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THE SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF MIEVIAL LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

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around 1500. Brant's own publications, including his editions, ranged from the law (Roman and canon), religion and patristics, leaflets and single-leaf woodcuts with generally Latin verse (then assembled in anthologies) to illustrated books, such as his *Vergil* and *Narrenschiff*. The first chapter centres on establishing a methodology of the 'archéologie du savoir', meaning something totally different from Foucault: a historically based cultural history focused on epistemology and 'Bildungsgeschichte', underscoring the different media employed (manuscript, print, illustration), and permitting the categorization of different types of 'elite' author or audience, in Brant's case 'functional' by virtue of a career in law and civic administration, but more particularly as a member of a select intellectual elite of individuals such as Trithemius, Reuchlin, Geiler, and Wimpfeling who were sensitized to the nuances of the Latin language, classical, patristic, and modern. Brant's use of Latin and German is characterized as 'vertical cultural transfer' in both directions. The major part of the book, which follows, consists of some sixty or more individual case studies, grouped in fifteen sections: the result is therefore a 'Brant handbook', rather than simply a traditional monograph. Special attention is directed to the shorter Latin poems, the majority of them religious, published in two separate collections, the *Carmina in laudem* (34 poems, 1494/5) and the *Varia carmina* (112 poems, 1498), the latter repeating the poems from the earlier collection. These texts are subjected to a meticulous analysis, covering previous printings, content (religious and profane/political), verse form (frequently following classical precedents), their illustrations, where appropriate Brant's German versions of the same material, and the coherently planned structure of these editions, demanding a new approach to their study. Individual studies address topics such as poems relating to the bells of the cathedrals in Erfurt, Basel, and Strasbourg, a posthumous collection celebrating the Emperor Maximilian, and Brant's involvement in the Latin hexameter version of the *Narrenschiff* (the *Stultifera navis*), but that is just a few of the wealth of new perspectives Henkel offers on this significant author. Essentially a treasure-trove for German culture in this period.

N.F.P.

Juliette Vuille, *Holy Harlots in Medieval English Religious Literature: Authority, Exemplarity, and Femininity*, Gender in the Middle Ages 17 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2021). xiv + 281 pp.; 3 illustrations. ISBN 978-1-84384-589-8. £60.00 (hardcovers); ISBN 978-1-80010-120-3. £19.99 (eBook).

Juliette Vuille's superb new book is far more than a literary study of holy harlots, female saints who spend their youths mired in sexual sin, only to repent in adulthood and achieve sanctity through eremitic or ascetic devotion. It is also a

study of how those saints became popular among vernacular readers in medieval England and how their lives were used to advance alternative religious beliefs and practices. For Vuille, the appeal of holy harlots lies in their multivalent gender expression, which encompasses debauchery and virginity, youth and age, childlessness and motherhood, confinement and wandering, self-denial and spiritual authority. They served not only as objects of veneration but also as models for emulation. For women, the lives of harlot saints could be used to legitimize unconventional life choices and gain influence in male-dominated spheres. For the laity generally, those lives could be used to critique religious orthodoxy and pursue reform.

The book is organized chronologically, and the earliest materials are in some sense the most radical. Chapter 1 uses three lives from the *Old English Martyrology* and the pseudo-Ælfrician *Life of Mary of Egypt* to consider how women could transcend a model of femininity as fallen humanity, though not (as Jerome prescribes) by becoming male, rather by rejecting binary gender and embracing queer sanctity. In chapter 2, we learn that in post-Conquest lives of Mary of Egypt (the Anglo-Norman *T* text) and Mary Magdalene (the *South English Legendary*), the harlot remains bound to femininity throughout her life but evolves her gender from an expression of moral dissolution into one of spiritual election. Influenced by courtly romance and affective piety, these lives suggest a hardening of gender roles, though the saints retain their spiritual power even as they bow to clerical control. In chapter 3, Vuille uses lives of Mary Magdalene by John Mirk and Osbern Bokenham to show how models of feminine authority were contingent upon contexts of production, here the challenge of Wycliffite reform, which uses the Magdalene to defend silent confession, critique sacerdotalism, and promote lay preaching. While Mirk counters Wycliffite beliefs by reducing the saint's influence as preacher, Bokenham balances the need to combat heresy against the demands of his female patron, who saw the Magdalene as *apostolorum apostola*. Chapter 4 identifies the late fifteenth-century Digby *Mary Magdalene* as the culmination of this post-Conquest tradition. The saint embodies femininity throughout the play, redirecting sinful indulgence toward the veneration of Christ and demonstrating how salvation itself could be coded as feminine performance. The final chapter uses the writings of Christina of Markyate, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Elizabeth Burton to argue that female visionaries viewed holy harlots not only as self-abnegating penitents but also as examples for women to follow as they sought to acquire power, voice dissent, and publicize new ideas. By turning sins of the flesh into affective bonds with Christ, holy harlots taught real women how to find authority in the very religious discourses that defined femininity as abjection. Vuille concludes her book by discussing the harlots' decline in the post-Reformation world, which renewed emphasis on determinate social and religious roles for women and insisted on a clear separation between

saintly and sinful femininities. If one senses a note of nostalgia for the medieval past here, it is perhaps not inappropriate. Much of the richness of Vuille's study lies in its sensitivity to the contradictions of medieval religious culture, which stigmatized femininity but also allowed for diverse forms of gender expression and feminine authority. Vuille notes that scholars have often failed to understand the popularity of harlot saints and have wondered why medieval Christians sought to emulate them. Her answer is that unlike virgin martyrs and holy mothers, who were defined by reductive, static, and unrelatable forms of femininity, holy harlots led long, contradictory lives that afforded them opportunities to redefine their gender or transcend it altogether.

Vuille's book is thoroughly researched, cogently argued, and beautifully written. I recommend it to anyone interested in religion and gender in the medieval period. I know I will return to it often.

University of California, Davis

NOAH D. GUYNN

Sarah Breckenridge Wright, *Mobility and Identity in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'*, Chaucer Studies XLVI (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020). viii + 208 pp.; 1 map; 3 figures. ISBN 978-1-84384-552-2. £60.00.

Sarah Breckenridge Wright's exciting study of mobility in the *Canterbury Tales* demonstrates that 'movement had captured the medieval imagination' (p. 3). Drawing upon the frameworks of cultural geography, ecocriticism, and identity, and grounded in the social and economic history of the fourteenth century, Wright explores physical, social, environmental, economic, ideological, and literary mobilities. The range of historical and contextual material Wright employs ensures that this book never feels narrow in scope, instead revealing the *Canterbury Tales'* mediation of the mobility and vibrancy of the medieval world. Indeed, at times Wright does a lot with a very small amount of content from the *Canterbury Tales*. Chapter 2, 'Building bridges to Canterbury', offers an ecocritical reading of bridges in the fourteenth century, focusing on Rochester Bridge and London Bridge. Neither is explicitly mentioned in the *Canterbury Tales*, but they were vital for real-life pilgrimage and travel between London and Canterbury (and between England and Europe). Wright offers a fascinating account of the architecture, history, and social and environmental effects of these bridges. Working at the edges of the *Tales* in this way, Wright establishes generative new points of departure for thinking about the *Canterbury Tales'* representation of fourteenth-century England. Chapter 1 details the anxieties about economic mobility evident in the London tales, drawing upon Chaucer's lived experience of London as a centre of migration and movement. While the London tales position mobility as suspicious, the frame