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1088714ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i1.22805>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Saslow, J. (2015). Review of [Prodan, Sarah Rolfe. Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism: Spirituality, Poetry, and Art in Sixteenth-Century Italy]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 38(1), 191–194.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i1.22805>

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metaphors of *imitatio* as metaphors. His deconstructive analysis of the literary mechanisms of *imitatio* marks his radical break with a broader cultural faith in the correspondence between human signs and transcendent realities. In the absence of stable, collective meaning, it becomes the responsibility of the reader to stir up the fallen affections and engage in a search for transcendent truth that can never be complete. The body does not gesture to the transcendent, but rather to the subject's desire for transcendence.

One of the strengths of Perry's research is the attention she devotes to her contextual sources. Placing equal interpretive weight on martyrologies, polemical treatises, and devotional handbooks, her study offers fascinating revelations about the interplay between public and private, elite and popular, Catholic, Anglican, and Puritan—eliding traditional critical binaries. If Elizabeth Cary seems at first like the lone Catholic woman out, Perry's analysis demonstrates the usefulness of examining early modern women authors outside a universalizing gynocentric continuum. Her study also suggests directions for future research: What use (or misuse) did the multitude of unknown readers, so feared by Sidney and his successors, make of the *imitatio Christi*?

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Prodan, Sarah Rolfe.

Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism: Spirituality, Poetry, and Art in Sixteenth-Century Italy.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xiii, 251 +15 ill. ISBN 978-1-107-04376-3 (hardcover) \$99.95.

Pity the poor literary scholar who attempts to hack through the dense jungle of intertextuality that is the poetry of Michelangelo. The artist-author drew inspiration and imagery from a plethora of disparate sources, in a syncretic *ambiente* where every cultural vine was entwined with every other. Sarah Prodan succeeds with exemplary thoroughness, sensitivity, and balance in laying out the imbricated components of Michelangelo's poetic imaginary, from the canonical—Dante, Petrarch, Ficinian Neoplatonism—to the familiar but less exhaustively explored, particularly St. Augustine, the Catholic Reformation, and the

realm of popular piety, such as sung *laude* (which Michelangelo would have heard in the milieu of Lorenzo de' Medici, himself an author in this genre). While sympathetic to the wide-ranging historiography of approaches to his life and artistic output, Prodan emphasizes the centrality to his spiritual quest of the Catholic reform movement, specifically its stress on Augustinian conceptions of the role of grace and faith in the individual sinner's struggle for salvation.

Prodan's approach is almost cinematic, effectively shifting between sharply focused analytic close-ups of individual poems and wide-angle shots panning synthetically over the surrounding cultural landscape. Her book is comprised of two related units: first, a four-chapter case study of the overlapping concerns and motifs in poem 18, whose frustrated yearning for ascent to mystical union with the divine is expressed in multivalent imagery that closely parallels, among significant precedents, "both Augustine and the first canto of *Inferno*" (20). The second half looks beyond text to context, with another four chapters examining how Michelangelo's work shared themes and sources with the circle of reform-minded Catholics centred in the city of Viterbo, in which his *amico* and muse Vittoria Colonna played a key role.

Prodan's close readings of individual poems are precise, exhaustive, and alert to their manifold layers of sources, allusions, and intellectual context. Her ingenious and richly detailed exegesis of poem 18 probes the key line, over-stuffed with symbolism, in which Michelangelo laments the multiple barriers to salvation: "The sea, and the mountain, and the fire with the sword." She convincingly interprets this series as linked metaphors for life's stormy voyage of temptation, the soul's yearning for heavenward ascent, and the giving or withholding of divine grace. She is not concerned to declare a victor among variant interpretations, but to harmonize them; as she observes, "The spirituality of the Italian Reformation was Augustinian as well as Platonic and Pauline" (2).

Full disclosure: Prodan utilizes throughout her project the translations of Michelangelo's poetry by this author. It is both flattering and disconcerting, even humbling, to read such learned and probing line-by-line analysis of what are, in one literal sense at least, one's own words; but it also provides a rare vantage point from which to attest to the acuity and accuracy of her interpretations. For numerous verses, she clarified motifs and emotions whose ambiguity or obscurity I had long struggled with; I confess that there were even a few passages where her renderings corrected my own partial understandings.

In part 2, “the literary analysis [...] is [...] followed and complemented by a study that is historical and biographical” (86). Turning from the poet’s literary persona to his literal person, she lays out the Viterbans’ reformist program through their network of individual interactions—e.g., the literary exchanges between Colonna and Michelangelo—and the group’s connection to such vernacular texts as the pious, hortatory treatise *Il beneficio di Cristo* (chap. 5). Here Prodan’s panoramic vision is as inclusive and perceptive as her close readings. She makes clear, for example, that however well-intentioned the Viterbans’ devotion to the doctrine of justification *sola fide*, such ideas skirted heresy and were investigated by the Inquisition, which placed the *Beneficio* in the first catalogue of prohibited books in 1549 (chap. 5). This section skillfully unifies theology, esthetics, poetics, and even art history: Prodan cites approvingly recent studies suggesting that Michelangelo’s religious drawings for Colonna were circulated among their fellow *spirituali* as inspirational, possibly even propagandistic embodiments of their controversial beliefs.

Her inclusivity flags in only one area, that of gender and homosexuality. Guilt over forbidden eros is a crucial ingredient of Michelangelo’s religious torment (as it was for Augustine), yet the principal object of his erotic affections, Tommaso de’ Cavalieri, is mentioned only twice. Cavalieri was not directly involved with the Viterbans, but he was an intimate friend of the artist during these same 1540s, and he was receiving poems that exalted his potential as beloved to elevate Michelangelo spiritually—the same theme Prodan so carefully attends to in his contemporaneous verses for Colonna—in male-male terms. The radicality of this gender-bending device—it is often unclear whether Michelangelo is addressing him or her—was as suspect as the Lutheranizing of the *spirituali*, and merits more than passing acknowledgment.

Overall, this volume offers the most comprehensive and integrated discussion of Michelangelo’s spiritual poetry since Robert Clements’s magisterial *The Poetry of Michelangelo* (1965). However, Prodan’s signal contribution is not paradigm-shifting new observations; she modestly characterizes her goals as “a more nuanced understanding” (79) or “a more sensitive examination” (84). Rather than a revisionist attempt to deconstruct and rebuild the house of Michelangelo studies, she has added an elegant surrounding portico that ties its existing rooms together and provides them access to each other.

One might compare her project to modern physicists’ quest for the Unified Field Theory of all natural forces. By the end, this book synthesizes,

contextualizes, and reconciles all previous readings, demonstrating that “Italian evangelism was Neoplatonic, Augustinian, and Pauline in nature—a confluence of monastic and mendicant piety to which Valdesian, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Erasmian influences were added,” and that, in Michelangelo’s oeuvre, all these streams contributed to celebrating “the ascent paradigm at the heart of the Christian spiritual tradition” (155).

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Rhenanus, Beatus.

Epistulae Beati Rhenani. La Correspondance latine et grecque de Beatus Rhenanus de Sélestat.

Édition critique raisonnée, avec traduction et commentaire. Vol. 1 (1506–1517). Ed. James Hirstein with Jean Boës, François Heim, Charles Munier†, Francis Schlienger, Robert Walter† et al. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013. Pp. clxiii, 941. ISBN 978-2-503-51358-4 (hardcover) €185.

This volume presents the first fruits of a team of scholars who have been working over the last decade-and-a-half on a critical edition of all the surviving Latin and Greek correspondence to and from the Alsatian humanist Beatus Rhenanus (1485–1547), along with translations of all of the letters into French. Beatus was a friend of the leading lights of the Northern Renaissance—such as Erasmus, Jakob Wimpfeling, and Sebastian Brant—and collaborator with presses famous for producing editions of classical literature and criticism, such as Mathias Shürer in Strasbourg, Josse Bade in Paris, and Johann Froben in Basel. He was active as an editor of ancient Greek and Latin texts. He was also responsible for the *editiones princeps* of the works of the Roman historian Valleius Paterculus and the Church Father Tertullian, as well as important critical works on the Roman historians Tacitus and Titus Livy. Despite these credentials, Beatus was ignored, for the most part, by twentieth-century scholars. This project will make it impossible for scholars to ignore him any longer.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, scholars interested in Beatus and his circle have had recourse to a one-volume edition of the correspondence