

volume includes appendices listing the works included in the *Recueil général des opéras*, a bibliography, and an index nominum.

Bret L. Rothstein. *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xii + 262 pp. \$90.00. Review by MIYA TOKUMITSU, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Much like the artists he discusses, Bret L. Rothstein has created a dense work, requiring of its audience close reading and careful interpretation. His book, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting*, examines four seminal paintings of the fifteenth-century Low Countries and discusses the consequences of representing aspects of Christian spirituality for both artist and viewer. Painterly reflexivity, or the artist's signaling of his own means of representation, is the overarching theme of the book, and this theme provides the terms on which the other issues, including naturalism and patronage, are discussed. The topic requires some patience on the reader's part, but allowing Rothstein the time to elucidate his observations is worth the effort.

Each chapter of the book is dedicated to a single work: Rogier van der Weyden's *Bladelin Triptych* (c. 1445), Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Canon Joris van der Paele* (c. 1434-36), and *Virgin and Child with Chancellor Nicolas Rolin* (c. 1435) and Petrus Christus's *Goldsmith in His Shop* (c. 1449). In the first chapter on the *Bladelin* triptych, Rothstein argues that Van der Weyden's reflexive painting undermines or at least disturbs the "nature and function of optical experience" (184). While the viewer looks at a visually stunning painting, the subjects of that painting, Octavius Augustus, *Bladelin*, the shepherds behind the Nativity, and the Virgin Annunciate, are all having their own, purely spiritual visions. Clearly the "spiritual seeing" of these subjects is more exalted than the viewer's physical seeing of the painting. Yet the painting serves a specific devotional purpose. Exactly what this purpose is and how one should employ the painting are at issue. That such paintings simultaneously enhance and complicate the spiritual aims of their viewers is one of the key paradoxes of fifteenth-century devotional art. Rothstein's discussion of it is illuminating in that he shows the artist beginning to position himself within these paradoxes to determine how these paintings should be used and interpreted.

The second chapter, on Van Eyck's *Van der Paele Virgin and Child*, claims

that painterly reflexivity allows Van Eyck to push the limits of visual and spiritual representation. Again, this painting seems to be a paradox unto itself. Clearly, Van der Paele's vision is motivated by spiritually pure meditation and is unaided by visual stimuli, as evidenced by the canon's removal of his spectacles. Yet this ideal form of imageless devotion is represented by a lavish picture. The painting undermines its very function for both painter and viewer. By showing the canon present with yet physically disconnected from his visionary figures, Van Eyck demonstrates that religious experience is separate from, but more exalted than physical, everyday existence. Ironically, Van Eyck must make pictures to deliver this very message. Naturalism and illusionism receive careful treatment in this chapter, and Rothstein argues that Van Eyck deliberately undermines his own naturalistic style in order to reinforce to the viewer that the painting is a physical object and not, in fact, a journalistic account of a naturally occurring scene.

Chapter three discusses the value of style and images as social currency. By showing Nicolas Rolin, the Burgundian courtier, having a lucid vision of the Virgin and Child, Van Eyck presents Rolin to the world as a devout man, thus elevating his social standing at court. He represents the ideal courtly figure: a man who balances adequately the *vita activa*, represented in the painting by the worldly landscape that was his domain, and the *vita contemplativa*, evidenced by his bookmarked prayer book and extraordinary vision of the Virgin and Child. Despite the elevation of Rolin in the picture, Van Eyck's unrestrained virtuosity reverts the viewer's attention to the presence of the artist, and thus the artist can moderate the picture's interpretation.

This final observation of the third chapter sets the stage for chapter four, which, using Petrus Christus's *Goldsmith in His Shop* as its example, shows sophisticated fifteenth-century painters as asserting their talents to their viewers in their works via reflexivity. These painters "not only tried to answer the paradoxical nature of religious picture-making, but also tried to position themselves socially and intellectually with respect to these challenges" (138). Rothstein also discusses at length a small patch of light that is reflected on Christ's orb in Van der Weyden's *Last Judgment* altarpiece. The reflection appears to be created by the loggias that appear in the Rolin picture and in Van der Weyden's own *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child*. As the *Last Judgment* was created for Rolin as well, Rothstein suggests that this reflection respects Rolin's patronage of the other artist, and also links the altarpiece to his

own *St. Luke*. It is a strategic and clever positioning of the artist in that it both praises his patron's taste and in doing so fully incorporates himself to his patron's aesthetic.

Sight and visibility in Netherlandish painting is not a new topic, but it is observations such as the loggia reflection that make this book both refreshing and useful. Rothstein puts the pictorial density in the context of contemporary thought, drawing heavily on writers such as Ruusbroec, Grote, and Gerson. (It is Gerson whose idea of the *vitae* described above provides the framework for chapter three).

Although there are common threads among the chapters, one still wonders what, aside from their renown, links these paintings in such a way that they would comprise a single book. The answer, and it is an enlightening one, is not simply that the term "reflexivity" appears in every chapter. It is that the reflexive elements of the paintings or "play signals" (184) have become an intellectual point which draws artist and patron closer from their opposite sides of the transaction. Or, in Rothstein's own words: "In each case, painters promote themselves by advancing shared rather than competing expectations [of their patrons], and by underscoring the efficacy of their responses to the challenges posed by those expectations" (187).

Thomas V. Cohen. *Love and Death in Renaissance Italy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004. x + 306 pp. \$27.50. Review by MICHELE MARRAPODI, UNIVERSITY OF PALERMO.

Thomas V. Cohen's *Love and Death in Renaissance Italy* is a compelling and stimulating book which aims to blend historical accuracy with a critical investigation into the social life of Renaissance Italy. Departing from a careful examination of the court papers of the Roman governor of justice during the second half of the sixteenth century, the author singles out six piquant cases of awful crimes and illicit passions taken from the state archives of Rome. The book's strength is to illustrate every single trial in an individual chapter, introduced by a narrative reconstruction of the historical facts which are then followed by brief excerpts from the actual written proceedings. As the author rightly points out, "these court papers are marvellous cultural documents; they open windows onto modes of thought and speech and tell