modern historiography (she takes particular issue, for example, with Brian Levack's argument that demoniacs were merely acting out a sort of cultural performance, simply playing out a role given to them). The book's openness to this sort of variation – in comparing the Italian and Swedish cases, she also finds distinct regional variation, for example in the way the cases in these diverse locations considered and imagined political authority and allegiance – becomes its great strength, and indeed its primary contribution to the field.

In this volume, we see that 'gender was seen as a multifaceted, not binary, system' (p. 46); that 'demoniacs came from all walks of life, and manifested variable symptoms, [and so] the responses to their afflictions also varied' (p. 93); and that 'views about spirit possession were not always unanimous' (p. 110). This resistance to totalising interpretation energises the volume and lends an outsize productivity to its approach to what remains a relatively small subset of cases. Katajala-Peltomaa demonstrates that contemporaries were well aware of demonism's variation, and engaged in complex dialogue to construct consensus approaches that saw clerics and laity achieve a collective view – even identity – that transcended dispute. For example, she argues that 'demonic presence played a part in … enhancing a community's coherence' by offering the historian an opportunity to express and explore political allegiances, matching the particular saint called upon to resolve a given case of possession with the local political elite associated with them. Read in this way, 'cases of demonic possession were a way to draw the boundaries of a cultic community' (p. 149).

It is always easy to accuse these kinds of cultural history of back-filling gaps in the material with too much colour. It is certainly true that some of Katajala-Peltomaa's examples are more convincing than others – does her examination of the disruptive role of dancing really bear the interpretative weight the volume asks of it when the author admits that 'dancers did not verbally summon demons, but, according to clerical authorities, bodily gestures communicated an association with them' (p. 155)? Readers may disagree. But each of this book's relatively short chapters is split into further, still shorter, subsections – and so much variation of interest is covered here that the book comes amply to demonstrate its case: that demonic possession was a fissiparous phenomenon that can reward close and creative readings with new understandings of how late medieval religion worked in practice and in dialogue.

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL ANNA FRENCH

Women, dance and parish religion in England, 1300–1640. By Lynneth Miller Renberg. (Gender in the Middle Ages, 19.) Pp. xii + 255. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2022. £60. 978 1 78327 747 6

JEH (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924000678

In this new study that spans the late medieval and early modern periods, Miller Renberg explores the rhetorical uses of dance. Although Miller Renberg's focus is sermons, a wide variety of sources such as ecclesiastical court documents, instructional literature, biblical commentaries and vernacular religious poetry weave in and out of the study. Dance provides a fruitful way to explore changing gender and spiritual dynamics across three eventful centuries, and Miller Renberg

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. 24 Jan 2025 at 10:29:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use.

attends to both the ruptures and continuities that shaped cultural understandings and (more importantly) discursive uses of dance. This is a lively and engaging book that raises many compelling questions.

This study is deliberately unmoored from medieval and early modern practice: Miller Renberg makes it clear in her introduction that she approaches dance as a 'discursive rhetorical construct' (p. 11) that clerics repeatedly deployed in the many sermons she marshals together here. In the focal shift from embodied practice to rhetorical strategy, dance becomes something abstract, disconnected from medieval and early modern bodies (even as it seeks to regulate them). As Miller Renberg acknowledges early on, dance is exceptionally difficult to 'recover' (p. 11), but deeper discussion of medieval and early modern practices (and their meaning and significance) would have added nuance and depth to the book's central arguments. I found myself wanting to know more about this fascinating leap from embodied practice to rhetorical strategy and why clerics turned to dance in particular as a means of exploring and evaluating sin. I wondered, too, about the clerics themselves in performance – the agitations of the 'masse-Priest' at the altar (p. 47), the 'dauncing, piperly, and effeminate eloquence' of the ear-tickling preacher (p. 177).

Laying out a compelling argument about dance, sacrilege and the increasingly suspect female body, chapter i provides the 'chronological grounding' (p. 14) for the book and positions dance as a 'lens for a broad overview of reform' (p. 25). Miller Renberg consistently homes in on dance as an example of *adiaphora*, an issue without a clear biblical or theological definition, but she never quite explains how or why this matters in the larger scheme of things, including what it meant for the many sermonists who took it up as a trope.

Chapter ii takes up the widespread tale of the cursed carolers, a subject that has been central to Miller Renberg's work, particularly her co-edited volume, *The cursed carolers in context* (Abingdon 2021). Although one can appreciate not wanting to cover the same ground twice, a conspicuous lack of description in this new context leaves lots of interesting questions unanswered. Miller Renberg assembles an impressive catalogue of dance references, but does not always step back to analyse them or consider more broadly what all this rhetorical work does or affords. The link between dancing and 'jangling' feels compelling and new, a rich connection with lots of potential for future study. Chapter iii pushes beyond sacrilege and space to frame dance as inherently disruptive to sacred time, particularly to the sabbath. Miller Renberg tracks the decline of 'dancing days' and demonstrates how women were increasingly characterised as 'innately sacrilegious' (p. 95), whether they were dancing or not.

Chapters iv and v focus on the story of Salome, whose dancing – though mentioned only briefly in the Gospels – captivated medieval and early modern writers. Miller Renberg's overview of medieval biblical commentaries sets the stage for her discussion of the overwhelmingly negative treatment of Salome in medieval sermons, and her important observation about an emerging distinction between solitary and collective dance has clear implications for social identities and practices in the parish. There is room for more nuanced analysis of the link between dance and female desire in relation to the book's ongoing study of gender dynamics. Looking at early seventeenth-century biblical commentaries,

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. 24 Jan 2025 at 10:29:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use.

Miller Renberg calls attention to Salome and her mother as tools of moral instruction and illustrates the myriad uses of the Salome story by early modern sermonists. Chapter iv closes with the very different dancing of David, whose movement drew him not into sin, but closer to God. This striking comparison deserves more stage time in the book because it helps us understand the gendered evaluation of dance and the dancing body in new ways; while male bodies are associated with vertical, heaven-bound movement, women are grounded. There are important (and not always fully explored) implications here for the book's central claims about gender and access to the divine.

The concluding chapter endeavours to map the book's many themes onto the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to assess the performative 'rubrics' that resulted from centuries of 'discussions about dance' (p. 160). As Miller Renberg demonstrates, dance sets off a concatenation of sins and emerges as an emblem of sinful individualism, of the failed household, of communities in decline.

This book makes important contributions to an ongoing conversation in the field about dance and the body. The evidence that Miller Renberg marshals throughout the book is invariably interesting and evocative, but (at least for this reader, trained in literary studies) she does not always do as much with it as she could. As I write this review, I keep thinking of the arresting image of the 'carnall Gospellers' who think they 'have God by the toe' (p. 42) – what does this mean, and what are the implications for dance as a way of thinking through issues related to spiritual understanding and even ambition? The larger claims of the book can feel a bit unearned, and its expansive time frame ends up steering some of the most interesting and complex arguments into observations about ideas shifting over time. If some of the analysis and interpretation remains to be done, this is nevertheless an appealing book that consistently draws attention to new ways of thinking about the representation and discursive uses of moving bodies at a time of vast cultural and spiritual change.

CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE, CALIFORNIA — ELLEN R. KETELS

Art and death in The Netherlands, 1400–1800. Edited by Bart Ramakers and Edward H. Wouk. (Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art, 2022, 72.) Pp. 368 incl. 191 colour and black-and-white ills. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2022. €149. 978 90 04 533374 5; 0169 6726

JEH (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924000666

This book begins by informing readers that 'In pre-modern times, death was a more visible phenomenon than it is nowadays.' Really? Could any historian of early modern Europe see the photos of the coffins of Covid-19 victims in Bergamo in 2020, piled up in stacks because the cemeteries had run out of space, and not think of similar images of the coffins of plague victims piled up in stacks for the same reason between the 1340s and the 1650s? Could any historian of early modern Europe read the lament of a funeral director of Bergamo in 2020 – 'A generation has died in just over two weeks. We've never seen anything

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. 24 Jan 2025 at 10:29:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use.