

Short Notices

Adcock, Rachel, *Baptist Women's Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640–1680* (Women and Gender in the Early Modern World), Farnham, Ashgate, 2015; hardback; pp. 232; 5 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £60.00; ISBN 9781472457066.

The role of women in early modern English religion has been brought to the fore in recent years. While non-conformist sects, and the roles women played in them, have been studied, Baptist women, and their published writings, are still largely neglected. Rachel Adcock's book does an excellent job of addressing this lacuna, while also bringing to light the stories of many, hitherto unknown, women.

According to the Book of Acts, the last days would see God pour out His spirit on His sons and daughters, allowing them to prophesy. Baptists, and other non-conformist sects, viewed the English Civil Wars as proof of Christ's imminent second coming, giving women previously unparalleled spiritual authority. Indeed, as Adcock demonstrates, women were able to subvert their perceived role as the 'weaker' sex because they 'could be viewed as effective conduits for the word of God', as 'their passivity could allow for God to speak through them' (p. 4).

As is clear from the book's title, Adcock focuses on the published works of Baptist women. She deftly examines how these women 'enjoyed an authority and independence that were not available to women in other cultural contexts' of the early modern period (p. 1). Adcock draws out the power that these women could wield, sometimes against the wishes of their husbands.

Adcock deftly interweaves the stories of familiar figures—like Anna Trapnel and Susanna Parr—with stories of women who emphasize the independence Baptist women could exert, such as Anne Pharepoint. Pharepoint took a non-Baptist husband but, during questioning by her congregation, was adamant that 'she would continue to walk with the church, despite her husband's beliefs' (p. 6).

The book is well grounded in the scholarship. Adcock's introduction, while impressive, could potentially have been split into two separate chapters so that her excellent analysis of the persons and texts she includes would not be lost in the thorough literature review and explanation of her methodology. This, however, is a very minor critique of an excellent, and important, piece of work.

Scholars and students, both familiar and unfamiliar with the book's topic, will glean much from this fine addition to the growing scholarship that emphasises the lived experiences of early modern women.

AIDAN NORRIE, *The University of Warwick*

Connolly, Margaret, and Raluca **Radulescu**, *Editing and Interpretation of Middle English Texts: Essays in Honour of William Marx* (Texts & Transitions, 12), Turnhout, Brepols, 2018; hardback; pp. xx, 351; 30 b/w, 2 colour illustrations; R.R.P. €95.00; ISBN 9782503568478.

For nearly twenty years, William Marx has been a general editor of 'Middle English Texts' (Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University), a series for which several of the contributors to this Festschrift, whose title is self-explanatory, have edited volumes. The first section appropriately concentrates on the minutiae of editing. A. S. G. Edwards queries the treatment of manuscript capitalization and text division in the Athlone *Piers Plowman* editions; Ronald Waldron examines the extent of scribal attention to punctuation in English and Latin copies of the *Polychronicon*; Janet Cowen scrutinizes the function, if any, of virgules in an English verse translation of Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*; and Hans Sauer taxonomizes 'binomials' (i.e. doublets and similar phrases) in the same Boccaccio text.

Section 2 focuses on chronicles. Erik Kooper exhaustively analyses the work of a copyist and/or adaptor who drastically abridged one version of Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*; Andrew Prescott and Raluca Radulescu both write on the *Middle English Prose Brut*, the former on its influential treatment of the Peasants' Revolt and the latter on the manuscript tradition; Julia Boffey speculates on the possible different audiences for Robert Fabian's two chronicles.

Section 3 contains seven contributions on religious texts. Oliver Pickering claims one of the many hybrid versions of *Nine Points Best Pleasing to God* as prose heightened with rhyme and assonance; Susan Powell supplements her edition of Mirk's *Festial* with additional historical and textual notes and Margaret Connolly, too, revisits earlier work, discussing Chapter AB from *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, which circulated independently of and possibly existed before the main text. Veronica O'Mara studies the problems of defining the term 'prayer' in relation to those found in the Chester Processional; Mayumi Taguchi examines the use of multiple biblical and extra-biblical sources in *The Patriarchs* and Caxton's *Golden Legend*; Martha Driver revisits the *Gospel of Nicodemus* to discuss the recycling of French woodcuts in Julian Notary's and de Worde's editions. John J. Thompson traces the fortunes among lay readers of Nicholas Love's *Mirror* in manuscript and print during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The volume concludes with a list of the honorand's publications.

ALEXANDRA BARRATT, *University of Waikato*

Conti, Fabrizio, *Witchcraft, Superstition, and Observant Franciscan Preachers: Pastoral Approach and Intellectual Debate in Renaissance Milan* (Europa Sacra, 18), Turnhout, Brepols, 2015; hardback; pp. xviii, 380; 5 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. €100.00; ISBN 9782503549194.

Dispassionately reasoned, theologically sophisticated pedagogical writings produced at the height of the European witch craze? It sounds almost counter-intuitive, and the more so during the period examined in the present book, the decades following the publication of Innocent VIII's bull, *Summis desiderantes affectibus* (1484)—papal licensing of inquisitorial excess—and Heinrich Institoris's treatise, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), to which, in many editions, Innocent's bull served as a preamble. Fabrizio Conti's monograph, developed from his 2011 doctoral dissertation, provides an important corrective to received opinion, and to the harsh, inquisitorial image evoked by those infamous texts and associated trial records.

A central focus of his study is the education of minorite friars in the key areas of their pastoral work, preaching and confessions. What sort of intellectual and spiritual training should friars receive to be able to instruct, monitor, and invigilate their congregations' beliefs, and discern what was unorthodox and what was licit in matters of faith? Conti explores these issues as they are dealt with in the writings of half a dozen Franciscan Observants at the Friary of St Angelo, Milan, during the last two decades of the fifteenth century and first decade of the sixteenth. His study 'places itself at the intersection of three different but complementary areas of exploration: sermon studies, confession, and superstition with the emergence of a specific set of beliefs in witchcraft' (p. xv). To be sure, Conti's close readings of the writings of these friars are provided with ample context, rich in detail, drawn from an impressive array of primary and secondary sources.

What emerges, the so-called Milanese pastoral approach, has been characterized by Heiko Oberman as the Observants' 'non-violent revolutionary eschatology' (p. 122, n. 104). It certainly stands in stark contrast to the stance taken by the Dominicans. Indeed, when the influence of their *Malleus* started to penetrate into Northern Italy, Samuel de Cassini from St Angelo's was one of the first to denounce as untrue and patently impossible its harrowing accounts of witches' Sabbaths.

ROBERT CURRY, *The University of Sydney*

Monson, Craig A., *Habitual Offenders: A True Tale of Nuns, Prostitutes, and Murderers in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016; cloth; pp. 344; 29 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$40.00; ISBN 9780226335339.

If the title alone leaves one in any doubt, Natalie Smith's colourful dust jacket design with its racy quotes and saucy illustration makes it amply clear, Craig Monson's latest foray into convent archives is going to be a page-turner. His long-

honed expertise as an historian of Italian women's religious houses is brought to bear on the official transcript of a murder case, all 2200 pages of it. This documentary treasure-trove, standing over twenty centimetres deep, provides the book's core material, which Monson then enlivens with information gleaned from love letters, arrest and detention mandates, notarial annotations, papal directives and petitions, private communications in the Vatican Secret Archive, and *avvisi*, the gossip sheets of the period.

The action unfolds over a three-year period, 1644 to 1646. Two convertite nuns (former prostitutes) are abducted from a Carmelite convent in Bologna by a volatile priest and a dashing mercenary in the papal army. An archiepiscopal investigation ensues but leads nowhere. Two years later, the women's bodies are found interred in a wine cellar, naked and garrotted. The ramifications of their murder turn out to be far-reaching, touching both the French and papal courts. Powering much of the intrigue is the almost lethal antipathy between the families Barberini (Urban VII and his nephews, Cardinals Antonio and Francesco) and Pamfilii (Innocent X and his nephew, Cardinal Camillo Francesco).

What animates the pacing of this whodunit, a touch over-ripe with detail (all scrupulously documented), is Monson's convincing construal of dialogue, in particular, his imaginative reinterpretation of the notaries' mediation between interrogators and witnesses. Replete with distinctions between dialects and lowlife argot, it reads like a play script, with witness accounts injecting a realistic sense of the mores and social status of the protagonists. While Monson makes occasional tangential observations on broader issues (such as monastic enclosure of prostitutes and other marginalised women), relating the tale rarely retreats from the foreground. The description of the use of judicial torture inflicted on the culprit, Possenti, is not for the fainthearted.

One can admire the author's panache as a storyteller as much as his perspicacity as an archival sleuth, but Monson's *Habitual Offenders*, as a hybrid genre, remains less than the sum of its fascinating parts: a tawdry tale artfully told.

ROBERT CURRY, *The University of Sydney*

Somerset, Fiona, and **Nicholas Watson**, eds, *Truth and Tales: Cultural Mobility and Medieval Media* (Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture), Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2015; hardback; pp. 360; R.R.P. US\$69.95; ISBN 9780814212714.

Truth and Tales: Cultural Mobility and Medieval Media was created out of a series of papers presented at the Canada Chaucer Seminar at the Centre for Medieval Studies in Toronto in honour of esteemed middle Middle English literature scholar Richard Firth Green. Edited by Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson, it presents to the reader the complex tapestry of communications during the medieval period. Illustrating the intersection of oral and written stories from both high and low cultures, it proposes to understand 'truth' and 'tale', nowadays understood mostly as the difference between folk tales and 'real' stories.

Broken into parts, with Part 1 devoted to ‘The Truth of Tales 1’, Part 2 ‘Repetition and Continuity: The Claims of History’, Part 3 ‘Cultural Divides and Their Common Ground’, parts 4 and 5 ‘New Media and the Literate Laity’ and ‘The Truth of Tales 2’ respectively, the book collects papers together based around thematic clusters, which allows readers to pursue the contents collectively, or selectively as standalone essays depending on their interest.

Given the calibre of the contributors, it is of no surprise that the book expertly sheds light on how communication networks and various media may have been fashioned during the Middle Ages. In the essay by M. J. Toswell, called ‘The Exegesis of Tears in Lambeth Homily 17’, the focus is on illustrating the interconnectedness of homily collections from both an oral and written cultural standpoint. In Kathleen E. Kennedy’s chapter ‘A London Legal Miscellany, Popular Law and Medieval Print Culture’, we explore ‘Arnold’s book’, a manuscript of diverse contents that is believed to be the first to be printed on a hand press (p. 223), attesting perhaps to its popularity, or rather, the curiosity surrounding the author and his life as a merchant. The common factor in these two seemingly unconnected pieces of content is the evolution in both our understanding of how communities communicated with media and each other, but also how such practices can be seen to impact upon the idea of ‘truth’, ‘authority’, and ‘ownership’—an interest of Richard Green to whom the book is dedicated.

Truth and Tales: Cultural Mobility and Medieval Media provides insightful comment on the different media that impacted medieval culture, in a linear and non-linear fashion. As Somerset notes in her introduction, ‘we no longer assume [...] that movement and voices change nothing’ (p. 3).

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