

# Renaissance and Reformation

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### D'Elia, Una Roman. Raphael's Ostrich

Damiano Acciarino

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rigid generic distinctions give way to more flexible definitions of what counts as literature versus what counts as life. The narrative of young queens being groomed to play their part on the world stage through an actual travelling itinerary of dramatic pieces performed at stops along the way—not to mention the tragic eventuality of their later death in childbirth, only to be replaced with shocking rapidity by newly eligible child brides—forces us to rethink many received notions of theatre as limited by a proscenium arch.

Perhaps the book's most effective "rescue" operation is conducted by Susan Paun de García to rehabilitate another part of María de Zayas's legacy. As the author notes, several memorable literary characters crafted by Zayas, such as her particular take on the miser or the *pícaro*, were translated, adapted, and absorbed into mainstream European literature without so much as a nod in the direction of their creator. It is time to give this early modern female writer credit where it is due.

A few minor errors mar this otherwise praiseworthy essay collection, notably the reference in the introduction to the *Celestina* as an early Renaissance novel. As the book's first printed title pages announce explicitly, it is a *tragicomedia*. Nonetheless, this is a valuable book and one which deserves to be taken seriously, as do the theatrical foremothers whose contributions it honours.

HILAIRE KALLENDORF  
Texas A&M University

**D'Elia, Una Roman.**  
***Raphael's Ostrich.***

University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015. Pp. xvii, 251 + 70 colour, 130 b/w ill. ISBN 978-0-271-06640-0 (hardcover) US\$74.95.

The purpose of this book is to describe the multiform ramifications of Renaissance culture through the diffusion and reception of an image: the ostrich. Divided into eight chapters, the work retraces the many appearances of this animal in artistic, literary, and erudite contexts, mostly focusing on the continuous exchange between verbal dimension and visual outcome.

The author begins with a brief overview on which sources treated, mentioned, or described the ostrich in antiquity (Egyptian, Greek, Latin, and biblical) and during the Middle Ages, with stress on encyclopedic collections and bestiaries (ch. 1: “A Brief History of the Ostrich: Antiquity and the Middle Ages”). According to D’Elia, this cultural pathway illustrates how ostrich imagery developed from antiquity to the Renaissance. Such a premise is necessary in order to understand the presence of ostriches in written and artistic works between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. A first example comes from the Montefeltro court in Urbino and Gubbio (ch. 2: “The Eagle and the Ostrich: The Court of Urbino”): here, the flightless bird was used as an emblem for the family because of its ability to eat and digest iron, and was featured in theatrical plays (the *intermezzi* of Baldassarre Castiglione for Bernardo Dovizi’s *Calandria*). This leads to the main point of the book. In fact, Urbino represents the environment in which Raphael could have been inspired for the representations of his ostriches, especially the one developed as an attribute of Justice in a mural painting in the Vatican Loggias (ch. 3: “Pope Leo X and Raphael’s Ostriches”). Such an invention was probably fostered by the presence at the papal court of scholars deeply acquainted with Horapollo’s book on the interpretation of hieroglyphics (Valeriano, Bembo, Giovio), rediscovered a few decades earlier. In Horapollo’s work, the bird was associated with the concept of justice because its feathers were believed to be of equal length—and thence became one of the emblems of the Medici family. D’Elia investigates the later occurrence of the ostrich in the paintings of Giovanni da Udine and Giulio Romano (ch. 4: “Raphael’s Heirs”), also with a digression in literary works (including Ariosto). Later still, the animal became a symbolic figuration of the Farnese family (ch. 5: “Farnese Ostriches and Vasari’s Raphael”), as demonstrated by its depictions by Giorgio Vasari and Federico Zuccari, respectively for the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome and Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola. Around the mid-sixteenth century, the ostrich was loaded with new meanings, becoming in some cases also an attribute of fortune (ch. 6: “Fortune Is an Ostrich: Discontent in the 1550s and 1560s”). This latter interpretation emerges from a reading of Anton Francesco Doni, which had repercussions also in the mural paintings of Villa d’Este in Tivoli. In the post-Tridentine period, the ostrich was still a constant feature in figurative art (ch. 7: “Curiosity and the Ostrich in the Counter-Reformation”). The core of this chapter is dedicated to the Milanese environment where the cultural and

political influence of the Borromeo family was most felt. Almost at the same time, the ostrich became an object of study in natural philosophy, which started conjugating antiquarian erudition with the rising empirical investigation (ch. 8: "Taming the Ostrich: Ripa and Aldrovandi"). This "scientific" vision was further developed in Conrad Gesner's and Ulisse Aldrovandi's works. In this same section, D'Elia also analyzes Cesare Ripa's iconological discussions (where the ostrich apparently follows traditional patterns).

In her book, D'Elia overlays different perspectives on the topic, which could be summarized in four major points.

First, the genesis and impact of Raphael's invention and representation of the ostrich as an attribute of Justice. D'Elia identifies at least seven images inspired by this archetype, listing also the several attempts of each epigone to add further original elements to the pattern. Vasari's ostrich, for example, which was openly inspired by Raphael's, was the only one to clearly use a female figure in the allegory of Justice. The thread of this iconography involves works from artists ranging from Baldassarre Peruzzi (1523–33) to Luca Giordano (1685), unveiling unknown dynamics of the transformation of images based on the spirit of the times.

Second, the ostrich as a grotesque commonly used throughout the entire Renaissance. Here, D'Elia explains the peculiar meaning of this image in contexts where the symbolic architecture appears extremely cryptic. But at least one addition should be made: according to Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1592 and 1603), the ostrich in the grotesques depicted on the ceiling of the Uffizi could represent "gluttony" (205), though this interpretation should be cross-referenced with another edition of Ripa's book (the one published in Siena by the heirs of Matteo Florimi in 1613). This edition is further expanded (the ostrich is mentioned six times compared with the four in the previous ones); and one of these supplements explains, also thanks to an engraving, that the animal could symbolize "digestion" (188–89).

Third, the ostrich as a symbolic feature in *imprese*, where several interpretations of emblems in relation to their addressees are given. This very interesting approach to the iconographic uses of the bird could be enriched with other examples of emblems, including those collected by Joachim Camerarius in *Symbolorum et Emblematum ex Volatilibus Centuria* published in 1596 (17–19), and those found in the database *Emblematica Online* (<http://emblematica.grainger.illinois.edu/>) browsing the word "ostrich."

Fourth, the ostrich in naturalistic representations, which exclude symbolic or allegorical meanings, focusing on the bird intended as a living creature. Such interest seems to begin with Raphael's *Creation of the Animals* in the Vatican Stanze (1518–19) and reaches its peak during the Counter-Reformation; the author refers to the reproduction in natural scale of an ostrich in the polychrome sculpture of the bird in the Chapel of Adam and Eve at the Sacro Monte of Varallo, and to many other engravings of the period. This is a very crucial point because it shows how Renaissance curiosity towards nature could be perfectly combined with a Christian spirit. In this light, the author's claim that Breughel's *The Four Elements* (1617–21) depicts a powerful and detailed nature in order to “hunt for the Christian truth behind the profane world” (181) or to express patron Federico Borromeo's “interest in the new science” (184). In this reviewer's opinion, during the Renaissance, nature was perceived as symbol itself in line with Paul's *invisibilia Dei per ea, quae visibilia facta sunt, cognoscuntur* (Rom. 1:20), a point already made by Giuseppe Olmi in his *L'inventario del mondo: catalogazione della natura e luoghi del sapere nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992, 157–64). Also, one should keep in mind, as D'Elia in fact does, that Federico Borromeo was raised by Gabriele Paleotti, the theorist, in Paolo Prodi's words, of naturalistic/historical realism (Paolo Prodi, *Il cardinal Gabriele Paleotti*, vol. 2, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1967, 537–39), whereby the notion of science could not be secluded from a historical approach to classical and medieval tradition.

DAMIANO ACCIARINO

University of Toronto

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

**D'Elia, Una Roman, ed.**

***Rethinking Renaissance Drawings: Essays in Honour of David McTavish.***

Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2015. Pp. 409 + 147 colour ill. ISBN 978-0-7735-4636-3 (hardcover) \$125.

To honour David McTavish (1943–2014), his colleagues at Queen's University invited twenty friends, students, and colleagues to contribute essays on Renaissance drawings—the subject to which he contributed the most, as an