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Hui, Andrew. The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature

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ceremony in the early modern period, and should be rightly hailed as a major contribution to art and cultural history.

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Hui, Andrew.

The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature.

New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. Pp. x, 282 + 11 ill., 8 colour plates. ISBN 978-0-8232-7431-4 (paperback) US\$28.

In the memorable opening anecdote to *The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature*, author Andrew Hui describes how a Japanese friend's questions while on a walk through the Roman Forum unsettled his cultural assumptions about the significance and purpose of architectural ruins. Readers, like this reviewer, who have perhaps been aware of representations of ruins and responses to them in Renaissance literature but never considered the matter at length, may find that Hui's book invites similar unsettlement; yet it leads to an expanded knowledge and firmer understanding of the relationship between ruins and poetic survival strategies. Providing far-ranging examples across languages, geography, and time periods, Hui argues that ruins, as objects of contemplation in both the material world and literary texts, played a vital role in the development of Renaissance poetics and the topos of poetic immortality in particular. Most intriguingly, Hui contends that, in the Renaissance, thinking about ruins did not lead simply to attempts to monumentalize in poetry but rather to more dynamic conceptions of the life cycle of works—fragmented, reused, and transformed over time.

After a stimulating introduction, part 1 provides two chapters defining and exploring the relations of ruins to poetics and poetry. The first chapter, "The Rebirth of Poetics," surveys the topos of poetic immortality in texts from antiquity and the Renaissance, unearthing, in early modern works such as Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, yearning for reproduction through language alongside the anticipation of future transmutation. The second chapter, "The Rebirth of Ruins," explores the material ruins in Rome and their role in establishing the ruin as a "distinct category of discourse" as well as in stimulating new

approaches to knowledge, literature, and the conception of history during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. These two chapters could prove useful for further study of the poetics of ruins, as they invite application of Hui's insights to different authors and re-examination in other contexts.

Part 2 contains four analytic chapters framed around an author's use of a particular word. The analysis ranges from close philological inspection to wider cultural criticism. Chapter 3, "Petrarch's *Vestigia* and the Presence of Absence," investigates the links between Petrarch's ruminations on the ruins of Rome and lost time, his fragmentary compositions, and his own sense of splintered selfhood. Chapter 5, "Du Bellay's *Cendre* and the Formless Signifier," explores Joachim Du Bellay's approach to the textual fragments of antiquity and his desire to repurpose them for the building of a new French lyric. Chapter 6, "Spenser's *Moniment* and the Allegory of Ruins," examines Edmund Spenser's sense of the limitations of the poetic immortality topos and the development of an "allegory of ruins" in his works. Chapter 4, "The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and the Erotics of Fragments," is the odd chapter out, by far the briefest of the four and structured around a single text, Francesco Colonna's prose narrative, and not the author's use of a particular word.

Hui's ability to discuss a variety of poets writing in different languages—primarily Latin, Italian, French, and English—and in different cultural contexts—of both geography and chronology, with a focus on the fourteenth to the sixteenth century—displays impressive erudition and certainly contributes to the persuasiveness of the book's large-scale argument about the importance of ruins to Renaissance poetics in general. The book's brief epilogue, "Fallen Castles and Summer Grass," even takes initial steps to extend the argument into the context of East Asian poetry, reinforcing the interdisciplinary scope of the project.

The book's wide-ranging analytic eye is not a significant barrier for scholars primarily interested in the literature of a single language, since part 1 is valuable on its own and each critical study of an author in part 2 is fairly self-contained. This anglophone reviewer, at least, found the chapters on Petrarch and Du Bellay stimulating and worthwhile for a novice in those fields. Likewise, the chapter on *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* calls attention to a bizarrely fascinating text. Although Hui builds some connections to the other authors, chapter 6 tends to emphasize how Spenser is different for his interest in allegorical monuments and ruination, and Hui primarily situates

Spenser's approach in relation to English and Irish ruins and ruination, not those of Rome. Alongside the book's transnationalism, Hui takes a philological approach to literature. The book's mining of words for layers of significance can be almost dizzyingly thought-provoking, although on a few occasions it does slow down the reader's progress and obscures the larger argument. Likewise, the copious and diverse examples and references to related ideas about ruins (some from earlier and later centuries) occasionally result in short fragmented sections. However, given the feast of evocative ideas in the book, such criticism is mere crumbs.

In recent years, there has been no shortage of articles and books on the "poetics of [insert topic]" in early modern literary studies. This observation is not meant to be facetious; rather, this growing body of scholarship seems a healthful part of the critical trend to conduct formalist literary analysis of texts within specific historical contexts and in close relation to particular themes and topoi in works. *The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature* is significant not only for its philological emphasis but also for its selection and elucidation of the poetics of a topic not just conceptual (and therefore often nebulous to define) but materially present in the period. Hui's fascinating account of architectural ruins, in the physical world and in texts, grounds and enriches his deft analysis of words and literary forms. The book is written in clear and expressive language. Simultaneously focused and expansive, Hui's study makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship on Renaissance poetics.

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The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome: A Social History of the Papal Interregnum.

Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 200. Leiden: Brill, 2016. Pp. xii, 299. ISBN 978-90-04-31377-4 (hardcover) €154.

The city of Rome is a city of layers. Archaeologically and architecturally speaking, it is a city that has wrestled with—and continues to wrestle with—carving out a contemporary city amid the epic ruins of classical Rome and the