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*Representing War and Violence 1250–1600*, ed. by Joanna Bellis and Laura Slater. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016. x + 219 pp. ISBN 9781783271559.

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## Reviews

*Representing War and Violence 1250–1600*, ed. by Joanna Bellis and Laura Slater. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016. x + 219 pp. ISBN 9781783271559.

*Representing War and Violence 1250–1600*, edited by Joanna Bellis and Laura Slater, brings together nine essays from a range of disciplines, from literary criticism to art history, together with a scholarly introduction. The introduction grapples with the philosophical and epistemological problems associated with ‘representing’ historical phenomena, and violence in particular, as well as introducing the essays themselves. The volume is divided into three, loosely thematic sections: Ethics and Aesthetics; Debating and Narrating; Experiencing, Representing and Remembering.

The opening essay is by Richard W. Kaeuper. His monographs *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999) and *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry* (Philadelphia, 2009) are among the most important scholarship on chivalry and knighthood in the last thirty years. Readers familiar with these works will find little of surprise in this essay, as it is mostly a statement of his key theses about the relationships between chivalric ideologies, violence and religion. It does, however, provide a useful foundation on which the following essays can build their arguments.

Christina Normore provides the first of two excellent works of art history in this volume. She analyses two illuminations depicting the battle of Courtrai (1302) in manuscripts of the *Grandes Chroniques de France*. After contextualising the battle, a humiliating defeat for the French at the hands of common-born Flemings, Normore identifies how the illuminations reflect the political context of their production. The first, made for Charles V of France, recasts the defeat as a chivalric triumph, quite at odds with the actual chronicle text, while the second, intended for Charles VI, emphasises the violence inflicted on the French knights, perhaps to frame Charles’s sack of Courtrai in 1382 as an act of righteous vengeance. The article is accompanied by two full-colour plates of the illuminations in question, which greatly enhance the argument.

The final essay of this section, by Anne Baden-Daintree, is a study on the aesthetics of violence in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Baden-Daintree provides useful comparisons between the *Morte* and other major Arthurian texts, arguing that the poet deliberately lingered on images of violence and wounding to appeal to an audience that found such imagery exciting or appealing. For a reader unfamiliar with Middle English, this essay was somewhat difficult to read, due to the author inserting translations of particular words into otherwise untranslated passages:

And wysse [*teach*] me to werpe [*utter*] owte som worde at this tym  
 That nothyre [*neither*] voyde [*empty*] be ne wayne bot wyrchip till Him selvyn  
 Pleasande and profitabill to the pople [*people*] Pat them heres

A complete translation, either directly beneath the text or in a footnote, as was done in all the other essays in this volume, would have greatly improved readability.

The next three essays are grouped under the heading ‘Debating and Narrating Violence’. First is Andrew Lynch’s analysis of two works by the fifteenth-century English monk John Lydgate: his *Troy Book* and the later *Siege of Thebes*. Lynch argues for a tension between the ‘chivalric’ depiction of warfare as glorious, and ‘clerkly’ concerns about the morality of violence. Rather than being motivated by honour or duty, Lydgate’s heroes are motivated by envy, a cold emotion in medieval thought, closely associated with insanity.

Sara V. Torres’s essay is about another English author, this time from the late fourteenth century, John Gower. Torres explores the various ways Gower’s writings represent both peace and violence. In earlier works, such as the *Vox Clamantis*, the unrestrained violence of rebellious peasantry threatens the peace of England and must, paradoxically, be put down by violence wielded by the young Richard II. In the later *Confessio Amantis*, however, Gower advises the king to avoid wrath and to pursue unity within the kingdom. Finally, in his later works, Gower praises Henry, earl of Derby, as the bringer of a lawful, just peace through his violent usurpation of the throne, to be contrasted with Richard, whose tyrannical behaviour belied his outward policies of peace-making and threatened the unity of England.

This section concludes with a highly detailed study of three illustrations in the thirteenth-century royal manuscript *Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei* by Laura Slater. Slater analyses these scenes of violence in the *Estoire*, examining how their composition and relationship with the accompanying text were intended to convey ideas of good royal governance and the connection between ruler and populace. Again, three full colour plates greatly enhance the argument and allow the reader to appreciate how the artist has used colour to convey meaning.

The final section consists of three historical essays on the remembrance of war in contemporary texts. Anne Curry’s contribution looks at the authorship, creation and purpose of a short chronicle in College of Arms MS M9, created by members of English knight Sir John Fastolf’s household as a memorial of his service in the later stages of the Hundred Years War. Curry has since published a critical edition of this text, with Rémy Ambühl, as *A Soldiers’ Chronicle of the Hundred Years War* (Woodbridge, 2022). The essay reads very much like an introduction to this chronicle, providing contextual information and arguing for its importance as a different kind of chronicle, one that prioritises naming the various commanders over narrative or interpretation.

Matthew Woodcock’s essay is a survey of martial autobiography in Tudor sources. He locates his essay within existing scholarship on autobiographical writings, before turning to an overview of the different military texts produced in Tudor England and how the authors represented their own experience of warfare. Most of these authors are members of the social elite, using autobiography to justify their failures or to appeal for patronage in view of past service, but there is at least one source, by Welshman Elis Gruffydd, that provides a low-ranking soldier’s view of war, as he recounts the Boulogne campaign of 1544–46.

The final essay is by David Grummitt. It has a clear, three part structure, analysing the various ways that English writers represented the fall of Calais to the French in 1558. Early accounts seek to explain the defeat, with accusations of treachery within the garrison and Mary Tudor’s neglectful rule. In the following decades, the defeat was recast as a display

of chivalric heroism, particularly on the part of the commander Lord Grey, who is depicted as a valiant soldier faced with an impossible task. Finally, in the later Elizabethan period, a more rational, critical assessment of the siege followed, by authors such as Edward Hoby, who acknowledged the ability of the French commander, the duke of Guise, and how his conduct could serve as a model for future generals.

While all the contributions to this volume are of a uniformly high quality, as a collection it lacks a certain cohesion. Narrowing the focus, either by discipline or chronology, would have produced a stronger intellectual framework. As it stands, the essays on early modern subjects have very little to say to those on medieval art history, beyond a nebulous shared interest in the practice of violence. Specialists will find the essays in their particular field of interest but it would be difficult to find any individual who would consider the entire collection essential reading.

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