

ment in noble households. The letters allude constantly to the problems of women's limited mobility, yet they give the impression that the problem is not that women are locked up but rather finding the material resources (escorts, horses, carts) to travel safely from place to place. However, teachers may in fact be grateful that the letters suggest such interesting areas for students to explore on their own.

This readable and inexpensive translation deserves a place in many classrooms. I will use this volume when I again teach the so-called "orality/literacy" debates because it illustrates and complicates beautifully, for example, some of Roger Chartier's ideas on the practical impact of writing. Anyone who teaches any version of the Griselda story should read these letters and consider teaching them alongside the literary text. Perchta is not, and never claims to be, a literary artist, but one is struck and moved by the subtle changes that emerge over time in Perchta's sense of self-representation. The final and lingering impression is Perchta of Rožmberk's indomitable spirit. The words she writes to her brother, John, in 1464 (p. 77) echo powerfully across the centuries: "I am striving for nothing but respect."

—Ann Marie Rasmussen, Duke University

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**Lewis, Katherine J. *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, New York: Boydell Press, 2000. Pp. 277.**

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Katherine J. Lewis's ambitious book, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England*, sets out to explore why St. Katherine of Alexandria was such a popular, powerful figure. Lewis's main concerns are "reading" St. Katherine as she would have been read and interpreted by late medieval English people and examining how St. Katherine, her life, and her actions were turned to ideological uses. The preface sets up these questions and provides a composite narrative of St. Katherine's life compiled from the Latin and Middle English versions that would have been available to the English audience of the late medieval period. Chapter 1 introduces more background material, sets up the parameters of the study, and introduces the types of materials used in the book's analysis. Chapter 2 explores the early history of St. Katherine, the history of the virgin martyr tradition, and how St. Katherine fits into this tradition; Chapter 2 also provides a list and brief analysis of the various lives of St. Katherine available in late medieval England. Chapter 3 examines St. Katherine's functions in parish life, with some concentration on parish guilds. Chapter 4 takes the analysis of St. Katherine's functions into the domestic sphere. Chapter 5 finally explores St. Katherine's meanings for women, with the caveat that men, too, followed St. Katherine devotedly.

Lewis's research is astoundingly detailed and comprehensive, including not only such expected materials as artwork and literature, but also wills, guild records, household objects, and pageants. Lewis always puts these primary sources to excellent use, and her knowledge about the saint and her cult is

obviously immense. To anyone interested in St. Katherine of Alexandria (as I admittedly am), the facts are fascinating, and the thorough documentation useful for following up on facts for one's own research. Although the book at least officially concerns itself only with St. Katherine's cult in late medieval England, Lewis provides enough background material about the history of the saint and the cult to be useful to those interested in earlier periods or St. Katherine's cult in other countries.

Chapter 5, which explores the meaning and the uses of St. Katherine, her legend, and her cult for women, makes especially excellent use of these primary materials and facts. In this chapter, Lewis argues that St. Katherine functioned as a role model for both married and single women, as a means of both social control and possibly of subversion, and as a justification for education for women. Her analysis of contemporary conduct manuals, the place of the Empress in St. Katherine's legend, and *The Book of Margery Kempe* support her points admirably. Indeed, Lewis's brilliant and unique connection of the Empress, a devout married lay woman, to bridal mysticism particularly deserves further development and exploration.

As this argument in Chapter 5 indicates, Lewis makes some effort to locate St. Katherine's life and cult in a discourse of gender. Lewis argues convincingly in Chapters 4 and 5 that St. Katherine's education was used to justify the education of women, even though such education made many medieval writers uncomfortable. Lewis also briefly discusses the masculinizing effects of education and chastity on women, but then claims that the legends of St. Katherine, instead of masculinizing Katherine, reverse the dominant medieval discourses of masculine and feminine: "The texts of the life construct the feminine as rational, eloquent and educated and the masculine as intemperate, ignorant and bestial" (218). Lewis's stance here is interesting and makes use of both the lives and other documents, but does not account for the fact that the rational, eloquent, and educated characters are all Christian, and the intemperate, ignorant, and bestial characters are all pagan.

The book has a few very minor problems. First, and most importantly, Lewis's wealth of knowledge sometimes hinders the power of her arguments. None of the facts seem inappropriate or extraneous, but in every chapter but the last, the immense and detailed data seem to overwhelm Lewis's points rather than clearly supporting them. Secondly, illustrations from stained glass windows appear as black and white sketches and are difficult to make out, a problem somewhat off-set by Lewis's descriptions. Finally, texts quoted in foreign languages are not always translated, which may pose a difficulty for some researchers, particularly undergraduates.

Even with these minor flaws, *The Cult of Saint Katherine* is a fascinating read for anyone at all interested in St. Katherine of Alexandria or indeed in the virgin martyr saints, whom she necessarily discusses as well. Anyone researching saints' lives or saints' cults or the material culture of saints—medieval or modern—would find this book valuable not only for its information about St.

Katherine and other saints but also for its method and its extensive bibliography. Many of the footnotes contain interesting information and are a fascinating read in and of themselves.

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**Lupack, Alan, ed. *New Directions in Arthurian Studies*. (Arthurian Studies 51.) Cambridge, England: D. S. Brewer, 2002. Pp. 168.**

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A collection of essays from the Camelot 2000 conference, *New Directions in Arthurian Studies* takes Arthurian studies in its widest sense chronologically and generically: half of the collection discusses medieval works, while the other half moves from Tennyson to modern texts and films. Three essays in the volume discuss past, current, and future trends in medieval Arthurian studies and call for more research in particular areas. The first, Norris J. Lacy's "Arthurian Research in a New Century: Prospects and Projects," lauds the publication of new editions, translations, reference works, recent criticism, and the potential for hypermedia editions, but calls for a widening of the canon and more study of Celtic, Dutch, Norse/Icelandic, Italian, and Hispanic Arthurian material. Lacy sees as valuable new trends the current interest in manuscript studies, in art, in feminist theory, modern Arthuriana, and the work on lesser known romances and the Celtic tradition.

Bonnie Wheeler's very valuable "The Project of Arthurian Studies: *Quondam et Futurus*" suggests in its "*Futurus*" section fascinating critical approaches to Arthurian literature. Noting the "narrative absence" of Arthur in Arthurian literature, Wheeler believes that psychoanalytic and gender analyses will generate an exploration of father fixation and obsession with authority, and of the texts as "narratives of suppression and eruption—narratives of absence" (126), and she calls for further work in gender studies and masculinities. Wheeler also suggests that New Historicism will yield valuable scholarship in the areas of historical studies of magic, the crusades, pilgrimage, noble work and play, literature and law, the economics of social class, the history of the emotions, the function of nostalgia, medieval devotional theories and practices, and the use of anthropological, linguistic, and postcolonial analyses to interrogate what Wheeler terms "Arthurian Aryanism"—the metanarrative of Aryan myth in Arthurian studies, including the "inexplicit assumptions regarding race, nationalism and the politics of identity" that are informed by Aryan myth (130).

The third essay assessing scholarship is Blanch and Wasserman's "Judging Camelot," which recaps the history of critics' assessments of Arthur's court in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Wasserman in particular asserts that British critics' views of the court tend to be positive, while American views after the mid-1960s tend to be negative. Attributing these opposing critical stances to the differences between British and American experiences, Wasserman calls for greater critical awareness of the contexts in which we read. Wasserman points to two specific new contexts important to *Sir Gawain* studies: Thomas