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Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making (review)

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The city also gave rise to seven different groups of *disciplinati*, or flagellants, in the early fourteenth century. All of the *disciplinati* confraternities were founded before the Black Death of 1348, an event usually associated with increases in flagellant activity. Banker argues that the increasing emphasis on commerce in the economic life of San Sepolcro in the fourteenth century precipitated a spiritual crisis there as in other cities in northern and central Italy. The earliest *disciplinati* appeared in Perugia and several other cities in 1260; their absence in San Sepolcro before 1300 may reflect in part the city's relatively backward commercial life. *Disciplinati* associations aimed to purge their members of sinful forms of social behavior, especially those involved with commerce and the vices of city life, like usury. Members did penance for various sins through ritual self-flagellation in processions through town, a commitment to charity, and a closely regulated code of behavior. The purification imposed on members would ensure their salvation and inspire others by example.

Death in the Community provides a valuable portrait of a major part of the religious and social life of a small Italian city. Throughout the book Banker demonstrates a commendable command of his sources as well as an awareness of their limitations. These limitations stem largely from Banker's resolute refusal to strain the evidence beyond its limitations. The book thus delivers less about individual attitudes to death and more about the institutional handling of death by the confraternities of San Sepolcro than one might expect from the introduction. The otherwise commendable focus on sources leads to a degree of narrowness. The book would have profited from a broader discussion of confraternities in medieval life, though the curious reader may find ample material for further study cited in the notes and bibliography. Several appendices give previously unpublished texts of the rules of some of San Sepolcro's confraternities. These minor points notwithstanding, *Death in the Community* makes a fine contribution to medieval social and religious history.

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Harry Berger, Jr., *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. xxiii, 519.

In *Centuries of Meditations* II. 90, Thomas Traherne writes, ''God hath made you able to create worlds in your own mind which are more precious

unto Him than those which He created.'' Harry Berger, Jr. has spent a quarter of a century defining the fictional heterocosms produced by the Renaissance imagination and manifested in its literature, art, and philosophy. His own richly eclectic imagination, as responsive to the manifold implications of modern cricital theory as to Renaissance statements on aesthetic creation and interpretation, seeks out the purposes and perspectives with which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thinkers recreated fictional worlds in order that it may test larger questions of how changing cultural forces govern artistic expression. *Second World and Green World*, a collection of fourteen of Berger's essays, demonstrates that modern interpretative strategies may be blended in such an original fashion as to do homage, rather than violence, to historical texts.

Berger's theoretical approaches are outlined in three essays essential to our appreciation of his textual criticism: ''The Renaissance Imagination: Second World and Green World''; ''The Ecology of the Mind: The Concept of Period Imagination—An Outline Sketch''; and ''Naive Consciousness and Culture Change: An Essay in Historical Structuralism.'' Far from containing the authoritarian brand of academic prose threatened by the colons in their titles, these essays clearly present their author's methodologies. Berger's primary hypothesis is that the Renaissance imagination developed a consciousness of its own working which classical and medieval artistic mentalities lacked. His is not a forced application of phenomenological and poststructuralist theory to an inappropriate historical period, however. Using discussions upon the nature of perspective drawn from theorists in art history, religion, psychology, and sociology, he proceeds to reread Thomas More, Leon Battista Alberti, and even Calvin in order to show that ''The Renaissance imagination proclaimed with increasing clarity that God wanted man to make models, that the tentative and experimental creation of models and second worlds was the chief role of interpretation, the surest discovery procedure'' (59).

The importance of such models receives full elaboration in Berger's readings of Shakespeare, Erasmus, More, Marvell, Milton, Alberti, da Vinci, and Vermeer. His interpretations of *Troilus and Cressida* (''The Observer as Basilisk'') and *The Tempest* (''The Miraculous Harp'') have established themselves within classroom discussion since their publications in 1968 and 1969, of course, and offer the simplest introduction to his definition of the types of models, or ''second worlds,'' which humans construct. Both plays base their fictional worlds on the model of theatrical performance itself; the theatrical order in turn reflects a social order which becomes confused when observed from the perspective of the stage. Ex-

plicit references to its own theatricality remind the audience of each play that it is involved in an act of interpretation no less than are the actors. Participation in the fiction thus alters the audience's view of the "real" world beyond the theater.

If heterocosms serve to define the perils of a real cultural order, they also provide havens from the difficult truths they discover. Berger labels this process "the dialectic of withdrawal and return." The dialectic is most cogently explored in his comparison of More's *Utopia* to Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*. His excellent treatment of the latter describes withdrawal as the retreat into "pastoral misanthropy." The character of Folly urges us to escape the responsibility of a fallen, hypocritical society through self-deception yet leaves us with the option to reject participation in this illusion. More's second world, on the other hand, is one of self-fulfilling misanthropy from which there is no release.

The rest of Berger's essays continue to set up dialectics between multiple heterocosms which delineate the interpreter's biases as a reader. This mutability of interpretative perspective is best argued as he shows how poets and artists loaded their texts with self-reflexive indicators. Marvell, for instance, "stages" his "Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn" as a commentary upon escapism through art and literature. The paintings of Vermeer are "self-conscious pastoral," demanding that we realize the "conspicuous exclusion" of dark or evil elements as they give us fictional pictures which are too ordered, too perfect.

In *Second World and Green World*, Berger touches upon many of the issues currently discussed in theoretical circles, yet always with an eloquence and generous use of example which mark him as a scholar of the Renaissance. Indeed, he stands among the few thinkers who have effectively proven the efficacy of modern theory to early historical periods. If his work has a weakness, it may lie in his claim that intellectuals only began to explore their power as autonomous creators in the fifteenth century. Aesthetic reflexivity is not period-specific but is formulated and utilized according to different cultural needs; it exists in the Middle Ages as well as in the Renaissance. Neither, perhaps, is the ability to distance one's perspective a clear-cut evolutionary development from the "positional perception" of a pre-Renaissance "naive" consciousness. One of the beauties of Berger's radiant thought is that it allows for questions such as these, provoking others to test his fine models in other fields.

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