

BOOK REVIEWS

Albrecht Classen (ed.), *The Book and the Magic of Reading in the Middle Ages* (London and New York, Routledge, 2012 [1999]); pp. xliii + 308; ISBN 978-1-138-79903-5.

This edited book is a welcome reprint of a Garland volume. Albrecht Classen's "Introduction" discusses the medieval Christian context, based on the Biblical text, and the emergence of oral reading communities around religious and secular literature. Reading was both suspected and advocated in the Middle Ages; the spiritual power of the written word was undeniable, but fictions could express lies. Letters "represent the fundamental vehicle to penetrate into the depth of the final truth of God's grace for which there are no words" (p. xxxiii). The eleven chapters cover a wide range of approaches to literature, questions of authorship, books as physical and symbolic objects, and various types of readers. The first chapter, Ashlynn K. Pai's "Varying Degrees of Light: Bonaventure and the Medieval Book of Nature," examines Bonaventure's response to Aquinas, which involved reading as a somewhat magical art, and the beauty of the world as a disclosure of the divine, God. Raymond Cormier's "Reading that Transforms: Virgil's Hero Reborn in Twelfth Century Vernacular Representations" shifts the focus to secular literature and the refiguring of the Classical Aeneas in courtly love. Next is Penny Simons' "Reading and the Book: Frame and Story in the Old French *Dolopathos*" which discusses the Seven Sages of Rome complex of stories, and its reception in the Middle Ages.

The fourth chapter, Classen's "The Book and the Power of Reading in Medieval High German Literature: Mystery, Enlightenment, Spirituality and Love," looks at a range of authors including Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Strassburg, Ulrich von Liechtenstein, and Wolfram von Eschenbach. The richness of German secular literature in the high Middle Ages is astonishing and this is a fascinating and fun chapter. The next contribution, "Book Metaphors in the Textual Community of the *Ancrene Wisse*" by Jean-Marie Kauth, changes the register entirely, as this text is a manual for anchoresses, women who retreated from society into hermitages, rather than becoming a nun in a female monastic community. The evolution of the *Ancrene Wisse* is analysed as a kind of detective story,

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with multiple authors and involving different geographical areas. Chapter Six, Burt Kimmelman's "The Language of the Text: Authorship and Textuality in *Pearl*, the *Divine Comedy*, and *Piers Plowman*," examines similar issues for very different texts, both secular and religious in their concerns. The next contribution, Patricia E. Grieve's "Building Christian Narrative: The Rhetoric of Knowledge, Revelation and Interpretation in *Libro di Apolonio*," is a study of an "anonymous thirteenth century Castilian verse romance" (p. 149) in which Apolonio represents the type of the pious, repentant ascetic.

Chapter Eight is Jean E. Jost's "Chaucer's Literate Characters Reading Their Texts: Interpreting Infinite Regression, or the Narcissus Syndrome" which analyses the privileging of reading, and exposes how "reading romances within ... romances is reinforcing and self-referential" (p. 184). This lengthy and challenging chapter shows that reading can be narcissistic in that the text and all that it conveys can be absorbed by the reader, and be subordinated to his or her self. The next essay is Sue Ellen Holbrook's "Story, Picture, and Reading in Wynkyn de Worde's *Vitas Patrum*," a meditation on a book, twenty-seven copies of which survive, that is a collection of saints' lives, a particularly popular genre in the Middle Ages. David Linton's "Reading the Virgin Reader" discusses the Virgin Mary as engaged in weaving and later in reading, and the presence of a book in visual art depictions of the Annunciation. The theme of the Virgin continues in the final piece, "Maria Legens – Mariam Legere: St Mary as Ideal Reader and St Mary as a Textbook," which surveys the relation of reading and women, a world in which "teachers and spiritual advisors recommend needlework to aristocratic as well as patrician women to prevent them from turning to the literary and biblical word" (p. 281), yet the ideal woman, Mary, is an ideal reader and also a text to be read. This is an interesting collection of chapters that deserves a wide readership.

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Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit mission to China, 1579-1724* (New York, Harvard University Press, 2007); pp. xii + 496; ISBN 978-0-674-02448-9.

Liam Matthew Brockey's *Journey to the East* presents a comprehensive, erudite, yet readable, account of the Jesuit mission to China. It is a story of successes and failures, of cultural encounter and paradox, of "strangers in a strange land" (Exodus 2:22). Brockey's narrative breezes with scholarly aptitude through a variety of complex topics, including Jesuit theology, evangelisation strategy, Catholic ecclesiastical politics, and so on, while also taking account of Chinese language, culture, politics, and religion in the early modern period. Brockey does justice to both the Europeans and the Chinese who make up his tale; having said this, the work takes primarily a Eurocentric perspective as is necessary for the topic. Brockey considers the pragmatic problems associated with the mission, such as the language and cultural barriers faced by the Europeans, which became something of a learning experience for the Jesuit mission as a whole, as well as the institutional politics of the mandarins, and the philosophical debates held periodically between Confucian and Christian scholars in China. *Journey to the East* complements later work done by Brockey on the Jesuits in Asia, such as *The Visitor: André Palmeiro and the Jesuits in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). *Journey to the East* has some inevitable crossover with this later work, and it is clear that Brockey's expertise on the Jesuit mission in Asia is vast and growing. *Journey to the East* also complements others' works on the Jesuit mission in Asia, such as Ronnie Po-chia Hsia's wonderful biography of Matteo Ricci [*A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552-1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)] or Gauvin Alexander Bailey's analysis of Jesuit artistic exchange [*Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999)]. However, *Journey to the East* gives a broader account than these other works, and so it would therefore appear to be most useful as an enjoyable introductory text of use in undergraduate and graduate courses on the history of Catholicism, cultural encounter, or early modern Asia, although specialists are also likely to learn many details from it. In this sense, Brockey's work ought to be considered as an adjunct to the work of David E. Mungello's *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), which is now in its fourth edition.

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Journey to the East is structured temporally, progressing as a narrative from the Jesuit mission's early beginnings with Francis Xavier, to its ultimate unravelling in the early decades of the eighteenth century. The book is divided into two parts; the first presents the history of the mission, while the second asks how the Society of Jesus was able to develop the cultural competence to communicate its religious message within a cultural context vastly different to that of Western Europe. In structuring his work thus, Brockey gives both a detailed historical overview and a necessary cultural analysis that incorporates discussions of syncretism, philosophical interpretation of Catholicism through Chinese lenses, and the creation of an enduring religious tradition dependent on, but to some extent distinct from, European iterations of Catholicism. Chapter 1 considers the mission of Xavier and the early years of the Jesuits in Guangdong. Chapter 2 describes Matteo Ricci and his immediate successors, and their inability to convert any major Chinese statesmen or religious figures. Chapter 3 charts the position of the Jesuits during and after the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644. Chapter 4 concerns the harsh measures enacted against the Jesuits by the Chinese authorities in the 1660s and 1670s, the arrival of important French Jesuits, and the rise of the smaller missions of the Mendicants in coastal regions such as Jiangnan. Chapter 5 records the political and institutional problems that developed within the Jesuit mission to China in the late seventeenth century, as well as the logistical issues of pastoral care to a member base that had grown by this stage to at least ten thousand adherents. Part II commences with Chapter 6, which navigates the probationary training given to Jesuit missionaries in Europe and China. Chapter 7 examines the Jesuits' commitment to learning Chinese languages and philosophies as a precursor to attempts at evangelisation. Chapter 8 evaluates the methods of the Jesuits, and particularly Matteo Ricci, in attempting to convert the Chinese. Chapter 9 considers the mission's institutional structure and power hierarchy. Chapter 10 narrates the efforts of the various devotional groupings within the Jesuit mission, and particularly the Marian confraternities.

On the whole, *Mission to the East* does not bear any obvious deficiencies. It objectively, yet empathetically, considers the Jesuit mission and Chinese responses to it, taking heed of its corporate structure, Catholic underpinnings, and European identity, and how both successful and unsuccessful intercultural exchange took place with Chinese philosophy, religion, culture, and politics. The Jesuit mission to China remains one of

the most fascinatingly complex movements in the history of European-Asian exchange and intercultural dialogue during the age of exploration. Brockey's work is commendable, and will make an excellent addition to the bookshelf of many a scholar or student.

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Debra N. Mancoff (ed.), *The Arthurian Revival: Essays on Form, Tradition, and Transformation* (London and New York, Routledge, 2015 [1992]); pp. xxii + 307; ISBN 978-1-138-99767-7.

The acquisition of Garland Publishing by Routledge has resulted in paperback reissues of a large number of important publications. This interesting collection of essays, on the relationships between the medieval epics and romances about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and modern reinterpretations and adaptations thereof, is particularly welcome. Debra N. Mancoff's "Introduction" situates the Arthurian legend in the context of the wider medieval revival from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Gothic revival architecture, the new forms of film and television, and radical re-workings of the plot(s) in the service of sundry ideological positions about. Linda K. Hughes' first chapter discusses the medieval tournament staged by the Earl of Eglinton in 1839, and two related literary products: Edward Howard's poem "The Grand Tourney" and short story "The Three Knights and the Lady Errant: A Tale of True Chivalry" that appeared in *Metropolitan Magazine* in April 1840 and September 1841 respectively. The author acknowledges that the event and subsequent literature are at the margins of the Arthurian revival, but shows that studies of the periphery may illuminate the centre.

The second contribution, Mark Cumming's "Allegory and Comedy in Bulwer Lytton's *King Arthur*," contrasts the "reverent treatment of chivalry" (p. 31) in painter Daniel Maclise's *Combat of Two Knights* with Bulwer Lytton's epic which, though intended seriously, "achieved only the parodic" (p. 32). John R. Reed's "Teasing the King," which analyses the influence of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* via popular parodies of his work, including Rudyard Kipling's "The Cursing of Stephen" (1884) and Tom Taylor's "The Laureate's Bust at Trinity: A

Fragment of an Idyll (1859), among others. The next chapter, Rebecca Cochran's "William Morris: Arthurian Innovator," contrasts the Victorian distaste for *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858) with the esteem in which Morris is now held as a modern interpreter of the legend, with concern for issues of sexual hypocrisy, violence, and the repressive effects of the Christian religion. Christine Poulson, in "'The True and the False': Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and the Visual Arts," examines the popularity of paintings drawn from the idylls "Elaine" and "Enid" which reinforce gentle and subservient behavior among women.

The sixth chapter, "Sir Noel Paton and the Grail Quest: The Arthurian Mythos as Christian Art" by Richard A. Schindler, addresses issues of religious faith and doubt in late nineteenth century. The Scottish artist Noel Paton, believed that art was a vehicle for "moral, ethical, and spiritual issues" (pp. 117-118), and painted many images of Christ and also Arthurian paintings of Sir Galahad, the holiest of the Knights of Arthur's Round Table fellowship. Marilyn Lincoln Bord's "Art's Moral Mission: Reading G. F. Watt's *Sir Galahad*" explores similar territory in the 1862 painting by Watts (1817-1904), widely believed to be the finest Victorian artist. The next essay, Alan Lupack's "American Arthurian Authors: A Declaration of Independence," shifts focus to North America, where such distinguished works as Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) are joined by a host of lesser-known medievalist plays, opera libretti, and novels that linked the "Edenic Avalon" (p. 170) to the promise of the New World. The ninth chapter, Edward R. Haymes' "From Romance to Ritual: Wolfram, Arthur, and Wagner's Parsifal," traces the development of the figure of Perceval/Parzival/Parsifal from the thirteenth century epic by Wolfram von Eschenbach to Richard Wagner, whose final opera *Parsifal* (1882) is a curious hybrid of Christian and Buddhist doctrines and esoteric symbols.

Joe K. Law's "Toward the Condition of (Absolute) Music: Edward A. MacDowell and the Arthurian Twilight" examines the Arthurian revival in music, sketching Wagner's contribution (in addition to *Parsifal*, he wrote *Lohengrin* and *Tristan und Isolde* using plots from the legend), and focuses on MacDowell's *Lancelot and Elaine*, the score of which "seems to be lost" (p. 197). The next chapter, Michael Hurd's "Rutland Boughton's Arthurian Cycle," considers Boughton (1878-1960) and his librettist Reginald Ramsden Buckley (1883-1919), who produced several operas including *The Birth of Arthur* (1909) and *The Round Table* (1915-1916). Raymond H.

Thompson's "The First and Last Love: Morgan le Fay and Arthur" and Bruce A. Beatie's "The Broken Quest: The 'Perceval' Romances of Chretien de Troyes and Eric Rohmer" move the coverage of the legend decisively into the twentieth century, analysing the quasi-incestuous (or actually incestuous) love between Arthur and Morgan le Fay in various novels, and Rohmer's films as Arthurian adaptations. Julie F. Codell's "Decapitation and Deconstruction: The Body of the Hero in Robert Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*" discusses the radical 1974 film that "used ... the Arthurian legend as a vehicle to challenge the fundamental precepts of Western humanism – heroism, individuality, free will" (p. 266). The last essay, Martin B. Schichtman's "Who Does the Grail Serve? Wagner, Spielberg, and the Issue of Jewish Appropriation," concludes the book with an examination of connections between Wagner's *Parsifal* and Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). This volume is a fun roller-coaster ride through a lot of modern adaptations of Arthurian material, and all readers will learn at least something.

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Ellen D. Haskell, *Mystical Resistance: Uncovering the Zohar's Conversations with Christianity* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016); pp. 256; ISBN 978-0-19-060043-3.

This should be an important study of an important and interesting topic, but the buzzword "conversation" in the subtitle alerts the readers to something problematic, about the target audience and its own possible subversive intentions. It is not that nearly a third of the slim volume is taken up with notes and scholarly apparatus, seemingly leaving little room for a full presentation of "the strategies and specific arguments that the Zohar's authors used to contest Christian power" (p. 2). Something is wrong with the way in which the argument emerges. What appears could have been reduced to twenty-five pages if carefully focused and phrased; or it could have been expanded to a thousand pages with fuller evidence-based rational arguments and sensitive interpretations. There are therefore three approaches to my review of this book: the presentation of the content, the

awkward post-modernist scholarly style and the aim of its implied critical theory.

In the first approach, most pleasant and significant to read, is the importance of Ellen D. Haskell's discussion of the *Zohar* as a work of Jewish resistance against the rise of Christian domination in western Europe in general and the breakdown of the so-called *convivencia* in southern Iberia and parts of Mediterranean France in particular. Though rather exaggerated for polemical reasons, the idea *convivencia* "living together" wherein Christians, Muslims and Jews co-inhabit the same space and time in peace, harmony and mutual toleration, was certainly a significant ideal in many parts of Iberia until the thirteenth century. However, when Christian hegemony strengthened against the "others" in its midst, the aggressiveness of ecclesiastical and civil functionaries became intolerable, breaking out into the restriction of Jewish social rights, forced attendance at sermons and religious debates, and the increased coercion for Jews as individuals and communities to convert. The *Zohar* and associated kabbalistic writings were produced in those places where these tensions were highest and thus in an atmosphere of anxiety and desperation. Weakened by the Maimonidean Controversies (which Haskell barely touches on; her bibliography does not include José Faur or David Shasha) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Sephardic Jews were vulnerable to Catholic pressures, followers of Nachmanides's mysticism and sometimes nearly-Christian sacramentalism and iconography, and the smaller, more traditional faction of Maimonidean rationalists and humanists unable to sustain many of these attacks from within (by the new forms of heretical anti-intellectualism) and without (from converted Jews who prompted Christian theologians on the weakest places in Talmudic discourse to attack). Jewish mystical resistance in the *Zohar* arises from re-interpretations of Scriptural and rabbinical narratives and polemics to counter, undermine and ridicule Catholic beliefs and practices, which the medieval Jews were quite well aware of for a long time, and most sensitive to in the last few centuries. Most interesting of all, therefore, is Haskell's fifth chapter, "In the Palace of Images: Responding to Christian Art," in which she shows how the resistance was based on close-reading of new forms of Catholic visual art on cathedral facades—places there as much to insult and coerce Jews as to educate Christian passers-by in the developing doctrines of the Church Triumphant. We could wish there were more subtle discussion about how the Jewish imagination functioned to parse these

ecclesiastical images, transform them into verbal units, and then manipulates or recreates a pictorial universe into Hebrew words, letters and rabbinical and kabbalistic tropes.

The second approach to my reading of *Mystical Resistance* proves less pleasant; it is based on the fashionable vagueness and confusion running through the writing style of this book, not least its repetitions, tautologies, and reliance on formulaic jargon and neologisms drawn from a politicized and all too often anti-Zionist Sociology, especially its Foucauldian notion that everything—or at least every discourse—is about power. For example, the use of *critique* and *critiquing* to stand for all sorts of philosophical questioning, literary analysis and deconstruction, debate and polemical argumentation, and sometimes all together, even on the same page; or *reference* (as a verb) in place of more nuanced terms such as allusion, hint, inference, oblique referral or deferring. I am not speaking here as a “grammar Nazi” or old-fashioned philological pedant. The formulaic constructs force issues into generalized patterns of occurrence. When one speaks of “the golden calf incident” or “self-fashioning projects” and “independent negotiations”, these are tropes (to use another term that flattens out the dynamic uniqueness of each historical moment) the reader is perforce pushed into thinking in modern not very subtly secularized Christian jargon of triumphalism and replacement theology, along with carrying the baggage of post-modernism, aggressive anti-rationalism, identity politics and pseudo-feminist anti-Semitism.

In the Conclusion, suddenly everything is being “messed”, whether depicted in statuary on church façades, sung in choral processions, implied in gospel narratives and parables. Is this merely an example of sloppy computer talk where subtle discussions are required, or a case of anachronism tipped over into a ridiculous trumpeting of “alternate facts”?

Thus the critical third approach I must take towards this book is even less palatable and sometimes downright frightening because of the basic corps of authorities Haskell relies on, not least Judith Butler (who, in fact, gets the final word), Homi K. Bhaba and Edward Said, all of whom are post-modernist critics (to speak mildly) of Israel and Zionism, and therefore of the legitimacy and uniqueness of Jewish thought, history, and religious institutions. Part of this opposition to the multi-millennial-long Jewish “project” is the attempt to “normalize” Jewish themes, make Jews like everyone else, and deny integrity to Jewish history and modes of rabbinical analysis and judicial debate, as well as the “critique” of the

principles and ideals of the European Enlightenment upon which tolerance is founded, the legal admittance into the national polity codified, the universality of reason as a defining feature of the human mind, the common justice for all that twentieth century wars were fought over, the crushing and erasure of superstitions and mythical explanations and replacement by science that is now once again threatened in public universities and popular (and “social”) media.

But then again, maybe, and I hope, Haskell is doing her own kind of subversive resistance to the currently unquestioned academic paradigms of our day, absorbing their painful buzz words and vapid rhetorical tropes, to heap scorn on the big shots of Orientalism, Deconstructionism and Post-Modernism and so make us laugh at their “practice of domination.”

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J. H. Crone, *Our Lady of the Fence Post* (Crawley, University of Western Australia, 2016); pp. 106; ISBN 9781742589121.

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the contemporary world, accompanied by the (usually religious) phenomenon of pilgrimage, may be understood as an instance of the medieval manifesting in the modern. On 12 October 2002 Paddy’s Irish Bar and the Sari Club in Kuta, Bali were bombed by Islamic terrorists, an attack in which 202 people, from twenty-one countries, died. Twenty of the dead were from Sydney’s Eastern suburbs, and six were members of the Coogee Dolphins football team. In late January 2003 Coogee local Christine Cherry of the Beach Street Gallery Laundrette revealed to the media that, viewed in the afternoon sun, the fence on the headland that had been recently renamed “Dolphins Point” in honour of the dead appeared to resemble the Virgin Mary. Crowds flocked to Coogee to see the apparition (which technically was not an apparition because it was a trick of the light that made a fence post appear like a statue of the Virgin) and there was a short-lived media frenzy, interviewing “pilgrims” (Protestant, Catholic, New Age, not religious at all) and reporting on acts of vandalism that imperilled the fence through which “Mary” became visible.

J. H. Crone, a former commissioning editor at SBS Television and independent documentary maker, published a cycle of poems inspired by the events of the Coogee Marian apparition, covering the period from 2012 to 2015 (when ISIS was dominating the news across the globe). The poems fictionalise the events, with a fictional suburb, “Sunshine Bay,” replacing Coogee, and offer a powerful and distinctive take on the “War on Terror.” Forty-three poems introduce many characters: Joe and Mari, in a violent relationship; Maria de Jesus, whose son died in the Bali bombing, who frequents the bakery that takes the place of the laundrette in the poems; Christine Cherry from the laundrette is featured but Mari takes on some of her roles communicating with journalists and creating souvenirs for pilgrims; Mae the journalist; and Australian Muslims, including Maryam and Youssef (that their names are identical with Mary and Joseph is no accident). In fact, the women called Mari, Mae, and Maria de Jesus are all named for the Holy Virgin.

The poem “Graffiti Triptych” describes the memorial erected to the Bali bombing dead at the real Dolphins Point, and refers to a “Professor Maire McCormack, an expert on religion” (p. 27), in whom I recognise myself, an academic in Religious Studies, a woman with an Irish surname, who ventured in early 2003 to try to make sense of the strange religio-spiritual phenomena occurring in Coogee. The seeming innocence of Australians partying in Kuta is interrogated in “Elegy to Giants,” with its sad acknowledgement; “Kuta was a part of Oz/ then post the bombing it wasn’t” (p. 33). The military action of March 2003 in which Australia (as part of the “coalition of the willing” with Britain and the United States) invaded Iraq is referenced, as is the hostility of many toward the apparition. Mari receives death threats, as did Christine Cherry, and Jozo from Herzegovina brings the visionaries of the Virgin of Medjugorje into the mix, with all the violence and ethnic cleansing of the post-Yugoslavian Balkans. During the cycle a Jesuit is interviewed about the validity of the vision; Sister Mairwen Mattson, a radical nun, is investigated because of her views about “Our Lady of the Fence Post” (p. 72), members of the Taliban are glimpsed on television screens, and medieval mystics including Julian of Norwich are referenced.

“Hate Poem” conflates the events of the Cronulla Riots of December 2005 with the Coogee apparition, and the poem includes text messages urging racial hate and religionist violence, though in this case against “wog” Catholic images and rituals, rather than Islam (the target of

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the Cronulla Riots). Tragedy touches the lives of various characters: “beers” kill Jozo whose mother committed suicide; Mae and Joe have a fraught sexual relationship; Maria de Jesus lost her son; and the poem “Resurrection” details the destruction of the fence by vandals and the faithful being able to receive the vision of the Virgin, despite the absence of the medium through which she was made visible. The poems are fresh and clever, and use language in interesting ways. However, it is a serious question as to how comprehensible the poetic cycle is, a mere fourteen years after the events it immortalises, and it is possible that in just a few more years it will have become as obscure as Alexander Pope’s *Dunciad* (1728-1743), which I recall from the 1980s as a student of English as entirely incomprehensible. *Our Lady of the Fence Post* is a major artistic response to a challenging era of Australian history, written in accessible yet skilful language; it deserves a wide readership, not obscurity.

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