

Discourse” by Stephen Milner looks at one of the foremost experiences of marginalization in Italy—everyone, it seems, was at one time being exiled or imposing exile. Milner identifies the exiles’ use of Ciceronian discourse in their writings as the source of a communal identity for this diverse group. In “Dominican Marginalia: The Late Fifteenth Century Printing Press of San Jacopo di Ripoli in Florence” by Anabel Thomas, the surviving ledger of a printing house (*Magliachechiano* X 143) and one of its particular productions (*Libro della Compagnia del Rosario*) witness the ways female religious establishments gained access to the central city.

The concluding Part IV, “Minority Groups,” looks at those groups traditionally labeled as “other”: slaves, mountain men, and the destitute elderly. “Slaves in Italy, 1350-1550” by Steven Epstein demonstrates the ethnic complexity of Italian slavery and the attendant difficulty of generalizing about the group. In “The Marginality of Mountaineers in Renaissance Florence,” Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. points out that the geographical area of Florence included the population of the mountain areas who had always been considered “liminal groups.” Dennis Romano’s “Vecchi, Poveri, e Impotenti: The Elderly

in Renaissance Venice” uses this sidelined group to argue that being old was better for some than for others. All of these minorities constitute fluid categories again demonstrating that, as the editor proposes in his introduction, “[i]n the normal run of things no one person or group will be equally and consistently empowered and no one will suffer uniform disempowerment although the chances are clearly not the same for everyone.”

At the Margins is a rich volume of intriguing essays. What distinguishes this collection is the especially fine use of sources and close well focused arguments into a new area enlightened by critical theory.

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Liz Herbert McAvoy.
*Authority and the Female
Body in the Writings of
Julian of Norwich and
Margery Kempe.* Boydell
Press, 2004. Pp. viii + 276

In recent years there have been almost too many studies of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe to count: at

least twenty-five book-length studies on one or both of them since the year 2000 alone. It is not, then, the subjects of this monograph that makes it unique or appealing, but McAvoy's fresh approach which blends traditional approaches with a strong critical voice and invokes feminist and deconstructive methodologies to provide a much-needed and thought-provoking perspective on these two figures and their impact on the medieval world.

McAvoy focuses her attention on three particular articulations of feminine experience (either chosen or imposed): mother/wife, whore, and wise woman. Although these are not new categories for the study of female experience in the Middle Ages, it is unusual (and extremely helpful) to look at them not in isolation from each other, as so many critical approaches seem to do (i.e., *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginitly in the Middle Ages*, eds. Carlson and Weisl, 1999; *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, Mulder-Bakker, 1995; *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*, Karras, 2004), but rather as they merge and blend creating a continuum of feminine experience in the Middle Ages that includes, surely for many women, more than

one of these categories in the course of a lifetime. Margery Kempe was a wife, a mother, an anchoress, an outspoken troublemaker, a solitary, a member of a community; as far as we know, much of the same was almost certainly true for Julian of Norwich, whose early life is unclear but whose references to and association with various experiences of womanhood in her era demonstrate a knowledge (perhaps an intimate one) of these traditions and practices.

McAvoy begins with an overview of the various proscriptions of space and identity for medieval women, the marginalization of female experience overall, and the language of experience from the borders of medieval life. McAvoy reviews the corpus of critical approaches to Julian and Margery as well as some postmodern critical works addressing gender and female experience, such as those of H  l  ne C  xous and Luce Irigaray. McAvoy argues that many medieval women "fell into the grey area which lay between the domestic and the religious locations and, although never fully integrated into the male sphere of activity, the marginal status this occupancy could afford them could allow for a level of participation and acceptance in both spheres, tenuous though it

might be” (4). Julian and Margery Kempe are an excellent choice for the focus of McAvoy’s argument because both lived on the fringe in many ways, as medieval women, in their religious lives, and in their choice of the anchoritic life, for Julian a long-time avocation, for Margery one that she chose at the end of her life.

McAvoy’s argument takes shape with her treatment of the maternal. She addresses both women, one an actual mother and one associated with maternity through her work, not in the typical language of maternity, but by addressing the structural and performative nature of motherhood, childbirth, and the maternal in these works. She writes: “Margery’s suffering . . . constitutes a raging against the world which stands between her and a desired subjectivity . . . [but it is] also a bodily articulation of the unconfessed and sinful condition which has been deeply underscored by her transformation from virgin to wife to mother” (36). Ever conscious of her guiding structure (that is, of feminine authority and social constraint), McAvoy bases her argument on what she calls “the motherhood matrix” in Julian and the performative aspects of Margery’s maternity. The metaphorical shift from womb to tomb in the

anchoritic experience is addressed here for both women, as well as “the concept of motherhood as a literal truth, metaphorical tool, textual matrix, [and] religious ideology and philosophy” (75).

Turning next to perhaps the most common association of the feminine in medieval culture, the whore, McAvoy reads Margery and Julian as using this metaphor in reality and in literature.

Margery was, of course, and still is, at times, described as having little virtue, perhaps in part due to her frequent outbursts and insistence on her own verbal authority. McAvoy refers to this as “the sexualising of unacceptable female behaviour within patriarchal discourse” (106), focusing on the performative nature of these acts and arguing that Margery used her position as mother, whore, and wise woman, in turn, to work for her as she confronted patriarchal authority in her society, including a particularly useful section discussing Margery’s own identification (and, later, Julian’s) with Mary Magdalene. For Julian, the “holy whore” motif is part of her identification with the abject (and with Christ’s body) and, in the *Revelations*, with a humility and submission that belies her authority and influence (both in her own time and in ours).

Her identification with Christ, particularly with his bleeding body, “serves for a validation of the sacredness of a unified body (and Julian’s own female body as its representative) and a vindication of human corporeality” (153). Performance, particularly in mystical devotion, and taking on (though perhaps never fully buying into) a culturally approved role, was part of both women’s lives, all medieval women’s lives, in fact, and can be seen through these texts as a guiding principal of the feminine throughout history.

McAvoy’s third category of feminine experience is that of the wise woman/prophetess. Again, McAvoy’s unique twist is to treat Julian and Margery as wise women as that role merges with their articulations of the roles of mother and whore. Margery is seen here in her association with the Lollards and the power and cultural threat represented by her ability and desire to speak out. She participates in a “venerable tradition of authorised female utterance” which serves, ultimately, “as a catalyst for public disorder” (192). Julian, as an influential anchoress and as she aged, exemplified the wise woman and prophetess. McAvoy examines this concept as well as insisting, again, on Julian’s self-consciousness of

speaking for those whose voices might not otherwise be heard. McAvoy writes: “Julian’s voice as represented in this text is both word and Word of God. As its female conduit, Julian renders it feminine and she is entirely confident that its purpose is explicitly for the common profit of humanity” (231). McAvoy brings clearly and fully to light the recurrence of the theme of “redeemed femininity” (124) and its effective redemption of all humankind in both Margery Kempe’s and Julian of Norwich’s works.

Liz Herbert McAvoy has already become an important voice among scholars of the anchoritic, of Margery Kempe, and Julian of Norwich, and of women’s experience in medieval culture. Although this field grows and expands almost daily, an approach such as this one is extremely helpful, particularly because of its emphasis on critical scholarship and the importance of its application to medieval literature and society. Too often scholars of medieval literature and history get bound up in patriarchal scholarship—what McAvoy calls “ambiguities within patriarchal interpellative practices” (103)—reinforcing modes of discourse that do not seek to include or promote the experiences

or voices of the feminine (or, more often, of feminists). This book incorporates an overview of traditional scholarship into a fresh, critically sound, and accessible approach that speaks to feminist and indeed *post*-feminist needs and methodologies. It is a welcome and important addition to the growing library of studies on Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, as well as an extremely strong example of the applications of critical theory to pre-modern literature and culture.

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Juliette Merritt. *Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood's Female Spectators*. University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 154.

During her lifetime, Eliza Haywood (1693?-1756) enjoyed a privileged position as a woman engaged in social endeavors and activities that placed her at the core of public life. She was an actress, a prolific author of plays, novels, and other literary works, as well as a publisher and bookseller. Arguably her experience as an actress may have influenced

her authorial voice and her perceptions of sight and seeing as well as her craving for a public persona. Juliette Merritt's close readings of Haywood's narratives argue that often her authorial position is that of spectator. Merritt explores the significance of the gaze at different levels to assert women's identity, the realms of their power, and how to influence their social condition.

Drawing from theoretical concerns with the visual and discursive dynamics of gender construction and identity, Merritt examines a selection of Haywood's fictions to illustrate how Haywood uses her work to influence and defy the binary stereotyping of the period: male as spectator and female as spectacle. It is within this exploration of the voyeuristic nature of the gaze that Merritt's key contribution lies.

She begins by examining desire and the gaze in *Love in Excess* (1719), Haywood's first novel. The eighteenth-century fascination with optical devices and visual effects is, as Merritt points out, evident in the Haywood narratives that are the focus of her study. Men voyeuristically viewed women as eroticized objects of desire. Alovisa, the protagonist of this novel, escapes this role and tries