

Short Notices

Brewer, Charlotte, and Barry **Windeatt**, eds, *Traditions and Innovations in the Study of Medieval English Literature: The Influence of Derek Brewer*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2013; hardback; pp. 328; R.R.P. £50.00; ISBN 978184384542.

Threads of admiration and affection for Derek Brewer and his contributions to medieval literary studies unite this collection. An Introduction by Barry Windeatt and Charlotte Brewer and Afterword by E. G. Stanley frame the essays, and Derek Pearsall explores Brewer's career in 'Derek Brewer: Chaucerian Studies 1953–78'. Several contributors examine the historical reception of Brewer's interests in the context of critical opinion, and some deepen or extend them.

Essays of the former kind include those of R. F. Yeager ('Gowerian Laughter'), James Simpson ('Derek Brewer's Romance'), Elizabeth Archibald ('Malory and Late Medieval Arthurian Cycles'), and A. S. G. Edwards ('Manuscripts, Facsimiles and Approaches to Editing'). These offer valuable guides to changing attitudes and opinions.

Brewer's views may be starting points for the writers' deliberations. Alistair Minnis considers 'Brewer's Chaucer and the Knightly Virtues', and the Knight's reputation. Christopher Cannon weighs the significance of fluency in French in 'Class Distinction and the French of England'. Corinne Saunders's "'Greater love hath no man": Friendship in Medieval English Romance' traces the topic in various sources. Helen Cooper's fascinating essay, 'The Ends of Storytelling', probes most deeply into its theme, to find a search to explain death, even when the work begins by evoking spring, as *The Canterbury Tales* does.

Several essays elaborate Brewer's thoughts on *Troilus and Criseyde*. A. C. Spearing demonstrates implications of 'Time in *Troilus and Criseyde*'. Mary Carruthers probes Troilus's behaviour in 'Virtue, Intention and the Mind's Eye in *Troilus and Criseyde*', as the hero attempts to control his memory and imagination. Jill Mann writes zestfully of 'Falling in Love in the Middle Ages', seeing it as 'the supreme adventure' (p. 110) in any age. Jacqueline Tasioulas's 'The Idea of Feminine Beauty in *Troilus and Criseyde*, or Criseyde's Eyebrow' corrects notions of Criseyde's appearance, to show Troilus's willingness to fall in love with her.

Charlotte Brewer's essay, 'Words and Dictionaries: OED, MED and Chaucer', embraces both styles. She describes the making of the dictionaries, and also shows their limitations and suggests ways to use them most fruitfully.

These essays present Brewer as a generous, persuasive, innovative critic, who has inspired and encouraged the contributors and many other readers. Their extensions and explorations of his contributions have produced a graceful tribute to his influence.

ROSEMARY GREENTREE, *The University of Adelaide*

Calaresu, Melissa, and Helen **Hills**, eds, *New Approaches to Naples c. 1500–c. 1800: The Power of Place*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013; hardback; pp. 286; 7 colour, 38 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £70.00; ISBN 9781409429432.

The editors of this well-organised volume of collected essays, Melissa Calaresu and Helen Mills, inform the reader that the thrust and purpose of their volume is 'to challenge and interpret both the glamorization of Naples as excessive, dangerous and exotic, and its related scholarly neglect' (p. 1). If there ever were a place that warranted challenging new approaches to address scholarly neglect and its unique cultural and political paradoxes, that place must surely be Naples whose dual kingdoms were coveted particularly by generations of culturally diverse sovereigns and would-be princes in their questing dreams for monopoly over a bespoke Mediterranean empire.

As a political historian of the second house of Anjou and its dealings with the late medieval crown of Aragon–Catalonia, I found John A. Marino's essay, 'Myths of Modernity and Myths of the City' of particular interest. Marino analyses, with considerable insight and a freshness of prose, the marginalisation of southern Italy and redresses, in no small measure, the 'undeservedly patchy presence' occupied by Naples in general surveys of Italian cities.

In the premodern era, Naples was a space of immeasurable geopolitical import and prestige but now languishes largely forgotten, at least in the minds of non-specialist historians across the disciplines. Marino states that he has 'evoked the haunting image of the contested crowns, caskets and conquests in this well-known chronology [of the various battles for Naples] ... to highlight the complex exchange and interaction between the Italian north and south, and between the Italian states and their neighbouring states in Spain, France and Germany' (p. 13). He rejects viewing these actions and events 'from a vantage point of a single state or a single national tradition' (p. 13) and seeks instead to integrate them into a single unified history. With this essay he succeeds admirably: it lives up to its promises with the added bonus of enriching the understanding of the reader.

While many of the contributors' essays seek to address the fragmented field of the cultural history of Naples, not all of them live up to their promise

and their variety leaves the field no more connected. Rather than resolving it as the volume's editors set out to do, this mirrors the, sometimes disconnected, nature of current cultural historical research into the Neapolitan 'enigma'. As is often the case with collected essays, a few of them leave the reader a little unsatisfied, but this is perhaps a harsh judgement upon a collection that will leave readers with much to consider, and enriched in no small measure.

ZITA ROHR, *The University of Sydney*

Dixon, Laurinda S., *The Dark Side of Genius: The Melancholic Persona in Art, ca. 1500–1700*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013; hardback; pp. 254; 62 colour, 77 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$89.95; ISBN 9780271059358.

Laurinda Dixon's exploration of melancholia begins, naturally, with Albrecht Dürer's 'cryptic' *Melancholia I* (1514). A 'major monument of art history' (p. 1), Dürer's engraving offers the reader the perfect springboard from which to dive into Dixon's in-depth analysis of melancholia, one of the four humours. It is truly a thought-provoking image, which only serves to entice the reader further into Dixon's work. *The Dark Side of Genius* effortlessly transcends disciplinary boundaries, bypassing the long-established 'isolation' of disciplines who 'take little notice of one another', despite the vast 'historical and cultural importance of melancholia ... across the broad scholarly spectrum' (p. 4). This approach solidifies the book's broad applications to a variety of disciplines, upholding the true, 'universal' nature of melancholia itself.

Building upon the English-language work of predecessors, such as Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and especially Fritz Saxl's groundbreaking *Saturn and Melancholy* (1964), Dixon's discussion includes analyses of the meaning of melancholy, in which she explores melancholia as a concept from antiquity to its evolution into a 'fashionable' disease in the seventeenth century. She considers religious, love-related, and scholarly melancholy, analysing the melancholic model in art, religion, 'erotomania' or love melancholy and the depiction of melancholic students and scholars. Also examined are the topics of artists and melancholy, with the 'aspects of the hermit's solitary martyrdom, the lover's aristocratic passion, and the scholar's misanthropic intellect' all amalgamating to establish a 'fourth subject' (p. 8), the artist's self-portrait, and melancholy mediated, with an emphasis on the 'bucolic nature, erotic stimulation and the music of stringed instrument' (p. 9) as cures for the disease of melancholia. Dixon also offers insight into the occurrences of 'melancholia denied and revived' in her Epilogue and she provides a concise Appendix detailing 'Medical Dissertations on Melancholia and Related Subjects, c. 1590–1750'.

With 140 illustrations, Dixon is meticulous in showing as well as telling, effortlessly weaving the visual and the written together. This approach

combines an exemplary explanation of melancholia with well-chosen practical examples that provide the reader with a comprehensive treatment of the subject. Without a doubt, Dixon's work will become a vital resource for any researcher – from art historian to emotions theorist and beyond. The importance of Dixon's work is profound.

PATRICIA ALESSI, *The University of Western Australia*

Haude, Sigrun, and Melinda S. **Zook**, eds, *Challenging Orthodoxies: The Social and Cultural Worlds of Early Modern Women. Essays Presented to Hilda L. Smith*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014; hardback; pp. xi, 265; 11 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £70.00; ISBN 9781409457084.

The ten essays in this volume are dedicated to women's history scholar Hilda L. Smith. The essays reflect Smith's dedication to 'challenging orthodoxies', and each essay intends to confront 'some perceived wisdom, "truth" or orthodoxy', by exploring ways in which women challenged conventional thinking and acted in ways that were previously unknown (p. 5). All of these essays make for fascinating reading and provide fuel for future research. For the sake of brevity, I will discuss the best contributions from each section of the book.

Part I, 'Challenging Cultural and Social Traditions', opens with Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks's essay challenging ideas about womanhood, the boundaries between wild and civilised, animal and human, woman and monster. The essay focuses on two 'hairy girls', the Gonzales sisters, who had a condition called hypertrichosis universalis that caused most of their bodies to be covered in hair. Wiesner-Hanks questions whether contemporaries considered the sisters to be women or even human. By evaluating physical, linguistic, and religious constructs of what 'made' a woman, she comes to the conclusion that all women were considered to be monsters to some extent, or at least, more animal than human.

Part II, 'Challenging Scientific and Intellectual Traditions', also opens with its strongest essay, wherein Lisa T. Sarasohn examines the multiple meanings of bodily parasites, specifically fleas and lice in fiction, satire, and political commentary. According to Sarasohn, parasites were particularly associated with sexual promiscuity, voyeurism, and even political rebellion and she shows how fleas and lice came to represent more than uncleanness as they attached themselves to kings and beggars alike.

Part III, 'Challenging Legal and Political Traditions', is best represented by Anna Suranyi's chapter on early modern women and indentured servitude. Suranyi focuses on how female indentured servants attempted to negotiate some aspects of their servitude. These women made and broke their own contracts, sometimes after being kidnapped or pressed into servitude. In one fascinating case, the female leader of a criminal gang had her contract of servitude bought

off by her criminal associates. Suranyi's essay finds women in surprising places successfully petitioning against sentences of transportation, taking their abusive masters to court, and even escaping transportation altogether.

All ten chapters of this exceptional volume succeed in challenging our ideas about early modern women. Many of these essays offer a demonstration on how to find early modern women acting in unexpected or unexplored ways. The authors of these essays show them making financial investments, becoming master gun-makers, engaging in legal discourse, and wielding pistols. Scholarship on early modern women is enriched by this work.

JENNIFER JORM, *The University of Queensland*

Hellemans, Babette S., ed., *Rethinking Abelard: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History), Leiden, Brill, 2014; hardback; pp. xi, 356; R.R.P. €129.00, US\$167.00; ISBN 9789004262706.

Abelard has been dead for nearly nine centuries, but his appeal across that expanse of time has not dwindled. It is the mother of all weariness to repeat uncritically the wisdom or findings of the past. This volume avoids adding to the burden of redundancy. In rethinking Abelard, new ground is gained and a measure of provocation has been offered for the road ahead; the adage of finding new ways to approach old problems is fulfilled in this volume.

There is little to critique beyond personal quibbles (which may rightly be excluded) in this collection of essays. Contributions by Constant Mews, Michael Clanchy, and Wim Verbaal are particularly useful. What is evident is that among the multiple interpretations and hermeneutical quagmires that beset any complex historical topic, this collection appears to facilitate understanding and encourage questions in concert with the spirit of Abelard himself. If Abelard used letters, poetry, and preaching to reform monasticism, the thirteen contributors have drawn our attention to almost as many updated or newly blazed pathways for approaching Abelard.

Verbaal's admonitions about Abelard as icon, and the savagery of the guardians of the icon who are offended by proper scholarship, are both sound and sobering. What is needed, indeed required, is a rethinking of Abelard which takes seriously the encouragement to regard Abelard himself as a perverse twelfth-century topic (or text) which should be subjected to a robust and rigorous perverse reading in order to avoid a real perverse historicisation. After all, an entire coterie in his own time considered him perverse. Perverse heretic! This is more refreshing than the ideologically constructed icon. Hellemans may be right to suggest that Abelard's greatness has less to do with linguistic speculations, or theology, or philosophical discourse, or even logic, but more in his withdrawal from these preoccupations. Intellectually fearless, Abelard charged straight at whatever obstacle lay in his path. This

book suggests the same approach in its rethinking of a man whose teaching (if we take William of St Thierry literally) was even more monstrous than that suggested by the monstrous titles of his books. What a compelling predicament. Never pedestrian, seldom disappointing, always exciting, Abelard should be praised for distressing his world. This book might also be lauded for shining new light into the dark corners of one of the truly fascinating men of the Middle Ages.

THOMAS A. FUDGE, *The University of New England*

Hoskins, Peter, *In the Steps of the Black Prince: The Road to Poitiers, 1355–1356* (Warfare in History), Woodbridge, Boydell, 2013; paperback; pp. 274; 11 b/w illustrations, 31 maps; R.R.P. £16.99; ISBN 9781843838746.

As the title promises, Peter Hoskins's *In the Steps of the Black Prince* delivers a detailed analysis of Edward of Woodstock's 1355 and 1356 *chevauchées* into France, culminating as they did in the English victory outside Poitiers. This edition follows the 2011 hardback publication and contains some additional findings.

The book is divided into five parts: Part I – Prologue; Part II – The *Chevauchée* in the Languedoc, October to December 1355; Part III – Interlude; Part IV – The Poitiers *Chevauchée*, August to October 1356; and Part V – Epilogue. Two appendices each deal with one of the two separate *chevauchées*, detailing the probable distances travelled between each resting point. The work is well referenced with endnotes and a comprehensive index, and the bibliography is neatly divided into unpublished/published primary, and secondary sources, making it easy to access wanted information.

The main sections – II to IV – divide the Black Prince's progress in France into stages, beginning (5 October 1355) and ending (2 October 1356) in Bordeaux, moving through every significant stage in between, and concluding with the battle at Poitiers. The epilogue sums up the political ramifications of the Black Prince's efforts.

Hoskins clearly has a distinct fondness for his topic; his dedication to walking the route as so many in the Black Prince's army would have done shows not only his enthusiasm for his topic, but also prompts the realisation that we can sometimes forget the physicality of our historical subjects. The result of this quite physical approach to analysing the Prince's movements is a book that brings the Black Prince's *chevauchées* to life. Details such as fords, gradients, forests, and townships are brought to life with Hoskins's detailed analysis of the modern terrain (much of which remains unchanged since the fourteenth century) along with both historical and modern maps. Whenever possible, he has taken contemporary material into account, often comparing differing versions with the terrain, to come to a conclusion as to the path

taken, which town was actually referred to, or even at which point along a river was the most feasible for the baggage train crossing. His reconstruction of the paths of the *chevauchées*, using his immediate experience of the terrain has also helped to clear up some of the mysteries surrounding town names.

In the Steps of the Black Prince is a solid addition to the Warfare in History series, but will also be appealing to a broader audience. Hoskins's attention to detail brings the fourteenth-century *chevauchées* to life, allowing tantalising glimpses into the social and physical aspects at play among the men. This is an enjoyable and informative work.

DEBORAH SEILER, *The University of Western Australia*

Kienzle, Beverly Mayne, *Hildegard of Bingen and her Gospel Homilies: Speaking New Mysteries* (Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts, 12), Turnhout, Brepols, 2009; hardback; pp. xvi, 338; R.R.P. €70.00; ISBN 9782503517773.

This is the 'first comprehensive study' (p. 16) of Hildegard of Bingen's *Expositiones evangeliorum*, or homilies on the Gospels. Beverly Mayne Kienzle is well known for her scholarship on Hildegard as a preacher and teacher. This fine study complements her other two works on the homilies – a critical edition, with Carolyn Muessig, in *Hildegard Bingensis Opera minora* (Brepols, 2007) and an English translation, *Homilies on the Gospels* (Liturgical Press, 2011) – and makes these lesser known Hildegardian works accessible to a broader audience.

The *Expositiones* consists of fifty-eight homilies, most of which were delivered by the *magistra* of Rupertsberg to her community of nuns, and four delivered to the monks of her former community at Mt St Disibod. These homilies illustrate Hildegard's preaching, teaching, and exegesis in practice, and present an extraordinary witness to a medieval woman instructing her community during the course of the liturgical year. As Kienzle stresses, for Hildegard the responsibility of religious leaders to instruct their communities was integral to her concept of leadership. The homilies demonstrate how Hildegard put this tenet into practice for her nuns at Rupertsberg.

Hildegard's originality is evident in her homiletic approach. Kienzle refers to her exegetical method as 'intratextual glossing', a form of progressive commentary through which the speaker follows the Gospel text word by word, and inserts into it a running commentary that provides her spiritual interpretation of the text. The gloss constitutes a narrative in its own right, creating a 'dramatic narrative exegesis' on the Gospel texts. In describing the performative quality and context of the homilies, Kienzle posits that 'the story unfolds like the acts of a drama voiced and performed by Hildegard herself as *magistra*, narrator, and interpreter' (p. 152). The author also examines three characteristically Hildegardian themes in the *Expositiones* – her concept of

salvation history, the ‘virtues’, and heresy – to situate the homilies within the context of her life and work.

Kienzle’s analysis of Hildegard’s exegetical method poses questions about her claims to spiritual authority. The *magistra* does not adopt a visionary persona in her homilies. The absence of reference to her visions in these works indicates that she felt no need to justify her authority to preach and teach when it involved commenting on scripture to her own community of nuns. Her position as their superior, bound with the obligation to instruct, provided the authorising environment to deliver her exegesis.

Importantly, Kienzle situates Hildegard and her learning within the wider context of the vibrant monastic *milieu* of religious reform and intellectual exchange. She deftly outlines the breadth of monastic women’s learning in Germany in the twelfth century, and their involvement in intellectual networks, emphasising the formative nature of this religious culture for Hildegard. Through the *Expositiones* Hildegard develops a distinctive exegesis for a female audience that in turn ‘speaks to multiple audiences’, like her other visionary and epistolary works.

JULIE HOTCHIN, *Independent Scholar, Canberra*

Lassner, Jacob, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam: Modern Scholarship, Medieval Realities*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014 [2012]; paperback; pp. 336; R.R.P. US\$37.50; ISBN 9780226143187.

This undoubtedly and wonderfully erudite book has two distinct sections. Part I is a detailed historiographical study of scholarly engagement with Islam as it developed in the West and grew into the subject area of oriental studies in European universities, exploring how such orientalist scholarship was then critiqued and continues to be critiqued by a wider spectrum of people. Jacob Lassner provides stinging rebukes to some modern surveys and scholarship. He notes medieval Europe’s lack of direct engagement with Islam itself (albeit while using Arabic texts to access the ancients) until the development of university-based study of the Near and Middle East. He gives prominence to the ‘Jerusalem School’ of scholarship and its continuing detail-focused analysis of sources, charts the varied levels of Islamic engagement with the orientalist scholarly project, and provides an extended criticism of anti-orientalist critics and commentators. This last is particularly focused on those coming from the Near and Middle East who sometimes simply counter scholars with critically weak occidentalist views. While in some respects an *apologia* for the orientalist project, it is nonetheless a fairly convincing one.

The second part of the book turns to relations of Jews and Christians with Muslims and the wider Islamic politics of the medieval Abode of Islam, surveying existing scholarly understandings and offering some new insights. For instance, Lassner charts Muslim hostility towards certain Jewish groups

in the early days of Islamic development and expansion, whereby particular political circumstances may have inscribed notions regarding Jews into a sort of scriptural timelessness in ways that do not necessarily reflect on real relationships over the early centuries and wider geography of the Abode of Islam.

Drawing on the extensive records of the Cairo Geniza, Lassner is very strong on Jewish relations with, and attitudes towards, Islamic hegemony. Regarding Christians, Lassner is less detailed, but repeatedly draws attention to their initial role as a subject majority, and highlights the important role some Christians played in preserving ancient texts by assisting in their translation from Greek to Arabic. In this, he essentially brings the book back towards its starting point and the well-known Western engagement with Arabic texts. Individual readers may disagree with elements of Lassner's discourse or individual sub-arguments, but as an overall argument for continuing and promoting scholarship that engages with texts and contexts in detail, it is hard to fault.

NICHOLAS D. BRODIE, *Hobart, Tasmania*

McAvoy, Liz Herbert, ed., *Anchoritic Traditions of Medieval Europe*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2010; hardback; pp. xiii, 241; R.R.P. £50.00, US\$99.00; ISBN 9781843835202.

Hermits and anchorites were familiar figures in the landscape of medieval Europe. Liz Herbert McAvoy, a leading scholar in the field of anchoritic studies, has brought together essays by nine scholars to illustrate the central role played by religious solitaires in Europe during the Middle Ages. The geographic spread of 'Europe' in the title comprises the Low Countries, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Ireland, and the British Isles. The collection's focus on anchoritic practice in a comparative perspective is particularly welcome, reflecting a 'new liaison and dialogue' (p. 3) between Anglophone and European scholars researching eremitical forms of religious life.

The contributors explore the 'multiple nature of medieval reclusion' (p. 2), outlining how eremitic practice gradually developed into the two distinct but overlapping categories of hermits and anchorites. Whereas hermits withdrew to isolated locations and maintained freedom of movement, anchorites were enclosed in cells, where they tended to remain for the rest of their lives. The essays highlight a shift in the gender of solitary practitioners over time. In the earlier period, hermits were more likely to be men, whereas from the eleventh and twelfth centuries women outnumbered men as anchorites, especially in the urban centres of later medieval Europe.

The contributors vary in their approaches. Whereas Anneke Mulder-Bakker (Low Countries) and Pauline L'Hermite-Leclercq (France) present broad-ranging, theoretically informed overviews of research into anchoritic

practice that raise broader issues and questions for the field in general, other contributors concentrate more specifically on aspects of eremitic life for a particular region. For example, Mario Sensi (Italy) adopts a very broad definition of anchoritic practice, locating the eremitic impulse as part of the broader lay penitential movement. He includes lay religious women (known as *pinzochere*) in his discussion of recluses in later medieval Italian cities. Anna McHugh and Liz Herbert McAvoy seek to uncover evidence of anchoritism in Scotland and Wales respectively. Both find evidence for eremitic practice, almost predominantly male hermits, and McHugh concludes that the female anchorite was 'virtually non-existent' (p. 193). Whether these conclusions reflect the lack of evidence of the practice, or the absence of the practice itself, remains difficult to determine with any certainty. Such analyses of why anchoritism lacked practical and cultural support in these less populated regions offer instructive insights into how economic, social, and political circumstances influenced opportunities for, and forms of, religious expression.

Methodologically, this collection is particularly strong. Much of what we know about anchoritic practice and the religious and cultural attitudes that enabled it derives from narrative sources, such as saintly *vitae*. The contributors blend analysis of hagiographical texts with archival research into wills, charters, municipal records, and archaeological evidence to balance the ideals portrayed in literature with evidence of practice, presenting a finely grained picture of the spiritual and social roles of recluses, how their lives were financed, and how they were enmeshed within and supported by their communities.

The editor's primary aim – to present a comparative collection as a resource for teaching – has been met admirably. Several chapters could be set as reading in undergraduate courses, and graduate students and researchers seeking an orientation to the field in general, or an overview of anchoritic practice within a particular geographic region, will find much of value in this collection.

JULIE HOTCHIN, *Independent Scholar, Canberra*

Meakin, H. L., *The Painted Closet of Lady Anne Bacon Drury*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013; hardback; pp. 410; 64 colour, 31 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £75.00; ISBN 9780754663973.

Lady Anne Drury was an early seventeenth-century English gentlewoman who installed in her country house a decorated 'closet', or a small chamber decorated with painted panels. The images contained therein are, for the most part, allegorical and suggest a great deal about Lady Drury's education, erudition, and also something of her inner emotional life, as they perhaps provided themes and ideas to stimulate her prayers and meditations. Although

these panels have received some scholarly attention from historians and art historians, H. L. Meakin's monograph is the first comprehensive examination of the images, their sources, the possible date of their creation and installation, the role of Lady Drury in their design, their positioning in the architectural space, and the woman who commissioned them, as well as the social context from which she emerged. Lady Drury was granddaughter of Sir Nicholas Bacon, the Lord Keeper of Elizabeth I, and was a friend of John Donne and Joseph Hall, a clergyman and writer on Protestant meditations. As Meakin points out, the Bacon family usually educated their daughters, as they did their sons, to a high level. This observation is the starting point for Meakin's rich interpretation of the panels.

The first section of the book surveys Lady Drury, her circles, and ways to interpret the closet, in particular the outlet it may have provided her, in terms of what she chose to put on the panels, for expressing her view of the world (p. 29) and her meditations on life experiences, such as her husband's frustrated career and her daughters' deaths. In the second section of the book, each panel is given individual attention and analysis. The analysis is impressive and multi-disciplinary. The very idea of sitting and contemplating in a closet brings the meditative writings of Joseph Hall more than once into consideration. Other sources for the often-enigmatic images are proverbs, classics such as Martial and Apuleius, Christian stoicism, bestiaries such as Edward Topsell's *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes*, and continental emblem books. Meakin points to some panels that simply defy interpretation, but the cumulative impact of the panel-by-panel study is to reconstruct the meaning of the small but visually and intellectually rich space in which Lady Drury could immerse herself.

MARCUS HARMES, *The University of Southern Queensland*

Mostert, Marco, and Anna Adamska, eds, *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy II* (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 28), Turnhout, Brepols, 2014; hardback; pp. xx, 453; 25 b/w illustrations, 9 b/w line art; R.R.P. €100.00; ISBN 9782503549606.

This substantial work on Urban Literacy across Europe consists of fifteen chapters, an Introduction, and a final section, written by editors Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska. It is divided into four parts: I, 'Alphabets and Languages'; II, 'Making Books, Telling Stories'; III, 'Individuals Resort to Writing'; and IV, 'Reading, Seeing and Hearing'. All of the authors are European, and it comes as a surprise to find all of the interesting contributions to this volume are written in perfect English. The collection underlines the importance, not only of scribes working in scriptoria, but also of the scribe in general.

The Preface provides nine maps that will be of great assistance to scholars unfamiliar with the continual change occurring in central and Eastern Europe at this time: Red Ruthania around 1400; Livonia around 1500; The Main Hanseatic Towns in Northern Europe in the Late Middle Ages; Vlnius around 1500; The Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages; The Network of Hungarian Towns in the Late Middle Ages; Croatia: Geographical and Political Division at the End of the Sixteenth Century; The Town Network of the Iberian Kingdoms of the Late Middle Ages; and The Main Towns of Transylvania in the Early Modern Period.

Surprisingly, there are few references to the many European monasteries and convents, outstanding abbots, abbesses, and clergy that were so important for the production of manuscripts and supported all levels of religious and secular education. Eltjo Buringh does describe the survival and loss of manuscripts very thoroughly, and the editors do briefly suggest that the clergy 'participated as actively as the lay professionals of the written word in government', describe the 'two-way traffic between the Church and the town' (p. 13), and argue that parish churches and religious houses carried out the daily practice of municipal literacy, determining in large part their towns' 'topography of literacy' (p. 16). But throughout the rest of the book, the vital part played by the Church has been somewhat overlooked. For the spread of humanism at this time, for instance, the works of St Gregory the Great – namely some or all of his surviving Letters, his Book of Pastoral Rule (compulsory reading for all bishops), his Dialogues, his Homilies, his biography of Saint Benedict, and his brilliant *Morals on the book of Job* – were seen as basic reading, and were found in almost every monastery in Europe. Yet no mention is made of him.

Even so, the book provides an excellent, wide-ranging, and well expressed study of municipal writings and of the development of literacy in both Central, Northern, and Eastern Europe, and the editors have also produced a companion volume, *Writings and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy I* (Brepols, 2014). These two admirable scholars are now preparing yet another major work for the 'Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy' series, this time on *Clergy, Noblemen and Peasants: Oral and Literate Communication in the Medieval Countryside*, for which it will be well worth waiting.

JOHN R. C. MARTYN, *The University of Melbourne*

Nicholson, Catherine, *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013; cloth; pp. 224; 3 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$55.00, £36.00; ISBN 9780812245585.

In *Uncommon Tongues*, Catherine Nicholson situates 'strangeness' at the centre of the development of English vernacular eloquence during the Renaissance. Through an in-depth analysis and reading of notable English literary works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Nicholson places eccentricity in its pedagogical, rhetorical, and literary context. The study is highly engaging, written with conscious eloquence, and provides a unique approach to well-studied and little known texts that builds upon existing research in the field of English rhetoric, such as Carla Mazzio's *The Inarticulate Renaissance* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

Nicholson's concern is the hyper-embellished prose of John Lyly's *Euphues*, Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar*, and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. She argues that the wilful eccentricity displayed by their writing elevated the rhetorical eloquence of the English language during a time when rhetoricians and pedagogues were realising the unique difficulty of applying Latin and Greek theories of eloquence to a supposedly barbarous tongue. Nicholson does so through a series of elegant metaphors, such as the rhetorical exile of the English language from Latin eloquence, with its attendant colonial concerns about an England perceived to be on the periphery of Europe and the old Roman Empire.

The first two chapters of the book ground these concerns in a thorough analysis of the development of English rhetoric. This section flows exceedingly well and Nicholson's reading of texts such as Thomas Elyot's *The Boke named the Governor* and Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* is engaging. The second half of the study, which provides three interesting chapter-length case studies of strangeness in Lyly, Spenser, and Marlowe, feels less cohesive; the analysis in these chapters is, nevertheless, still coherent and impressive. The final *coda* to the book, which briefly reads Shakespeare against the other studies, is less convincing than other sections of the book, perhaps because of its brevity.

The strength of the study ultimately lies in Nicholson's in-depth engagement and reading of her literary sources. In her own eloquent prose, Nicholson emerges as deeply aware of the connection between these texts and their immediate contexts, although the disconnected structure of the second half of the book sometimes makes this difficult to appreciate. *Uncommon Tongues* will appeal to historians of the English vernacular culture of the Renaissance, and English literary historians more generally. Those attracted to the development of theories of rhetoric will also find much of interest in this book.

SAMUEL BAUDINETTE, *Monash University*

Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás, *Coire Sois, The Cauldron of Knowledge: A Companion to Early Irish Saga*, ed. Matthieu Boyd, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2014; paperback; pp. 648; R.R.P. US\$72.00; ISBN 9780268037369.

This is a book that should be acquired by anyone who is concerned with the study of early Irish literature. After a Foreword by Declan Kiberd and Preface by the editor, Matthieu Boyd, the body of this volume is made up of thirty-one studies of Old and Middle Irish texts reprinted from earlier publications, all by Tomás Ó Cathasaigh. Boyd helpfully provides indications of further reading, in this way supplementing individual chapters that can date from as long ago as the mid-1970s. There is also a full index and combined bibliography.

This book is nonetheless not a simple guide to early Irish saga. Neither is it a *festschrift*, nor a swansong: Ó Cathasaigh remains active in his teaching and research as the Henry L. Shattuck Professor of Irish Studies at Harvard University. I would say this book owes its existence, firstly, to the pre-eminence of Ó Cathasaigh as a critic of early Irish literature and, secondly, to the nature of the discipline, early Celtic Studies, from which it emerges. The learned article has long held sway over the monograph in this field and, apart from one outstanding short monograph on Cormac Mac Airt, the best of Ó Cathasaigh's thought on early Irish literature is found in specialist journals or collections on Irish/Celtic Studies. If one might question the value of reprinting works that are individually available in print, the question is answered by reading this book, in which the reader gains an impression of a concerted approach to a subject that is hard to recover from discrete reading of these items.

I can note only some important points in the space available. In his Introduction, Kiberd highlights Ó Cathasaigh's formation in a wider critical milieu, and a key distinction of his approach from contemporaries in early Irish studies, namely, its focus on the extant text and diverse reference to theory. Re-reading Chapter 3 ('Pagan Survivals') is particularly enlightening in the light of these points. Ó Cathasaigh observes here that 'the attempt to rediscover the process whereby a given work of literature came into being is a valid exercise, but it does not exhaust the critic's task: there must also be elucidation and interpretation of the product itself' (p. 46). In referencing T. P. Cross's *Motif Index*, Ó Cathasaigh observes that it 'can be useful even to those who do not subscribe to the theory on which it is based' (p. 43). Such principles are well illustrated in the range of studies that follow. Students often make use of Ó Cathasaigh's articles for his close readings of individual sagas. Reading these in the context of more theoretical reflections will hopefully inspire thought beyond the simple study of language or mythic structures.

This perhaps inspires my only, fairly minor, quibble, which is with the choice of title. The phrase *coire sois* (all one sees on the spine of the work) will defeat anyone without a knowledge of Irish. This is a book, however, which should have appeal well beyond that constituency. This is a very special book indeed, its sum greater than its already outstanding parts.

JONATHAN WOODING, *The University of Sydney*

Soranzo, Matteo, *Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014; hardback; pp. 178; 1 b/w illustration; R.R.P. £60.00; ISBN 9781472413550.

Frequently neglected in studies of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian poetry, the social and political status and associations of writers, and the material diffusion of their works, provide the context from which Matteo Soranzo investigates poetry in Aragonese Naples. Through the analysis of five case studies, Soranzo interprets the poetic production in Quattrocento Naples as a series of acts of cultural identity: an act of identity is 'a statement about its author's position within the society and culture of a given period' (p. 4). Through the very act of choosing a specific language or genre from a diverse variety of options, writers declare cultural and political affiliation, and define their role within the society in which they live and operate. This was a process that was particularly necessary in fifteenth-century Naples, a 'world city' characterised by an imported and multicultural society.

Traditionally interpreted as a consequence of Humanism, the use of Latin and the reuse of ancient models in Giovanni Pontano's literary debut, *Parthenopeus*, are here reanalysed in terms of their specific social and political meaning, and are thereby read as part of a broader act of cultural identity. By this act, Pontano showed his membership of the intellectual circle promoted by Alfonso of Aragon and declared his loyalty to the king (Chapter 1). The following editions of Pontano's poetic debut were also part of another identity-building process, this time directed towards his assimilation into the Neapolitan society: Pontano's Umbrian origins had now to be left aside, as shown by the evolution of his signature (Chapter 2).

Identity is a work continually in progress that has to be renegotiated and adjusted to new social and political circumstances. After Alfonso's death, King Ferrante tried to assimilate the Neapolitan aristocracy into the Aragonese court. Emblematic of this political action was the marriage of Pontano to the noble Adriana Sassone; Pontano's *De amore coniugali* was a response to Ferrante's project (Chapter 3).

In Chapter 4, Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* is read as a declaration of affiliation to Pontano's cultural circle, while Chapter 5 examines Pontano's image re-building after the downfall of the Aragonese dynasty. With *Urania*, the 'symbol of a legacy that Pontano envisioned as written in the stars' (p. 90),

the author secured his authority in the domain of astrology, philosophy, and poetry. The last chapter explores Sannazaro's masterpiece, *De partu Virginis*, observing how its author rethought his identity strategy as a spiritual itinerary, and thus abandoned Pontano's legacy and moved from classical scholarship to theology.

FEDERICA VERDINA, *The University of Western Australia*

Watkins, John, and Kathryn L. Reyerson, eds, *Mediterranean Identities in the Premodern Era: Entrepôts, Islands, Empires* (Transculturalisms, 1400–1700), Farnham, Ashgate, 2014; hardback; pp. 286; 3 b/w illustrations; 1 map; R.R.P. £65.00; ISBN 9781409455998.

The editors of this very interesting collection of essays, John Watkins and Kathryn Reyerson, posit that the 'Mediterranean's new relevance arises from its potential as a microcosm of a world of interdependent societies linked by ever faster channels of communication', and that the 'possibilities for cultural as well as material exchange were endless' (p. 4). This volume of readable, well-edited, and engaging essays covers considerable ground in proving the truth of its editors' claims.

In the 'Entrepôt' section, Eric R. Durstler examines the idea that, while language equals 'blood and belonging' in the modern era, the world of the premodern era was a horse of an entirely different colour. Here as elsewhere, it is vital to avoid anachronism, to put to one side our twenty-first-century *retrospectoscopes*, leaving behind the 'tendency to project modern readings (or mis-readings) of the functioning of language in our own day onto earlier times' (p. 35). The Mediterranean, for all its linguistic diversity, was a connected space, where 'linguistic pragmatism' was born of a 'rich linguistic ecology'. The premodern Mediterranean has much to teach 'modern' inhabitants about the 'one state-one language' nationalist model, and Durstler's essay is a handy point of departure for any discussion on the complex nature of the world of the premodern era, linguistic or otherwise.

In the 'Islands' section, Theresa M. Vann discusses the nuances and registers exposed when one compares public rhetoric with private dialogues. In the Mediterranean space, exchanges between the representatives of Christendom, in this case the Hospitallers of Rhodes, and Islam, the Ottoman Turks, demonstrated that propaganda and diplomacy walked hand in hand. Vann argues that the Hospitallers 'could not afford to alienate' the Ottomans completely – they needed to maintain a balancing act – because Constantinople was a vital source of grain for the region in which they found themselves. According to the Order's propaganda, religious enthusiasm moulded their diplomacy. They gave Europe 'what it wanted to hear at the time', but this is to ignore the reality that pragmatism rather than Christian fervour carried the day: 'Rhodes was not self-supporting' (p. 118).

In the final section, 'Empires', Wadad Kadi (al-Qāḍī) examines 'Identity Formation of the Bureaucracy of the Early Islamic State', analysing Abd al-Ḥamīd's 'Letter to the Secretaries' to great effect. His erudite and well-argued essay alone is sufficient reason to secure this volume for any library or scholar's collection.

Other very strong essays populate this diverse and thoughtfully curated collection. It should be a boon to any reader with an interest in the diversity and interdependency of Mediterranean identities in the premodern world.

ZITA ROHR, *The University of Sydney*