

Contemporary theory likewise goes unconsidered here, particularly as it relates to conceptions of the self and interiority. That oversight seems especially a shame as the kind of subject Abbott describes Julian to be differs not only from the conception of the subject that is commonly held today, but also from the static, undifferentiated conception of the subject that for too long has been considered the medieval paradigm of selfhood.

These omissions aside, Abbott's study is a welcome addition to scholarship on Julian of Norwich. His account of Julian's development of the concept of the mystical subject offers an important starting point for further consideration of the complexities and differences that distinguish medieval identities, especially as they are grounded in faith, and offers a much-needed disruption to the progress narrative that for so long has characterized discussions of the "history of the self."

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Gabriella Brooke, *The Words of Bernfrieda: A Chronicle of Hauteville*. Cheney, Washington: Eastern Washington University Press, 1999. 258 pp., \$18.95.

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The long subtitle of this novel, elegantly laid out on its title page, reflects in its diction and even in its hierarchy of scripts the conventions of the sources on which it is based, "contemporary accounts and histories of the Normans in France and Italy:"

The Chronicle of the Life of Fredesenda  
Wife of Tancred of Hauteville and  
Mother of Robert Guiscard Duke of  
Apulia and Rogier Count of Mileto from  
her Birth in 1000 Anno Domini at  
Granville in Normandy until her Death  
and Burial at the Abbey of Santa  
Eufemia in Apulia in 1063 Anno Domini  
The Words of Bernfrieda by her Hand  
Written at the Abbeys of Santa Eufemia  
in Apulia and Santa Agatha in Catania  
by the Grace of God

This enjoyable book is a fictionalized account of the other Norman Conquest, or rather the first, in which Southern Italy became Norman after long occupation by the Byzantines and the Muslims. The novel thematizes its competition with the more familiar Norman Conquest even in its material incarnation: the map which opens the book, labelled "Normandy and her Neighbors in 1066," relegates to its upper margin the southern coast of England, where only two towns are labelled. These are of course Pevensey and Hastings, but both words are literally truncated horizontally so that we see only the bottom half of the letters. This effect, intentional or not, is both pleasing and exemplary of the twisting of familiar perspective which characterizes the entire book.

In fact, *The Words of Bernfrieda* is a pleasant read throughout. Nowadays it is all too easy to encounter novels set in the Middle Ages, whether murder mysteries or bodice-rippers, though it is less easy to enjoy reading them: their very approximate portrayals of the Middle Ages often make them useful mainly as unintentional comedy. (There are also, I'm happy to say, many exceptions to this frequent mediocrity.) Gabriella Brooke's book belongs to the more restricted category of historical novels intended to illuminate some element or aspect of the Middle Ages, rather than simply using the period as a decorative stage-setting. Its epigraphs from primary and secondary sources, its glossary, bibliography, maps, and the Hauteville family tree make it clear that this author cares that we understand the historical context; its detailed descriptions of scriptorium practice are careful and minute.

Like Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, by now so often imitated as to no longer seem original, *The Words of Bernfrieda* renews a familiar tale by presenting its events as a story which happened to the women involved. It thus gains that novelty of perspective which Emerson tells us to seek by looking at the world through our splayed legs, backwards and upside-down. It does, it is true, organize the events of the Norman conquest of Southern Italy according to those typically characterized as belonging to the private domain of women (infatuations, weddings, births, deaths) rather than to the public domain of men (conquests, battles, confrontations). However, in keeping with the task Brooke sets herself, it does weave the two together, both literally and imagistically (as in the "bow and mirror safe in Senda's chest," the two devices by which a revenge killing is effected by a male character and concealed by a female one [156]). It also thematizes the particular issues of women's literacy, women's (indirect and unofficial) political power, women's autonomy (or lack thereof), women's standing in the church, in ways which are more reminiscent of earlier women's studies—approaching women's history from within the dominant paradigm rather than reconfiguring the questions we ask of the past. Within that framework, however, the novel beautifully illustrates for us the limitations of

women's purview and the astonishing breadth of their expertise in an eleventh-century aristocratic milieu.

Like Stephen J. Rivele's novel *A Booke of Days: A Novel of the Crusades*, then, *The Words of Bernfrieda* portrays "world historical events" through a lens of narratorial personality and sentiment, the very lenses which medieval chronicles so sedulously avoid. Because the modernity of the treatment is so visible in both cases, however, it does not threaten to overrun the integrity of the events or of our sources for them. In both novels the first-person accounts, the focus on daily life, the window on intimate emotion, are characteristic of our own time rather than theirs, but they do help us to imagine their world from a closer point of view. The inevitable distortion may result in a few infelicities of phrasing, as well as in a sneaking suspicion that the authors are modernizing too much; but overall the pleasure of the reading outweighs these small reservations.

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