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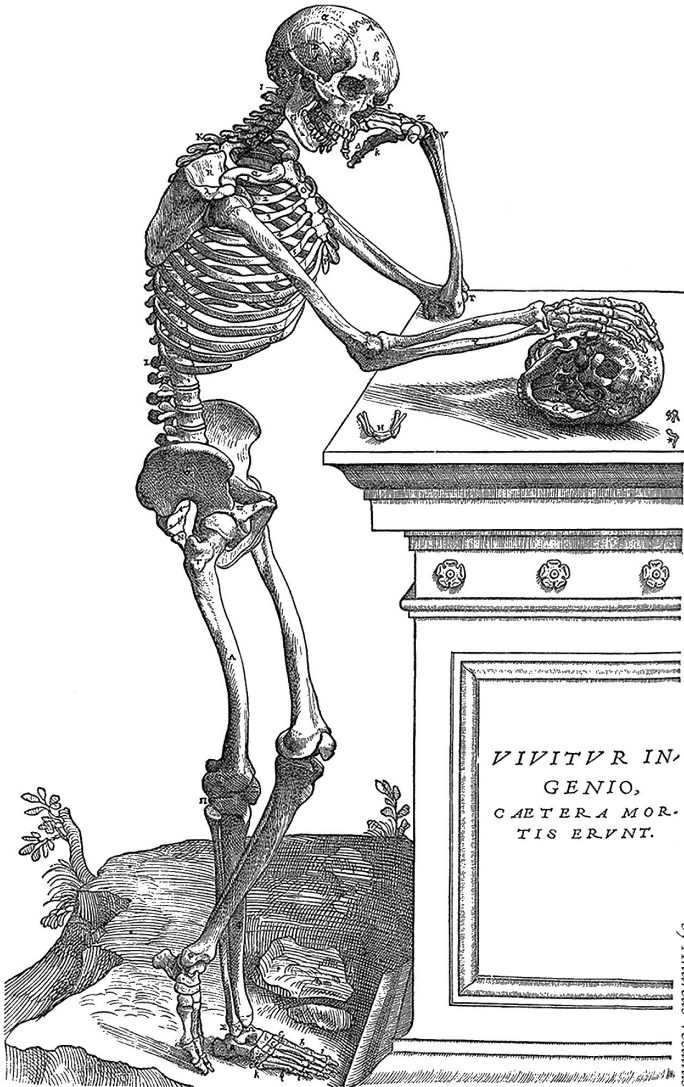
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by Andreas Vesalius

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Book Reviews

The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!

Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenny. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 349 p. \$24.46 CND (Paperback).

The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O! is a collection of ten essays dealing with the myriad of representations and understandings of the Christ Child during the Middle Ages. It is the first in-depth study on the subject, as no books or other thorough works had been written on this topic at the time of publication, and it more or less remains the case to this day. It is therefore accurate to say that this edition is at the forefront of emerging trends in scholarship which take children and childhood as relevant, important, and serious subjects of study.

The book is divided in three main sections. The first section explores the theme of the Christ Child as sacrifice. The four chapters included in this section examine the ways in which the Christ Child was portrayed in sermons, paintings, miracle stories, and Arthurian romances; especially as it relates to his sacrifice for humankind. Particularly fascinating are the essays by Leah Marcus and Elina Gertsman. Marcus analyzes a recurring theme in miracle stories, plays, and sermons which emphasize the link between Christ's infancy and his later sacrifice at the cross, effectively linking the Incarnation with Christ's sacrifice. Gertsman undertakes a similar analysis, but her focus is on the visual arts, examining how Christ's sacrifice was represented and enacted during his childhood.

The second part is dedicated to the relationship between the Christ Child and feminine spirituality. A truly thought-provoking article is Mary Dzon's contribution to the volume, which focuses on the imagery of clothing in the writings on the Nativity of St. Brigitta of Sweden, which emphasized the relationship between Jesus and Mary, as well as the inevitability of Christ's Passion. Dzon's article skillfully draws from textual and visual studies, thus providing the reader with strong evidence to support her claims.

The third and last section focuses on the question of the Christ Child's development. William MacLehose's contribution explores the issue of dentition. He argues that with the rise of childhood as a social category, and with the need to have a more approachable Jesus, as opposed to the stern judge of the Middle Ages' depictions of the Christ Child proliferated in art, literature, and liturgy. As such, the development of a cult surrounding the Christ Child's tooth took place. MacLehose explores this development and the issues that arose as a result.

This volume, moreover, responds well to the need for interdisciplinary research. As such, it manages to bring together textual studies and literature, religious and theological studies, as well as art history to explore the multi-layered role of the Christ Child in Medieval Europe, thus contributing significantly to the field of Medieval Studies. As important and useful as this interdisciplinary approach is, it is also one of the book's main weaknesses. Each chapter, drawing from specific fields and using various methodologies, is a valuable and interesting read from scholars well-versed in their discipline. However, those who are not very familiar with the topic or the disciplines at hand might find themselves a bit disoriented. This is especially the case in chapters dealing with texts, particularly sermons and poems, where authors have included (sometimes-lengthy) excerpts of the original text in Middle English, with no translation available. Whereas this is important for those familiar with and interested in Medieval liturgy and literature, those with no knowledge of Middle English could be excluded from the conversation, left with no opportunity to critically engage with the sources provided, and perhaps discouraged from further delving into the matter. Of course, one could argue that primary texts ought to be studied in their original language, and this is not false: it is an important component of scholarship. It is also important to keep in mind that when book projects are funded by public funds (as is the case of the University of Toronto Press which received support from the Canada Council of the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Government of Canada's Book Fund, not to mention the public funding that made the contributors' research possible), editors and authors should strive to make their research and publications accessible to the layperson. In a world where funding for the humanities and social sciences is increasingly questioned, scholars ought to make their research accessible to whoever wants to pick up a book and read it, rather than perpetuating the exclusive, sometimes alienating circle of intellectual mutual masturbation that academic discourses tend to become.

The *Christ Child in Medieval Culture* remains an important, groundbreaking piece of scholarship. The contributors' significant survey of literature, liturgy, and art have opened up a discursive space for the study of childhood, children, and the Child Christ in the Medieval and Early Modern period. The book is highly relevant for those interested in the Middle Ages, the history of Christianity, as well as religion and the arts; and it can be an interesting point of departure for future studies on the construction of childhood in the West.

Daniel Sáenz
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***Becoming Women:
The Embodied Self in Image Culture***

Carla Rice. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.
408 p. \$24.71 CND (Paperback).

Becoming Women is an ambitious body of research that aims to show how women create and embody their identity living within the imposed standards of a modern Western culture. Carla Rice spent a decade conducting interviews with a diverse group of Canadian women in order to understand how identity is formed. As Rice notes in her introduction, “By locating their stories in the social milieu, this book reframes, from a critical feminist perspective, how diverse women respond to a barrage of messages in their attempt to create an acceptable identity and affirm a self” (5). This book focuses on women growing up between the second and third wave of feminism, in a time when image culture was also growing rapidly.

Rice's book is organized in relation to different intersectional criteria. Each chapter is dedicated to exploring one issue of embodiment; including size, race, disability, puberty, and the modern beauty industry. Rice is a self-declared feminist with a lengthy career in academia focusing on women and gender studies. Her style is informal, and the book is easily readable for those unfamiliar with feminism or the other issues addressed in her