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Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. x + 269 pp. Four colour plates, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (cl), ISBN 0-8122-3658-0. \$19.95 U.S. (pb); ISBN 0-8122-1806-X.

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Way back in 1860, the cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt wrote that during the middle ages "[m]an was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation--only through some general category;" and medievalists have been annoyed ever since.[1] Burckhardt's underwriting of a certain self-regard about the "civilising" effects of renaissance humanism has remained surprisingly present and almost constant in literary scholarship on that period ever since. People otherwise as divergent as Stephen Greenblatt and Harold Bloom have found renaissance people to be more self-aware than their predecessors, more rounded, more individual--in a word, more like "us." In response, waving the flag for the richness of pre-renaissance culture and thought, medievalist critics and historians have written of the "discovery" of the individual in twelfth-century religious practices, the "development" of the individual in romance literature, a move "towards intimacy" in fourteenth-century architecture and culture, a changed sense of "the individual" in political thought of the later middle ages--and a host of other topics.[2] For literary critics in particular, the project has frequently been conceived as "a whisper in the ear of the early modernists,"[3] often a rather fiercely hissed whisper: "Oi! It doesn't all start with Shakespeare you know!"

This is the context for Susan Crane's book, and it is an important and interesting addition to the debate. As a medievalist interested in further developing the analysis of individuality and selfhood, she brings two (fairly) new moves to the topic: shifting the focus away from religion (where the vast body of work has been) to decidedly secular discourses and, through a mixture of social anthropology and postmodern theory, reconsidering the nature of the "selves" or "individuals" we can see in the late medieval context. Crane's main arena is English and French courtly culture during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (the subtitle might more accurately be amended to "During the *Period of the Hundred Years War*," although some military elements do enter into the discussion). An introduction sets out some conceptual wares (particularly ideas of ritual and performance), and an initial chapter develops theoretical and historical contexts for late medieval aristocratic clothing, including discussion of the symbolism employed by Charles VI of France and Richard II of England. Chapter two deals with "Maying" rituals in late medieval courts, mainly using lyrics and poetry about these annual events. In these rites courtiers (including monarchs) "dressed up in plants, celebrated women for being daisies, and allied themselves with the parties of Leaf and Flower" (p. 39). The function was the production of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital:" using the symbolism of flowers and springtime to emphasize social hierarchy and to distance themselves from the actual agricultural labour upon which that hierarchy depended. The rituals also, Crane argues, incorporated a kind of eroticism: playing with courtly ideas of "amorous law," the flowers become fetishes, permitting a charged movement within and without the demand for sexual order.

The third chapter focusses upon Joan of Arc and her clothing. Here, Crane's aim is to assert that, contrary to most recent opinion, Joan's cross-dressing *did* have implications for her sexual identity, as indeed did her chastity. Donning male clothing was not simply about (for either Joan or her various audiences) a bid for authority; it was also a bid to cite a certain kind of *masculinity* and place it in strange conjunction with a holy virginity. Thus, the concerns of her persecutors with her mode of dress, and their desire, after her execution, to rake back the ashes to show her naked body "to the people, and all the secrets that could or should belong to a woman, to take away any doubts from people's minds" (p. 105, quoting *Le journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*). Joan's self, so dependent upon cloth, is thrust back into flesh.

Chapter four looks at "Chivalric Display and Incognito": specifically, at coats of arms, at the legend of the "Swan knight" (imagined, by his late medieval descendants, as a magical ancestor to Geoffrey de Bouillon), and at those romantic instances where disguised knights win renown for their prowess and chivalry. Most interestingly, on the latter theme, Crane looks at apparently real, military occasions when Edward III of England went incognito (I say "apparently real," as a major source is Jean Froissart). Both heraldry and disguise, as Crane argues, are ways in which knights perform and manipulate their identity, and this was a particularly public kind of selfhood, dependent upon the vision of others. Finally, chapter five considers a different kind of courtly display: the use of *charivari*, interludes, and secular performances (by courtiers) in the king's court. Again, Charles VI and Richard II provide the material, along with the *Roman de Fauvel* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Once again, Crane's argument is that such pursuits provide "intensified situations for self-expression" (p. 140). As she points out in the short conclusion to the book, these rituals have not previously been taken very seriously because, from the Reformation onward, "ritual" has been coded as "falsification." Instead, Crane perceptively suggests, the rituals, dress and ornaments of the late-medieval nobility "are ostentatious indeed, but . . . ostentatious in the functional rather than the pejorative sense: they show forth identity with the serious purpose of accruing renown" (p. 178).

There is a massive amount to think about in *The Performance of Self*, and it is a very thoughtful and intelligent piece of literary scholarship. Its biggest contribution is, perhaps, its resolute focus upon secular, elite issues; for, whilst a number of critics have been thinking about "chivalry" in something like these "self-making" terms, Crane builds a much richer, more textured courtly context within which to think about aristocratic identity. This gives us a world of public selfhood much more richly envisaged than other, narrower works. It also provides what I think is Crane's greatest insight into medieval selfhood: that the "only" that sits innocuously in Burckhardt's dictum ("*only* through some general category") has unhelpfully hierarchized medievalists' responses to the challenge. Rather than trying to yank a transhistorical, ascendant "individual" self into her proceedings, what Crane insists upon is the essential *interplay* between aristocratic subjectivity and collectivity. Other historians (notably Caroline Walker Bynum) have previously pointed to the importance of groups in medieval selfhood, but what Crane adds is the important *tension*: "A kind of individuality—distinct from modern individuality and postmodern subjectivity alike—comes into play at the point of opposition between chivalric brotherhood and that brotherhood's charge to each knight to distinguish himself. The chivalric community both asserts its seamless accord and demands differentiation" (p. 133).

To be frank, that quotation is, for me, so insightful and important that it justifies the price of admission alone, and renders anything further I have to say somewhat quibbling and probably petty. But there are some other things to say. Some are relatively minor: in the opening chapters, there is a certain rather compulsive weaving together of theorists and critics, so that each paragraph becomes an almost parodic web of citation and counter-citation, and Crane's position (perhaps like her medieval subjects) appears hazily in the interstices of these interlocutors. I'm not sure, in chapter three, that the picture of inquisition (particularly that it was purely judicial and not at all sacramental) is quite correct, and this sense of inquisition as punitive rather than curative does rather affect the way in which one understands the production of inquisitorial texts, such as Joan's trial record. This chapter could also have benefited

from a more extended engagement with two recent works that appear very briefly in the footnotes, but which have a fairly profound effect on the argument, namely Karen Sullivan's book on Joan's trial (which provides a broader analysis of the cultural collision between Joan and her interrogators) and Sarah Salih's book on medieval virginity (which argues, from English material and in a more sustained fashion than Crane, that we need to think about medieval virginity as a kind of sexuality).^[4] It may be, however, that in revising her past work (chapters two, three, and four all appeared in earlier versions as articles), Crane left herself insufficient time to update and digest more recent scholarship.

What does bother me somewhat more than these matters, however, is the relationship in *The Performance of Self* between modern or postmodern theory and medieval historical context. To be clear: I do not mean to suggest that "theory" is, *a priori*, a "problem," or that one cannot use modern theorists to explore the middle ages. But I do wonder if some of the tools employed here fit as well as they might; whether, that is, Crane's profound insight into the *specificity* of medieval subjectivity that I quoted above is sustained in all areas of the book. The opening chapter on clothing, for example, tries to position it symbolically via reference to Jean Baudrillard and Marshall Sahlins and compares the economic importance of luxury clothing to coffee and chocolate in the late seventeenth century, using further theorists of capitalism to argue for elite goods as a motor of development. But this approach is in danger of assuming a transhistorical shape to "capitalism" and appropriating theoretical tools that Baudrillard (certainly) and Sahlins (probably) understood to be linked specifically to developments in *late* capitalism. It's not that one "should not" do this; only that one ought to then address the many comparative questions thus begged. In a different theoretical context, I'm not certain that the figure of "the fetish" (in chapter two) necessarily works in the same way in the symbolically- and allegorically-saturated fifteenth century as it does in the post-Freudian twenty-first century.

More broadly, there are points where I'm not convinced by Crane's wider historical context. In chapter one chroniclers' disapproval of "new" styles of clothing are cited in general support for the development of noble "fashion" (and its accompanying socio-economic implications), apparently in ignorance of the long tradition of decrying innovations in clothing found in chronicles and sermons since at least the twelfth century. Playing up the audience for the semiotic riddles posed by Charles VI and Richard II's clothing, Crane quotes M. V. Clarke: "Richard's subjects could read a coat more easily than they could read a letter" (p. 25). But Clarke was writing in 1937, encumbered by a number of assumptions about standards, development, extent, and implications of medieval literacy; Crane should know better.

In chapter two, the elite Maying rituals, in their erotic charge and non-economic emphasis, are placed in unexplored contrast with non-elite springtime rituals. Apart from wondering whether popular rituals really lacked the eroticism Crane sees in the elites', I'm also uncertain about whether courtly elites really were "disconcerned [*sic*] with the productive implications of spring" and hence with the success or failure of the harvest (p. 46). Whilst the elites undoubtedly were "elite" by virtue of their exploitation of surplus value from labour, and whilst bad harvests would rarely if ever lead to hunger or starvation for these noble few, the fact that their wealth was, for the most part, intimately connected to agricultural production makes the idea that they had a total lack of concern at least somewhat doubtful. I don't think we can see fifteenth-century nobles simply as the direct counterparts of multinational CEOs, snorting coke (or whatever it is that CEOs do) off the backs of a "flexible" labour force. There are more complex, *historical* contexts for the material and symbolic economics of hierarchy. This is also the case for cross-dressing: "late medieval cross-dressing and transvestism could both seem as radical as the modern decision [to change sex and gender through drugs and surgery]—as radical in their rarity, perceived extremity, and the profundity of their implications for sexuality" (p. 73). Was cross-dressing as rare, and did it always have profound implications for sexuality? The various uses of costumed role-change (boy bishops, midsummer games, disguise in romance, riotous assemblies, not to mention religious drama) perhaps provide further discourses within which such performances might have been read. It would be a mistake to take Joan of Arc's trial as a straightforward index for attitudes toward *anything*, not least clothing.

These caveats aside, this is a very interesting book, and a very imaginative addition to discussions of medieval subjectivity, and indeed to elite medieval culture. In the final two chapters in particular, Crane shows us some very important and highly nuanced elements of the life of the court.

NOTES

[1] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. O. Moore (1860. London: Phaidon Books, 1965), p. 81.

[2] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (London: SPCK, 1972); Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Philippe Braunstein, "Towards Intimacy: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 2, *Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. G. Duby, trans. A Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 535-630; and Walter Ullmann, *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1967).

[3] David Aers, "A Whisper in the Ears of the Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the 'History of the Subject'," in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writings*, ed. D. Aers (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 177-202. I am imagining, rather than quoting, Aers's "whisper."

[4] Karen Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001).

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