

Rayna M. Kalas. *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance*.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007. xix + 248 pp. index. illus. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-8014-4541-5.

*Frame, Glass, Verse* is an impure enterprise. Impure first because it mixes scrupulous historicism with a free-ranging philological and theoretical curiosity: it is interested in Renaissance frames, in Renaissance “frames,” and in what “frame” has come to mean for us moderns. Impure also because it refuses to credit attempts, then or now, to elevate the making of poetry above practical making. Kalas’s book approaches Renaissance poesis as a craft, a craft like glass-making, and it challenges us to recognize poetry “as *techne* rather than aesthetics, and figurative language as framed or tempered matter, rather than verbalized concepts” (xi).

Early pages address modern investments in framing. For us, a frame is a boundary, the border of a picture but not the picture; by analogy, a way of separating off a concept or a body of fact in order to think with it as a discreet whole. Kalas probes our idea of a historical period as a frame, and the problems — for Foucault in particular — of explaining the changes that move us from one frame to another. She proposes, as an alternative, “a technology of framing in the place of the epistemology of framing” (21): an “archeological” attention to the development, over time, of the practical arts. Her own archeology begins by establishing what a frame could be ca. 1600. The quadrilateral, alienable frame was still new, and unusual; much more commonplace, and hence available for metaphor, were the frame as infrastructure (like the frame of a barn), the frame as

body (the human frame), and — most challengingly and productively for the argument — framing as “any act of bringing matter into presence in conformity with a design or pattern” (54).

Renaissance framing testifies to an “accession to materiality” (54) in any act of making. A chapter on “The Craft of Poesy and the Framing of Verse” pursues the word through sixteenth-century tracts on poetics, and argues that it reveals a pervasive concern with the materiality of language: how ideas do not master, but rather accommodate themselves to the stuff of words, as a carpenter works with the grain of his wood. If Philip Sidney, on this account, emerges as a mostly obdurate idealist, many others, like Thomas Nashe, cherish a concept of poetry as craft that modern criticism has missed. The next chapter, “The Tempered Frame,” puts this keyword into relation first with “mould” (framing as the mixing of liquid and solid, on analogy with creation) and then “fashion.” It ends with a reading of the “frame of temperance” in book 2 of Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* that insists on moral framing as the mutual tempering of matter and form, sharply distinguished from “the kind of artifice that fancies itself a world of its own invention” (100).

At its midpoint, the book turns from frame to glass, and explores how the trades of glass-making and mirror-making offered themselves as figures for a material poesis. The history of those practices, and the abidingly strange rigid liquidity of glass itself, get a full hearing; among the book’s consistent pleasures is its mastery of craft-language (like the euphonious “roundels of crown glass” [158] observed in a Dürer engraving). The chapter “Poetic Offices and the Conceit of the Mirror” shows what is at stake technologically and socially in George Gascoigne’s preference for a *Steele Glas* over the age’s new glass mirrors. “Poesy, Progress, and the Perspective Glass” considers the persistence of the old technology of the perspective glass — an optical assist to image-makers — alongside the rise of geometric perspective. A last chapter on Shakespeare’s sonnets pursues the way they “register technical and material innovations in glass” (167), and what it means for accounts of the sonnets’ subjectivity to find their optical conceits so richly material.

The sum is a formidable book. One might ask whether the concept of craft is sometimes too narrowly material; there is little about the practical side of *artes* like grammar and rhetoric, and work like Judith Anderson’s on “words that matter” in humanist writing. But our profession has spent a great deal of energy in recent years making inventories of old objects, and arguably, we have collected more than we know what to do with. Kalas — who has chosen her matter, frame and glass, carefully — has made a book that is worth studying as an example of how material archeology and philology may collaborate to bring us nearer both to particular metaphors, and to the practice of metaphor itself, which is after all what matters most in a poem.

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