

Jerry Root, *The Theophilus Legend in Medieval Text and Image*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017. £60. 297pp. 60 b/w ill. ISBN 978-1-843-84461-7

The author presents the first broad overview of the legend of Theophilus and its social contexts, as well as its value for the historian of the medieval period. It includes precious data for the study of its social and institutional contexts, notably the role of ecclesiastical elites and their mediation in relationships and in the confrontation between Good and Evil. This power of evocation among the medieval population contributed considerably to the success and wide diffusion of the legend. Following Michael Cothren, Jerry Root considers the Theophilus legend as a highly visualizable and actual source, reflected by the numerous identifications of his patronage. The chapters follow the structure of the legend, each relating to medieval social practices and theology.

The author bases his study on a corpus of five texts (Adgar, Gautier de Coinci, Rutebeuf, and anonymous Anglo-Norman and Lyonnaise versions), occasionally using other sources, notably that of Paul the Deacon. The corpus of images is wider and, owing to the popularity of the legend, more freely selected, but is limited to manuscript illuminations.

In Chapter One, Root explores the homage to the Devil and its more or less detailed and technical description. After some discussion of the ritual of homage, based notably on Le Goff's and Clanchy's analysis, the author points out the importance of the act of writing in images of Theophilus's homage to the Devil. It follows the evolution of the homage ritual in medieval society and enhances the availability of images for the identification of Theophilus. Earlier versions of the legend, written by Paul the Deacon and Fulbert, did not refer to feudal homage but to servitude in general, by denying Christianity. Then, Adgar's version, the first in the vernacular, is analyzed. Here, Theophilus subtly moves away from the Divine and turns himself to the World, spurred on by the Devil who wants Theophilus to become 'his man' in addition to 'his servant', through the mediation of the Jews. According to Root, this points to a new feudal

dimension in the relationship between Theophilus and the Devil; but it is in Theophilus's relationship with the Virgin and with Christ that the feudal oath is more explicitly and technically expressed, implying that he has a similar relationship with the Devil.

A threshold is crossed with the thirteenth-century version by Gautier de Coincy, when Theophilus mentally pronounces words of homage to the Devil, without Jewish mediation, and engages a less passive engagement with restoring his lost position of power. In this text, the Virgin clearly considers her eviction (*déguerpissement*) by Theophilus as a consequence of his 'homage' to the Devil. Theophilus uses strong technical terms (*fait homage et ligée*) when he exposes his mistake to the congregation. The first real and explicit homage scene occurs in an anonymous Anglo-Saxon text written between 1230 and 1250. The narrator there also repeatedly describes the relationship as an homage.

The next text for consideration is Rutebeuf's theatrical version, written in 1260. Root considers that Rutebeuf focuses to such an extent on homage, including its gestural aspects, that the allegorical dimension nearly disappears. Conversely, the text from the later thirteenth century, from the *Lyonnaise* collection, gives very few technical precisions about gestures of homage, only mentioning a written act. Next, Root examines some images of the legend. These are structured in various ways, from one single scene to twenty-seven. For scenes of homage, most of them emphasise the contract, and are mostly accompanied by descriptions of the action or of the document, referring to a written or speech act. Scenes with hands joined are quite rare. Theophilus appears frequently kneeling in front of an enthroned Devil.

The author then deals with written and visualised evocations of the contract, represented in addition to the homage, but also in symbiosis, linked to a wider social phenomenon. Nevertheless, Root notes that Paul the Deacon's ninth-century version does not mention gestures, only the written act and seals. The written act is mentioned by the Devil as more

reliable because it cannot be reversed by Confession, and provides a real reciprocity between the two parties. This reciprocity, linked to the contract, is also emphasized in images.

In Chapter Two, the author addresses how images and texts accompany the willing mutation of Theophilus from semblance to God to dissemblance, from good man to sinner, as witnessed in Besançon MS 551. Visual processes are quite numerous and cover Theophilus position in space (representation from right to left profile for example) and gestures of sadness and covetousness. His environment also moves from a church to a secular building, from a public to a private place, accompanying Theophilus to a self-awareness that leads him to evil. Images also expand upon some aspects of the Theophilus legend, providing a wider context, notably, some negative representation and caricature of the Jewish intermediary as reflection of Theophilus's mutation. Next the author examines Theophilus's self-inspection and awareness of his mistake, followed by the return to *ressemblance* (resemblance, i.e., to God). This return is due to his conscience, the Virgin's intervention, and penitence. The part of the self-inspection compared to divine intervention increases in the versions posterior to that of Gautier.

Chapter Three deals with the intervention of the Virgin and its modalities between corporeal and spiritual realms, notably the role played by three-dimensional image and the sacramental space of the altar. This role is explored in its devotional dimension, as a support for the prayers performed by Theophilus during the forty-day vigil, and as a vector of the representation of apparition. It leads the author to a very pertinent issue dealing with the meditateness between spectator, image and prototype in medieval images and practices of prayer and in a Neoplatonic frame. He also explores the ways in which the power and performance of the Virgin are valorized in images, more specially during the retrieval of the pact. The author then focuses on the language of images in Gautier de Coinci's texts. The fundamental point for the return of Theophilus to *ressemblance* is not

the contemplation of the statue of the Virgin, but her gaze upon him, her divine light that reflects on him as a mirror of God.

In Chapter Four, Root interrogates the new identity of Theophilus provided by the intervention of the Virgin through topics of ‘sacramental action and Neoplatonic exemplarism’. He shows how the reform of Hugh of St Victor, especially the question of individual participation in the sacraments echoes and uses the Theophilus legend at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The theologian affirms effectiveness of individual exercises and sacramental actions in reformation from dissemblance to resemblance, as in the case Theophilus. Due to the comparison Hugh makes between the soul and the church building, an analogy can also be seen in the return of Theophilus to the church building found in some images. Root insists then on the importance of Theophilus’s public repentance in the church as a key moment that transforms him into an example following the bishop’s sermon. Further, the exemplary nature of Theophilus is valorized in images of similar gestures seen in representations of the audience, the author of the text, or the patrons of the books. Another key moment of transformation is the reception of Communion that transfigures him, his face shining like an angel’s, affirming the effectiveness of this sacramental act.

In a pragmatic way, this study replaces the Theophilus legend in all its frames of creation and reception and gives a valuable and subtle analysis, sustained by a rich bibliography and by sixty illustrations. The reader may have preferred more detailed descriptions of the contexts of images, but it is compensated by the quality of the discussion. Thus, this book constitutes a very precise and exhaustive analysis of the subject and achieves a great exploration of various themes, from psychology to sociology, from the feudal framework to the increasingly important role of the Virgin, and the rise of self-awareness. It also provides an impressive analysis of the relationship between word and image, partly conditioned by the perception of the contents of the legend in the narrative display.

Moreover, this study integrates and interrogates pertinently the polysemy of the word imagery, as a support and as a mirror, as material and immaterial matter. This book really highlights a lot of very interesting issues, notably the reciprocity between the legend and its reception frame, perceptible in the images and in changing made in the text, constituting a very fine cross-disciplinary study.

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