

writer of that particular piece, it would have spared him worrying about what Zenger and Brueggermann have to say about these difficult psalms. It would also have made it much easier to present this psalm to modern, middle class congregations, shocking them not by the 'naughty language' but by bringing home to them the awful possibility that they might themselves sometimes be the object of such terrible curses.

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WRITING RELIGIOUS WOMEN: FEMALE SPIRITUAL AND TEXTUAL PRACTICES IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND edited by Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead, *University of Wales Press, Cardiff: 2000. Pp. 272, £14.99. pbk*

This is a very interesting volume edited by two specialists in Medieval English Literature, who gather together ten essays on the subject of 'female vernacular theology', with a particular focus on texts in circulation in England during the period 1220 to 1500 AD. Because the majority of these texts were not originally written in English, the fact of their translation is indicative both of the influence of Latinate culture on the developing spirituality of English religious women, and of the distinctly pastoral intentions with which the material was directed for wider use. The influence of the Fourth Lateran Council is noted here, as theological study and spiritual practice were deliberately moving from hermetic monastic and university contexts out into the intellectually mixed and evangelistic environment of medieval England. These brief comments found in Reveney's introduction offer a quite fascinating glimpse into the early distinctiveness of English theological thought.

To focus on themes that emerge at the interface of female spiritual and textual practices in this period is a significant step forward within an expanding body of scholarship. The references to available collections of primary texts that have been edited since the 1970s give the reader a useful guide to the resources. A number of these have been shaped by feminist interests or by needs of the undergraduate syllabus. Influential in the interpretation of this material have been scholars like Carolyn Walker Bynum and Barbara Newman, whose interests are primarily historical and ideological, and thus 'of necessity there is little close engagement with the specific circumstances of English spiritual behaviour' (p. 8). This comment by Whitehead suggests that the unique agenda of this collection will open onto another understanding of what it is to be 'timely', of how it is that the receiving, circulating and reading of texts shape, and are shaped by, the patterns and requirements of spiritual formation in particular circumstances. Because formation has been a subject of some controversy not only amongst feminist scholars committed to personal autonomy, but also for those who suspect it as the artifice by which cultural hegemony is realised in the total institution of religious life, this collection offers a refreshing approach to the issues.

The essays are grouped into four sections. The first, with an essay

593

on the influence of anchorite spirituality upon later lay piety, examines the way in which the *Ancrene Wisse*, the rule for the devotional routine of anchoresses, prepared the way for the 15th century Book of Hours as a breviary for the laity. Bella Millett shows how the 13th century rule makes provision for lay women to lead 'an extra-monastic, relatively unstructured form of religious life' while 'being supported by unofficial legislative guidance and (in the later stages) pastoral care from members of the recently established mendicant orders, particularly the Dominicans' (p.28). The requirement for observation of the canonical Hours amongst these women who live in 'an intermediate position' (p. 31) is likely, she argues, to have accelerated the production of guidance for lay people, and thus offers a 'paradigm' of the evolution of monastic devotions into lay life (p.32).

The second section on Carthusian links with female spirituality, in its three essays, subverts the restrictions of modern gender categories by placing us before textual evidence of cross-reading, sex change, and uncertain identities to be found in texts copied or compiled in a Carthusian milieu. The question whether there were women in the Charterhouse is ambiguously posed by Marlene Cré to throw into confusion our assumptions about physical distinctions and bodily presence. Whether Julian of Norwich or Marguerite Porete were actually present in person or literally in text, their spirituality shaped that of the lay brothers and novices who read and were formed by their writings. Alternatively, the change of sex from the male-oriented Latin text of the *Horologium sapientiae* to the compilation of the *Speculum devotorum* for the Bridgittines of Syon reveals, according to Rebecca Selman, not only an encouragement of the special spiritual status of women, but early signs of indifference to gender as a measure of eucharistic effectiveness (p. 74). These transgressions are understood, through a study by Anne McGovern-Mouron of the seldom-examined *Manere of Good Lyvyng*, to be steps in that 'transcendental metamorphosis' by which 'a new self' is found 'in a new place', a reformation that even reverses the authoritative relation of teacher and student (p. 90-92). One need only consider the startling use of the figures of Heloise and Abelard in the recent film *Being John Malkovich*, a frolicsome tale of the bending of gender, to begin to appreciate how these middle English texts might yet come to illuminate our postmodern lives.

Such themes are also explored in the third section on the representation of femininity in Anglo-Norman and Middle English religious poetry. The two essays here on images of Mary, as a fortress and shield in the *Château d'amour* of Robert Grosseteste, and as the Yate of heaven in widely circulating religious lyrics, highlight a number of the difficulties, ambiguities and anachronisms encountered in interpreting this material. Whitehead, who claims that 'the troping of the Virgin as a fortress is an exercise in masculinization' (p. 123), considers the implications of this 'erasure of bodily reality', and offers counter-readings to those conceived in Freudian categories. That the 'enclosure' of woman can be understood

as a metaphor for gendered architectural space, a moral framework for ordering the virtues, an expression of widespread social confrontations, and a theological protection of ontological difference, are all richly suggestive possibilities that bear further scholarly consideration. A similar subversion of recent interpretative work occurs in the second essay, in which Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou shows how the body is not the material possession of an agent subject who inhabits and directs it, and who is morally responsible for its condition, but is rather that by which life, death and the divine come to dwell in us. The semiotics of the female body in vernacular devotional verse reveals the transposition of 'the body of Mother Earth in which the dead body of the believer is placed in order to dissolve and disintegrate' (p. 149), into the body of Christ in which the believer enters 'the Chamber of the Trinity' (p. 150). So the feminine body is disclosed as a conduit, 'a hole into heaven' that is found in the female figure of Mary and of Christ. How poignantly these things speak to us for whom the soul has become the body's prison.

Veneration, performance and delusion in *The Book of Margery Kempe* are considered in the four closing essays by Samuel Fanous, Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, Renevey, and Richard Lawes. These are studies in the spirituality of Margery's writings and activities, and in her location within the contemporary religious milieu. Perhaps the final essay (by Lawes), drawing upon conceptions of psychological disorder, fits least well with the more innovative approaches in the rest of the book. Renevey's analysis of Margery's translation of her visions of Christ into her performing body, uncovers her special 'contribution toward the creation of a new grammar' of mysticism. He thereby enhances a subject which has figured prominently on the theological agenda for at least a century by opening up a new way of speaking about it.

This review is already too long, but is an attempt to point the reader towards some of the many interesting things that are to be found within this collection, and to urge its closer investigation by those who would let voices of the past teach us how to think.

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THE MAN WHO FOUNDED CALIFORNIA: THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED JUNIPERO SERRA by Archbishop M.N.L. Couve de Murville, *Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2000 Pp.140, illustrated. Hbk. £19.50*

No visitor to California can fail to be enchanted by the missions that form a line for the length of the State and whose names are familiar to all due to the cities that grew up around them: the splendid natural harbour of San Francisco, that so amazed its discoverers; or the calm and palm trees of Santa Barbara, perhaps the most beautiful of all. The missions were founded by a team of Franciscans sent from their seminary in Mexico City in 1769, under the leadership of Junipero Serra. California had been superficially explored by Spaniards who had named it after a

595