

John Cannon and Beth Williamson (eds.), *The Medieval Art, Architecture and history of Bristol Cathedral: An Enigma Explored* (Boydell, 2011) ISBN 9781843836803 (Hardback); 476 pages; £60.

Encountering the east end of Bristol Cathedral for the first time is to be reminded of the exceptional inventiveness, wit, and imagination that marked the greatest European architecture of the period. From the last decade of the thirteenth century, and for the first time since various familiar forms had coalesced into the Gothic style in France in the 1140s, the locus of architectural invention moved to England as a series of major projects were conducted in London and elsewhere. The sober, lofty, graceful architecture of the thirteenth century became lush, inventive, and luxurious. Lines which were once straightforward curves and parallels were transformed into double curves ('ogees'), twists, and floral ornamentation. At Bristol alone there are at least seven different types of arch, as well as probably the earliest 'nodding ogee'. Microarchitecture proliferated, filling what would once have been empty walls with fiddly, rippling canopies and vaults. The name given to the style by nineteenth-century antiquarians is unusually apt: 'Decorated'.

Bristol, like so much built in England from around 1290 to the late fourteenth century, is thrilling to visit. The architecture feels clever, complex, and urban, even cosmopolitan, without being mannerist. It takes delight in its own ingenuity and richness, a strong aesthetic answer to any erroneous modern ideas that medieval churches were great bare masses of stone.

Such is the architectural historian's concern with the origins and genesis of forms, however, that Bristol's claim to architectural importance, rather than quality alone, lies in its dating. If the east end belongs to 1298, as its first great modern champion, Nikolaus Pevsner, claimed then it is in the vanguard of the Decorated style and of exceptional inventiveness. If it is of the 1320s, as a detailed monograph on the work by Richard K. Morris suggests, then it is just one clever-clogs design among many.

That this question is still unresolved might seem surprising. Thirty years is a big difference after all, and indeed, no other comparably important church of this period is so poorly dated. One of the most significant essays in this new collection is a forensic examination by Christopher Wilson into the dating of the east end and its role in the development of English and European architecture. Wilson combines documentation and archaeology to argue persuasively for the earlier date, and therefore against Morris's analysis. In doing so he returns the cathedral, or at least its choir, to the centre of questions about the development of English, or even European, architecture.

Attached to the issue of dates are two other points of controversy: the number of master masons, or architects, and with it the number of design changes; and the question of which design sources the church draws upon. Wilson argues for a fast building time, with less space for design changes. More importantly, he argues that sources for the church were not limited to Exeter and Hereford Cathedrals in the

southwest but include designs in eastern England that proceed from the radical inventions of Michael of Canterbury, in turn brilliantly reinvented from French Rayonnant architecture. Claiming Michael as a source for Bristol (although for the liberated use of a multitude of forms and ideas in a single church, rather than for specific features) is in opposition to Morris's claims for regional sources alone. Michael was the doyen of contemporary English architects and designer of much of St Stephen's Chapel in Westminster Palace in 1291-92, now destroyed above crypt level (which is free to visit) but the source of much of the design ideas that dominated English architecture for the following 250 years.

To focus exclusively on Wilson's chapter is, however, to miss some of the most important contributions this book makes to the study of the cathedral as part of the development of English architecture. The scene setting is relatively brief – John McNeil's chapter comprehensively lays out the evidence for the structure of the earliest abbey church. The first building was fairly large and vaulted throughout, and McNeil expounds on the important Chapter House and gatehouse. Interesting too is the historical context for its foundation by the important abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris. Roger Leech provides an account of both the abbey's economic relationship with the town and the early history of the site, including the obscure but enduring cult of St Jordan.

Built as an Augustinian abbey outside the centre of Bristol beginning in the 1140s and stretching over the next few decades, the church did not become a cathedral until after the Reformation. As a mid-ranking religious house, Bristol is of particular interest – so few survived the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s that those that did are important for what they reveal about monastic architecture away from the great monastic cathedrals. Indeed, their high architectural quality (consider, for example, other Augustinian foundations such as Oxford Cathedral, Southward Cathedral, and St Bartholomew-the-Great in Smithfield) suggests the importance attached to these institutions. Jon Canon provides as comprehensive a survey as possible of links between documented acts of generosity to the abbey by the Berkeley family and dated works of construction in the early fourteenth century.

Julian Luxford's analysis of the substantial amount of late medieval work at Bristol, of lesser architectural significance than the 1298 campaign but indicative of a thriving monastic culture (a point also made in James G. Clark's interesting chapter, regarding training, polyphony, and economy, if not academic achievement), is both long overdue and highly important. Luxford's survey of the tower, transepts, nave, cloister, and main gate, as well as other image making in the cathedral, are important contributions to the study of late medieval monastic architecture, while his study of the documentation regarding patronage places the abbey, and not the Berkeleys, at the forefront of providing funds. Of particular note, moreover, are the two choir aisle reredoses, of which I was unaware, and Luxford's accounts of the iconography of the gate and transepts (including a boss of Edward II, looking over his shoulder like a coquettish glamour model and exposing his anus).

The story of the abbey's transformation into a cathedral by Joseph Bettey is

important (probably some rather cunning courting of Cromwell was involved) and invites wider study of other buildings. The reordering of the interior and the destruction of the nave makes for a sad chapter even in a monastic church that survived. Catherine Oakes' account of the unusual survival of Reformation era wall paintings in the Old Deanery sheds new light on image making in a period of religious conflict, often iconoclastic.

Paul Crossley's magnificently erudite examination of the intellectual context for Pevsner's ground-breaking analysis of Bristol's precocity in the 1940s (which accounts for much of the cathedral's reception today) reminds us just how sober-minded modern scholarship is. Gone are the rich, subjective descriptions of walking through long ecclesiastical spaces, and in its place are close analyses of archaeological and documentary evidence. This is as true of scholars working in traditions based in archaeology (McNeil or Luxford in this volume) or the analysis of documents (the most 'theoretical' piece, by Sarah Jane Boss, chronicling the identification of Mary with 'Wisdom' or its house). As Crossley points out, however, Pevsner's analysis of Bristol as a precocious example of the late medieval German hall church is just, well, wrong.

If only every great church could receive a scholarly work on this scale, covering not just its architectural and artistic history but an analysis of its historiography, and geographical and intellectual context. Bristol Cathedral may, however, be peculiarly suitable for study, because of its exceptional fourteenth-century architecture and its overlooked earlier and later histories. I would encourage any prospective PhD student scouting for ideas to read Beth Williamson's epilogue – there cannot be many more promising objects of study than this church, the medieval Augustinian order or the development of English architecture around and after 1290.

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Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall (eds.), *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition* (Brepols, 2013) ISBN 978-2-503-54276-8; x + 509 pages; EUR 120.

This volume concerns the corpus of Middle English devotional works deriving from the (probably) early fourteenth-century Latin meditational text on the life of Christ, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (MVC). Of Franciscan origin – or at the very least bearing strong witness to Franciscan affiliation – the MVC was throughout the Middle Ages misattributed to Bonaventure, whose borrowed authority helped to ensure its longevity. Widely disseminated throughout Europe, its impact on late medieval devotional practice was incalculable, not least in England where vernacular translations and adaptations abounded. Especially significant among these was Nicholas Love's early fifteenth-century version, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, which was famously endorsed (c. 1410) by Archbishop Thomas Arundel in his campaign against Lollardy.

The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ is another hefty volume in the burgeoning Brepols Medieval Church Studies series that has already given us several important essay collections on late medieval devotional issues in England, including most recently Kantik Ghosh and Vincent Gillespie's *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England* (2011). As in that book, the focus here is chiefly on orthodoxy and on the richness and variety of devotional practice that the very term orthodoxy has sometimes obscured. The volume derives, in fact, from the Queen's Belfast-St Andrews University 'Geographies of Orthodoxy' research project, which culminated in a 2010 conference at Queen's entitled 'Mapping the English Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ, c.1350-1550'. The project has also given rise to two further Brepols volumes that complement the one under review here: Ian Johnson's monograph *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation and Vernacular Theology* (2013), and Ryan Perry and Steven Kelly's forthcoming collection *Diuerse Imaginaciouns of Cristes Life: Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Beyond*.

Following a fairly brief introduction, Johnson and Westphall's volume is divided into three sections: 'History and Ideology', 'Manuscript Culture', and 'Textual Relations'. The last two are much bulkier than the first, and the emphasis of the book is primarily codicological and textual, though a number of the essays do address some of the broader conceptual issues raised in important recent studies of affective reading in the meditative tradition, including those by Jennifer Bryan, Nicole Rice, Sarah McNamer, and Michelle Karnes. Overall, it must be said, the structure and organization of the volume is slightly perplexing, and one or two of the essays seem to be only tangentially connected to the main theme.

The first section comprises just two articles, where one might have hoped for a more substantial discussion of the historical and ideological backdrop to this large and complex subject. Mishtooni Bose's essay on the far from straightforward relationship between orthodox and dissenting versions of *imitatio Christi* is nevertheless a trenchant and nuanced piece which takes issue with David Aers's somewhat

polarized characterization of these matters in his and Lynn Staley's 1996 book, *The Powers of the Holy*. The first essay, however, is Rob Lutton's piece on the late medieval controversy surrounding contemporary enthusiasm for devotion to the Name of Jesus. Fascinating though this is – not least in relation to Nicholas Love's apparently ambivalent attitude to the Name of Jesus as evidenced by the *Mirror* – it seems a relatively narrow topic with which to open the book.

Lutton's is in fact one of four essays concerned mainly with Love's *Mirror*, but rather strangely these are scattered throughout the book's three sections rather than given a section of their own. Studies by Ryan Perry, David J. Falls, and Ian Johnson offer salutary correctives to a number of received ideas about Love's popular and important text. Johnson's is another essay with a narrow focus, demonstrating that Love's Proheme to the *Mirror* does not merely allude to Augustine's *De agone christiano*, as was previously thought, but instead makes extensive use of it. This rather specific issue is in fact a part of his larger project – outlined more fully in his monograph, already cited – to show that 'vernacular theology', the term introduced by Nicholas Watson in 1995 and now ubiquitous in discussions of the period, is seriously misunderstood if it is regarded as being always in simple opposition to Latinate, clerical learning. Falls argues that we need to pay much more attention to the Carthusian milieu in which Love's work originated: some of the stylistic revisions of the MVC that Michelle Karnes has recently attributed to Love's theological conservatism may, Falls suggests, be better accounted for by the fact that he was adapting a Franciscan text for a specific readership of Carthusian novices at the Mount Grace Charterhouse where he was prior. It was only at a later stage, when Arundel gave it his imprimatur, that an adapted version of the *Mirror* began to be more widely circulated among a lay readership. Perry's focus is on the way Love's text may have actually been used in practice. Invoking Michel de Certeau's model of the reader as a nomadic poacher – a model whose relevance to the Pseudo-Bonaventuran corpus he judiciously weighs up – Perry looks for manuscript and other evidence for the various ways the *Mirror* may have been accessed by 'spiritually ambitious' lay readers, either as a whole or (as foreseen by Love himself) in parts. He argues further that the text should not be seen 'only, or perhaps even primarily, as a meditative text in the affective mould', but as one which is also a 'work of *pastoralia*', 'an introductory step to would-be practitioners of the mixed life', and which offered a lay version of Carthusian devotional practice comparable to the kind of DIY lay monasticism offered by books of hours.

Johnson and Westphall's book also contains substantial essays by two especially distinguished scholars in the field: Michael Sargent, editor of the critical edition of Love's *Mirror* (2005), and Vincent Gillespie, whose numerous articles on late medieval devotional and bibliographic culture have been consistently enlightening. Both have interesting things to say here, but in neither case does their contribution directly address the topic of Middle English lives of Christ. In 'Fatherless Books', Gillespie treats with characteristic acumen and wit the general issue of deliberate misattribution: the circulation in fifteenth-century England of potentially

controversial texts under the assumed credentials of ideologically 'safe' authors, Richard Rolle pre-eminent among them. The MVC circulated widely under Bonaventure's name, of course, but it is not even mentioned by Gillespie. Sargent's essay is also somewhat tangential, his own credentials as Love's modern editor notwithstanding. In 'Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors for Manuscript Relations' he gives us a valuable, learned, and entertainingly illustrated overview of the history of stemmatics and cladistics, together with a conspectus of his own views – formed over forty years as a textual critic of Middle English texts – on both 'the new philology' and the digital future of the critical edition. He discusses a number of important cases in the history of editing medieval texts, including the Kane-Donaldson edition of *Piers Plowman* and the online Canterbury Tales Project. It's a wonderful piece, drawing also on his own recent experience as editor of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*. (Anyone seeking an explanation of the length of time it has taken to produce a critical edition of Hilton's text will be well rewarded here.) However, the justification for the essay taking up 68 pages in this particular volume seems doubtful at best.

Among the remaining studies, the most conceptually adventurous and interesting is Allan Westphall's subtle investigation of the concept of spiritual 'sikernesse' in *The Prickyng of Love*, a text which Westphall is prepared to attribute to Walter Hilton. The *Prickyng* is not a version of the MVC, but a translation of another Franciscan text that was sometimes attributed to Bonaventure, the *Stimulis Amoris*. Though it is not a narrative life of Christ, Westphall makes a good case for its relevance to this volume. Following in the wake of Kathryn Kerby-Fulton's work on the cautiously tolerant reception of continental spirituality in late medieval England, Westphall reads the text as 'a treatise on the hermeneutics of Passion meditation' and therefore as a kind of how-to 'companion text [...] to the linear lives of Christ'. He sees the text's preoccupation with 'sikernesse' – which might be glossed as something like 'cautious confidence' as well as 'spiritual safety' – as crucial for understanding its ideological positioning and its concern to guard against the 'potentially deviant ... impulses' precipitated by spiritual ambition.

The other contributions can be more briefly summarized: John J. Thompson considers the place of the MVC-derived *Privoty of the Passion* in Robert Thornton's manuscript miscellanies; Amanda Moss examines a London manuscript containing *The Rule of the Life of Our Lady*, a translation of MVC chapter three; while William Marx discusses the *Liber Aureus and Gospel of Nicodemus*, an overlooked text in which a partial translation of the MVC is spliced together with translated extracts from the Latin apocryphal gospel. The other essays deal with texts that are not actually derived directly from the MVC and might therefore have been better grouped with Westphall's contribution in a separate section: Catherine Innes-Parker offers an intriguing analysis of the little-known Middle English translation of the *Lignum Vitae*, a Latin 'life of Christ' that really was by Bonaventure, though very different from the MVC; and Mary Raschko writes about the Middle English Gospel harmony *Oon of Foure*, a translation from the Latin harmony *Unum ex Quattuor* and a text which, she argues, falls somewhere between meditative life of Christ and Wycliffite scriptural

translation. Finally, as an adjunct to her recent monograph on book production at Syon Abbey in the early sixteenth-century, Alexandra da Costa contributes a fascinating essay on John Fewterer's *Mirror or Glass of Christ's Passion* (1534), a translation not of the MVC, but of Ulrich Pinder's MVC-influenced Latin text *Speculum Passionis Christi* (first printed in 1507). However, since this is the only essay to address material from the sixteenth century, and very much in the context of Reformation controversies, it seems odd not to find it at the end of the volume.

The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ certainly provides a wealth of new scholarship that greatly enhances our understanding of this complex corpus of texts. It therefore seems churlish to cavil. Nevertheless, the rationale for the contents and structure of the book as a whole – explained only very cursorily in the introduction – does sometimes seem a strange one and the final impression is that the book falls slightly short of being the coherent and definitive guide to the subject that it might otherwise have been.

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Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) ISBN 978-0-268-03611-9 (Paperback); 416 pages; \$42.

What Barbara Newman proposes in *Medieval Crossover* is nothing less than a new paradigm for reading medieval literature. Her primary hermeneutic is that of the 'principle of double judgment' she finds both of use to the modern critic and inherent in theology and exegesis in the Middle Ages. This principle, threaded through the book, is one of 'both/and'; it permits the sacred and her various forms of the 'profane' to be understood as united in textual and intellectual symbiosis. As in the motet, her 'crossover genre *par excellence*', a sacred *cantus firmus* – the tenor voice which intones a liturgical phrase – is both foundational and yet strangely in counterpoint to middle and upper voices singing longer, and perhaps themselves contrasting, vernacular lyrics. The whole tones precisely as it contrasts, melds, and agrees in a harmony musically dependent on difference. Newman finds this type of situation, with all its interpretative dilemmas, more the medieval rule than the exception.

Gorgeously written, full of piquantly scented and coloured phrases and paradoxes, this book is a garden to be walked through not just by medievalists alone. Indeed it stands as a contribution to the cross-disciplinary secularization debate in its own right. For if the holy and the seemingly unholy engage and co-contribute even in the normatively sacred Middle Ages, this surely opens the way to a more capacious understanding of sacred content in later literature – although this is to read deliberately against Newman's rather provocative foreclosure of 'crossover' in the early modern period. Identifying such a complex sacred-secular 'spectrum' implicitly questions the existence of an end-closed 'secular'. Along the way, she provides fruitful new readings of old and well-carved oaks: engaging with the convergence and divergence of Celtic pagan and Christian chivalric strands in Arthurian romance through *Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charette*, *Percesvale*, the *Queste del Graal*, and the ending of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Newman also cultivates some fertile new crosses; the heresy-accused mystic Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* is located in the soil of a diverse Picard literary culture, and as cross-pollinating with the ecstatic poetry of the Béguines, and even with the 'profoundly profane' *Roman de la Rose* – and its many sacralizations. She introduces us to some rarer and more dangerous strains in her chapter on parody: the *Lai d'Ignaure*, the Middle French *Dispute between God and his Mother*, and the poisonous bloom that is the Latin *Passion of the Jews of Prague*. Finally she renews two old varieties; her last chapter unravels the complementarity of René d'Anjou's devotional and amorous allegories, the *Mortifiement de Vaine Plaisance*, and the *Livre du Cœur Epris*. Demonstrably here, Newman's medievalism is firmly European, acknowledging vernacular exchange and English francophonia as well as latinity.

D.W. Robertson's infamous 'exegetical' approach risked viewing the Middle Ages itself as *hortus conclusus*, as a fair enclosed garden of moral and hermeneutic alterity. Within this garden, all critical interpretation tended towards his

understanding of allegoresis as a perfect decoding: no tree could grow that was not also either tree of life or tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He read with what he considered to be the correct, and medieval, mode of interpretation after Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*. This meant a 'wheat-and-chaff hermeneutics' whereby the form exists only for the sacred content, the husk only for the aesthetic pleasure of the hulling. Robertson's readings tended to fetch forth *either* deep irony *or* deep sacrality, charity upheld or cupidity revealed. For Newman the main problem is that, in the wake of the rejection of Robertsonianism, there has been something of a scorched earth policy on these questions. Whilst many cultivators are working individually at their plots, the terrain has been barren of any fresh attempts to posit large-scale interpretative paradigms. In the vacuum, she suggests at points, have arisen the alternatives of either literary 'subversion' whereby texts are archly and in anachronistically modern manner read to be working against the sacred 'norms' or the endlessly mobile and infinitely differentiated Middle Ages, a permanent indeterminacy which can exercise its own effective tyranny. Where others have been tempted to either to tear Robertson's garden to pieces or to question its existence Newman, refreshingly, picks up the rake.

Newman rightly realises that a proper critical return to 'exegetical criticism' requires a new account of medieval exegesis. The relationship of scriptural reading modes to literary ones cannot be got rid of; texts such as Dante's *Epistle to Can Grande* tell us explicitly that vernacular poets could suggest their work be read using a typological process. Newman joins a recent array of critics concerned with the both/and, the paradox, and the irony innate in medieval exegesis and allegoresis: Sarah Kay, Catherine Brown, and Larry Scanlon, to cite just a few. What is particularly innovative here is that she argues that the very division we find in reading medieval texts – which can appear to be between the possibilities of a 'profane' or secular versus a 'sacred' sense – is paralleled, if not originated, in both exegetical practice *and* the theological ideas which underlie and inform it. Her 'principle of double judgment' is rooted in fundamentally theological ground as she points out that salvation history itself involves a 'doubleness' principle, and hence a possibility of double-reading, in the idea of the 'fortunate fall'. The theological principle of *felix culpa* is that by which the narrative of the fall is necessarily a part of the narrative of salvation: the way down is the way up. Second – and evidently in a related fashion – reading the *sensus mysticus* in scripture frequently involves interpretation 'against' the literal 'grain' with its perhaps self-evident immorality. Hence David's adultery with Bathsheba can be, mystically, the rejection of the old law for the new. Exegesis in Newman's account envelopes and even *celebrates* such paradoxes – and suggests the distinct possibility that medieval readers would find the both/and had a certain sense – just as they could read both in moral and mystical senses.

After Newman's first chapter 'Theorizing Crossover', which introduces her paradigm, Chapter Two, 'Double Coding' applies this approach to the Old French and Middle English Arthurian texts listed above. Here she argues that both the 'wheat' of the sacred and the 'chaff' or the erotic or the comedic must be taken seriously.

Newman's readings of Lancelot in the *Morte* and the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, for example, challenge the sense that he must be *either* an erotic hero *or* a perhaps allegorical ideal of Christian chivalry *or* an adulterous anti-hero. Lancelot's quest in the latter to rescue Guinevere from the giant Meleagant includes Christ-like elements of humiliation and ordeal, but is also at times ribaldly comic and – of course – is at the plot-level a story of adultery. C.S. Lewis celebratedly found the moment of the *Charrette* where Lancelot kneels before the 'altar' of Guinevere's bed, the most 'ridiculous' of all in what he still thought of as the 'Religion of Love'. The (in)famous Jacques Ribard reading deals with the problem of a Christianized erotic by a 'Song of Songs' reading, interpreting the whole as a spiritual allegory of the spiritual union of the Soul or the Church with Christ. Robertson's moralistic rather than mystical interpretation draws the inverse conclusion – that the sacred elements are only there as a raucous and biting funny indictment of the deeply anti-Christ-like mode of Lancelot's cupidity. Newman takes new steps here not just with this one text but with the entire question of the relationship between the discourses of profane and sacred love. The text remains both/and: 'Lancelot's love is sublime *and* idolatrous, his behaviour heroic *and* ridiculous.' What is particularly interesting is that Newman seems genuinely to be attempting to navigate between both the danger of reading in only a sacred or only an ironic sense *and* that of culminating in an amorphous open-ended postmodern preference for the text's ahistorical infinite polysemism. The both/and is a hermeneutic that is at the outset based in theological ideas – although perhaps here one feels that Newman could carry her own *felix culpa* argument further. Fallen nature nuances questions of 'justice' and can question a moral perfection so rigidly felt it refuses space for gracious action – such as that of Gawain before his encounter with the Green Knight. One could argue that the double judgment on Lancelot has a great deal to do with the realization that our sinful natures are the means of our redemption, and that it is human 'doubleness' – divine potential in fleshly form – with which this literature is concerned.

In Chapter Three, 'Conversion', Newman demonstrates the historicism of her approach by engaging with the particular context of Marguerite Porete and the Picard literary culture of her time. In Porete's home town of Valenciennes in the fourteenth-century, literary and religious fraternities called *puy*s ('podiums') *de nostre dame* ran poetical, musical, and dramatic competitions based around the composition of the love song proper – the *amoureuse* – and its sacralization and burlesquing in the *serventois* and *sotte chansons* respectively. Newman finds this a convincingly shaded and blended backdrop against which to read Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*. Certainly Porete's 'courtly' tales and dialogues are pressed into mystical service, but Newman is also arguing here for a parallel development and a mutual borrowing of ideas central to the 'metaphysics' of both one and the other love. So she finds in the poetry of the *trouvères* ideas suspiciously akin to Marguerite's of the abandonment and annihilation of the self – for the distantiated 'other' of the lover rather than the divine. I would question this reading only to wonder whether the texts on romantic love, precisely by refusing to cast out intermediate human charity as Porete's perfected soul

finally does, do not pull these ideas *back* from her arguable quietism. The final flourish in this chapter is to argue for a surprising ‘convergence’ of the *Roman de la Rose* and Porete’s *Miroir*. Both the Lover and Porete’s Free Soul depart from Reason and the Virtues for Love – in the one case to lift the soul above, making her mistress of servant virtues, and in the other, eventually, to cause the Lover to sink into a spiral of sin and lechery. Newman argues that both the *Roman* and the *Miroir* are engaged with debates of their age. It is well known that the *Roman* mocks the possibility of a spiritualised *fin’amor*, for its spiritualising allegorisation ironically stresses its grossly corporeal nature – the hard, stiff pilgrim’s staff and its hanging bag or scrip are the means of pornographic suggestion. To expand on Newman, if this relation is a real one then it could be argued that its mockery cuts two ways – both skewering *fin’amor*’s religious aspirations and perhaps entering into the theological debate, critiquing the *demesure* which had also become a feature of sacred discourse, as in Porete’s graduation from the requirements of virtue.

Chapter Four, ‘Parody’, has further theoretical contributions to make. Before the sixteenth-century *sacra parodia* meant precisely the opposite of what it might to us now – not the subversion of the sacred but its elevation by imitation, as when lines from Virgil were pieced together to create full Gospel narratives. Newman argues for the meaningful sacred content enacted even in those texts which ‘parody’ in a modern sense. The *Lai d’Ignaure* features what can be read as a cannibalistic mock-Eucharist where the body of an adulterous lover is fed to his twelve ladies. This not some wildly avant-garde mockery of the sacrament of the altar itself but a parody of one mode of extreme Eucharistic piety in the Beguines – still sacredly serious, as its seemingly ‘other’ reading as romance tragedy might also suggest. Most troubling of all, but given a fascinating treatment at Newman’s hands, is the case of the *Passion of the Jews of Prague*. This is *sacra parodia* in the ancient sense, taking the historical narrative of a fourteenth-century Jewish pogrom and narrating it as a patchwork of Latin gospel texts in the form of a Passion. Here, she argues, whilst the the authorial intent is unremittingly and sickeningly justificatory, the text may unwittingly parody itself. The Jews of Prague play both the part of the populace who condemn and that of Christ condemned: first turned upon for an alleged attack on a Host procession they nonetheless also play disciple and Christ roles including crucifixion-like deaths presented with words used of the Passion. Here Newman’s idea that no generic ‘convergence’ can be *merely* the adoption of forms, but involves, even against the author’s will, the convergence of some inherent content, salvages some redemptive possibility for the text. She convincingly argues that the very use of the Gospel citations and the identification of the victims with Christ must have made it possible for a medieval reader to see horror in the plight of the Jewish victims, and the text as a whole to become the darkest of satires on their persecutors.

One problem with Newman’s paradigm overall – which, it must be stressed, does not take away from the immensely illuminating content of her individual studies – lies in her use of the term ‘secular’. If celtic paganism, classical paganism, the ‘courtly’, historical narrative *per se*, and seemingly any literary form outside a narrow

range of 'sacred' ones (hagiography, mystic devotion) can all be 'secular', the term seems to have become too laden. Does it stand for the non-Christian, or just for the non-clerical or ecclesial? Newman does in passing acknowledge that the first two are actually their own forms of the sacred, and of course her Chapters 4 and 5 hinge on describing the interplay of courtly and devotional 'metaphysics'. If the sacred is early on categorized by Newman as the medieval 'norm', then perhaps the secular is basically the neutral, the generically or the formally constrained—the husk for the wheat. And yet what Newman's work itself shows is that forms and conventions themselves have hybridity, potentially mundane, potentially sacramental. So the 'secular' constantly escapes conventional definition into a series of alternative sacralities, be they the 'metaphysics' used to speak of romantic love, the ghosts of pagan rite in beheading rituals and reborn kings, or indeed the classical pagan world which interlopes into both to allow such possibilities as personified *Amor*. When Augustine used the term *saeculum* it meant something more temporal: precisely the worldly mixity of the 'two cities' with their two loves. This is the state of the world's perpetual middle age, its *medium aevum* between Eden and Jerusalem, whose 'new' is a perpetual renewal of the eschatological orientation of ourselves and the world towards one city or the other. Newman could even have exchanged her 'principle of double judgment' for a theory of the 'secularity' of medieval literature in this sense.

A further caution I have with regards to this book would be one of periodization. Newman identifies an 'early modern shift' which ends her 'crossover' period and the possibility of double judgment, and represents the entry of the 'properly' secular. She argues that this shift allows the imagining of a 'purely secular realm' for which the Middle Ages used the classical era as a substitute, and could nonetheless not properly conceive. Her framing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a 'perfectly secular comedy', the move with which she opens the book, must be questioned—Beatrice Groves, for example, has written on the echos of medieval drama in Bottom's burlesque resurrection, and his 'dream' speech's relationship to Pauline writing. Newman identifies this fairy-world as unquestionably secular, and yet surely her own development of how pagan, giant, and fairy forces in *Gawain and the Green Knight* can appear to represent divine will has not entirely lost its relevance here? Shakespeare's comedy is patterned through with questions about the stability of the governing supernatural order and its relationship to the human one—themes which do not become radically secular overnight.

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