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BOOK REVIEW

Jessica Rosenberg. Botanical Poetics: Early Modern Plant Books and the Husbandry of Print

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In *Natural Magick* (1658), a work of popular science translated from the Italian *Magia naturalis* (1558), Giambattista Della Porta claims that "not onely every Tree can be ingrafted into every Tree, but one Tree may be adulterated with them all" (58). The horticulturalist is a "magician" and "takes his sundry advantages of Natures instruments, and thereby either hastens or hinders her work, making things ripe before or after their natural season, and so indeed makes Nature to be his instrument" (74). From our modern vantage point, we can recognize that Della Porta overpromises what is possible when combining plants that are not of the same genus, but the spirit of potential experimentation, innovation, and augmentation that he expresses pervades the horticultural discourse of the early modern period. Pairing the power of plant life with the power of human intervention might offer astonishing, limitless results.

Jessica Rosenberg's *Botanical Poetics: Early Modern Plant Books and the Husbandry of Print* investigates the early modern investment in the power of plants alongside the world of print. It considers the role of both the innate and human-assisted capacities of plants in the development of a "botanical poetics," a "theory and practice of inscription that understands books' material form and possible futures on the model of vegetable life" (3–4). In contemplating what plants and books have in common—the many slips at play in both, for instance—Rosenberg examines how thinking about what plants can do inspired poets and printers to think of themselves as visionaries in the style of Della Porta's horticulturalist. They were, as she states, "temporary orchardists" (2). Rosenberg demonstrates how early modern writers understood plants and texts to share capacities of fragmentation, relocation, and cultivation. The aptitude of plants for reassembly and replanting, she argues, provided a template for writing, publishing, and the circulation of texts. *Botanical Poetics* makes fresh, significant contributions to the fields of book history, ecology, the history of science, and literary studies.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which consists of two chapters and a "branch," or a case study on canonical Renaissance literature. In the first part, "Bound Flowers, Loose Leaves: The Form and Force of Plants in Print," Rosenberg concentrates on the proliferation of plant books between 1567 and 1583, the middle years of Elizabeth's reign, and takes into account the material form and circulation of such books. Chapter 1 scrutinizes the many plant books published during this period—what Rosenberg refers to as "the long 1570s" (38)—by considering the graphic and spatial arrangement of their pages in relation to metaphors of enclosure. It also details the horticultural and husbandry terms that are used to envision the books' reception and circulation. Chapter 2 outlines the shared potential force of plants and books under a skilled hand by probing the innate

"vertues" of each. It introduces "virtue" as a rhetorical term borrowed from the lexicon of plants and demonstrates how vegetable virtues might help to shape human action. This chapter's "branch" studies William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in light of the play's many small, botanical moments—the transmission of plants, poems, and poisons—that ultimately portend disaster. Rosenberg deftly combines her previous assessment of nature's virtues with the plant virtues present in the play.

The second part, "Scattered, Sown, Slipped: Printed Gardens in the 1570s," examines poetic gardens and the concerns of both poets and stationers as to who might be given access to them. Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate that the poetic gardens of the 1570s provide readers with the ability to read in a fashion restricted by neither author nor printer. Such freedom was potentially unsettling. The first of these chapters, "Sundry Flowers by Sundry Gentlemen," considers figures of enclosure and circulation: the confines of gardens, books, and even the Inns of Court, where members composed poems named for flowers and gardens. The second, "Isabella Whitney's Dispersals," places Whitney's *Nosgay* in conversation with other printed nosegays that scatter textual and botanical slips, concluding that Whitney's book conjures an exceptionally social imaginative readership, one that envisions dispersed printed copies landing in the hands of a dispersed reading public. The "branch," entitled "How to Read Like a Pig," figures pigs as poor readers of poetry. Through a variety of literary examples but focusing primarily on Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Rosenberg investigates access to literary gardens and the tradition of unappreciative swine invading and trampling them.

Part 3, "An Increase of Small Things," contains only one chapter, "Richard Tottel, Thomas Tusser, and the Minutiae of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*." In this chapter, Rosenberg focuses on literary form, aligning Thomas Tusser's rhyming couplets in *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie* (1557) with Shakespeare's sonnets. Returning to the book's ongoing focus on minutiae, she shows how these couplets tie the work of memory in the sonnets to longstanding traditions in the literature of husbandry. The book's epilogue explores the botanical poetics of Hugh Plat's and Francis Bacon's "experiments," the loosely ordered collections that they name *Floraes Paradise* (1608) and *Sylva* Sylvarum (1626), respectively. An experimental spirit pervades these texts, which are each of great import to the history of science. But the works belong also to an inherited poetic tradition, one in which self-presentation and poetic imagination depend on botanical antecedents. Both authors bear in mind how readers read and that any reader might, through a process of trial or accident, reorder and repurpose slips of text. Overall, the greatest strength of *Botanical Poetics* lies in its consideration of the many complex intersections of plants and people, in the meeting of plant logic and book logic.

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