

Book Reviews

MIROUR DE L'OMME (The Mirror of Mankind). John Gower. Translated William Burton Wilson; revised Nancy Wilson Van Baak. Foreword by R.F. Yeager. Medieval Texts and Studies No. 5. 1992. Colleagues Press, East Lansing; distributed in UK by Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, £42. ISBN 0-937191-17-5.

Gower defines virtuous labour as industrious activity not only for oneself but also for one's neighbours: *car tiel labour est vertuous* (*Mirour*, 14544). Such must have been his own motive in compiling the vast *Mirour de L'Omme*, a poem in Angl-Norman on sin and virtue which must have originally been nearly 30,000 lines long: some 2,500 lines are lost from the sole extant manuscript (MS CUL, Addl. 3035) which lacks a total of about twelve folios; the manuscript is apparently late fourteenth-century. In 1895 the manuscript, purchased four years earlier by the Cambridge University Librarian and donated by him to the Library, was identified by G.C. Macaulay as the lost French poem which Gower mentions in the closing section of early copies of his more famous English *Confessio Amantis* under the title *Speculum Hominis* but re-titles in later copies as *Speculum Meditantis* (not *Meditatis* as Yeager's Foreword (p.vii) has it). Even Stow, who possessed copies of Gower's English and Latin poems in manuscript and print, had not read *Mirour* but thought it was to be found in Kent. In fact the Cambridge manuscript seems to have been lying in a farmhouse in Gloucestershire by the early eighteenth century before being rebound for Edward Hailstone's library. Macaulay edited *Mirour* in 1899 (*The Complete Works of John Gower*, vol.1: *The French Works*, Oxford) and Wilson's translation follows the edition and its glossary and notes closely, but alerts the reader to the fuller gloss and details of Gower's sources in Troendle's edition, to which, alas, no further bibliographical reference is given.

Of the three unequal parts of *Mirour de l'Omme* the first section is an allegory of the origin of Sin, born of the Devil, who couples with his daughter to produce Death, who in turn engenders on his mother the Seven Mortal Sins; these in their turn marry World and each produces five female offspring as a means of enticing Man, whose weak Flesh is dissuaded only by Reason and Fear (of Death) to reject sin. The thirty five vices are then described, with their associates. The Contrary Virtues, deriving directly from God, are then given in marriage to Reason, and again each produces five female offspring, also described. This first part extends to about two thirds of the whole work. The second part is an estates satire similar in content to that in *Vox Clamantis* but differing in order of presentation. The work concludes with a now incomplete Life of Our Lady, as an exemplum of the

conquest of sin. Around 10,000 lines deal with sins, 8,500 virtues, 9,000 satire, and about 2,500 cover the individual and his role models, the Virgin and Christ. Yet the table of contents in the manuscript, presumably authorial, divides the whole work into ten parts, giving undue emphasis to the estates satire which is numbered sections three through eight. The proportions (2:1) and relative vigour of style indicate Gower's greater interest in sin and social corruption than in virtue; Macaulay rightly thought the estates satire more original and interesting. Gower shows sin in its social aspects, whereas the virtues belong to the private man: matrimony and almsgiving and self-knowledge are treated at great length. Wilson does not discuss the readership of this enormous poem; it has recently been associated with a clerical milieu but is, rather, addressed to lay readers: Gower writes sympathetically of merchants, condescendingly of the poor and exasperatedly of rural labourers from an employer's viewpoint (24625). Women are not part of the implied audience, but because the allegory uses female personifications, a somewhat skewed female dimension is present:

The second daughter of Chastity was born against the sin of Rape, and her name is Virginité. She is of pure cleanliness, and, of all the others, the fairest in deed and intent. She is the one who from her youth always dwells with Chastity, who never assents to the flesh in deed or thought, who presents herself entirely to God. (*Mirour*, lines 16825ff, Wilson, p.231).

I have given this outline of the poem because the length and language of the original mean that many potential readers have not penetrated far into it, and Wilson has therefore provided a means of access to a poem which is interesting, if not brilliant or original. With Eric Stockton's 1962 translation of the major Latin works, the English reader is now equipped to appreciate the full extent of Gower's poetic production, and made the more aware of why Chaucer applied to him the epithet 'moral'.

Technically, Gower's French verse is accurate, often vigorous, although the prosaic (and sometimes archaic) register of Wilson's translation disguises the poetry almost entirely. Gower's frequent puns and word-play are inevitably hard to translate, although Wilson does attempt to, and the rendering of *tort:fort* as *wrong:strong* is a happy solution in lines 24244. *Mirour* is in the 12-line stanza rhyming *aabaabbbabba* popular in Continental French satire but also used for the 1381 poem in Latin which Wright entitled *Against the Lollards* (*Political Poems and Songs* vol.1, pp.231-49). The Latin poem may even imitate Gower's *Mirour*, which must have been completed before 1381: unlike Gower's Latin *Vox Clamantis*, *Mirour* does not mention the Peasants' Revolt. Gower probably revised and added to *Mirour*: although he speaks as if Edward III and the Black Prince (died 1376/77) were alive (*Mirour* 10333), he also mentions the 1378 Papal Schism (18817-40), presumably a later addition.

Some information about the poem and manuscript is supplied in Yeager's Foreword to Wilson's translation, and a few further details on Gower himself are given in the Introduction, which directs the reader further to the introduction and notes of Macaulay's 1899 edition. All too often Wilson's notes tell the reader what he already knows. The note to lines 27649ff remarks that Gower 'does not mention explicitly the doctrine of the immaculate Conception': this belief was not officially pronounced as doctrine until 1850. Lacunae in the manuscript are noted, except,

misleadingly, for the missing opening section.

Wilson's handy summary (pp.xvii-xix) is accompanied by a chart indicating the relationship of the sins and their contrary virtues which identifies two dislocations in Gower's ordering but misleadingly implies a wrong pairing of vices and virtues in the text itself. This chart would have been more helpful had it referred the reader to lines in the original or page references in the translated text, and more useful again had it shown the correspondence between the system presented so methodically in *Mirour* and the more impressionistic treatment of the same vices in *Confessio Amantis* (Macaulay only compares the first three books of CA [ed. cit., p.xxxviii]). This system of classifying five subdivisions for each of the seven vices and seven virtues is not discussed by Wilson; it was not Gower's own (as Macaulay thought, ed. cit., pp.xxxvii, liii), since Hildegard of Bingen's mid-twelfth-century *Liber Vitae Meritorum*, popular in Cistercian circles on the continent, has a series of debates between thirty-five Vices and their corresponding Virtues.

Surprisingly, Wilson makes no attempt to contrast the treatment of sin and virtue by Chaucer and Langland (partly under different nomenclature), and does not attempt to compare their relative sources: Chaucer used Pennaforte's *Summa de poenitentia* and Peraldus' *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*; Gower's sources include Pennaforte (mislabelled 'Boece': lines 14833-14904, cf. *Parson's Tale*, 960ff) but his main source of information about sin and confession seems to have been Frère Lorens's *Somme des vices et des vertus*. Like the medieval playwrights', Gower's reaction to social change, of which he shows himself anxiously aware in *Mirour*, is to identify the new with vice and the devil. Wilson captures the livelier style of writing in the Estates Satire section; with Wilson's translation, it is now much easier to compare Gower's version with Langland's dramatic social satire in *Piers Plowman*, Passus II-VII, and Chaucer's portraits in the General Prologue, revealed by the comparison as more stereotypic than they seem but all the more brilliantly individualised. Gower's favourite biblical texts apart from the Wisdom Books seem to be the Apocrypha, especially Tobit, Judith and Esther, although neither Wilson nor Macaulay comments on this. No doubt Wilson's translation will facilitate further work on Gower's sources and models for *Mirour de l'Omme*, and on its sociohistorical significance.

Wilson, then in his sixties, translated *Mirour* in 1970 for his University of Miami PhD, having begun his B.A. after retirement from business, a literary career which exactly replicates Gower's own. The original translation has been revised by Nancy Wilson Van Baak, but her contribution (and presumed relationship to the author) are nowhere explained. Wilson's Bibliography is amplified from his 1970 thesis, but unaccountably fails to include Jill Mann's *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (1973). The published translation improves on the thesis: *thou* is replaced by *you*, so removing the ugly *thou beest*, and *hereafter*, to wit and similar archaisms are eliminated. The revised translation is more idiomatic, and errors are corrected: 'that for which everyone in turn reproaches the world' becomes 'those who each in their own way condemn the world'; Avarice now rides a badger rather than a dappled horse: Macaulay did not gloss and misspells *bauçon*, or *bauzon*. The grammatical changes affect the allegory: Flesh is masculine in the thesis, neuter in this version, while Soul shifts from masculine to feminine (both are feminine in the original). Archaisms still abound, not enhancing the already dry

allegory of the virtues, because Wilson uses 'biblical' diction for citing authorities: 'I know not to whom I can compare'; 'if it please you'. Strangely, the word *maquerelle* is retained, and glossed 'go-between' in a footnote; *prouesce* is also retained (spelled *prowess*) whereas Chaucer calls this virtue 'Fortitude' (which Gower includes with Justice) 'or Strength' and Langland (oddly) 'Peace'. *Largess* is neither French nor English (but its contrary, *Escharceté* is rendered 'Stinginess', following Macaulay's stylistically inappropriate gloss; his *Introd.* has 'Niggardy', p.1).

Gower's *Mirour* contains important biographical details, like his reference to wearing 'striped sleeves': *la raye mance* (21774), thought to designate a functionary in the courts of law, as Wilson notes; references to marriage and 'my wife' (more numerous than Macaulay suggests) make it almost certain that Gower was married when he wrote *Mirour* and that his marriage at the age of 68 was his second. He tells us that he has already written *les fols ditz d'amours* (27340), but Wilson makes no comment on this. One phrase, 'knocks the flowers from the crown' (Wilson, p.174) needs explaining: it may have some connexion with the chaplet of roses Gower's effigy wears on the Southwark tomb. The expression 'I find written that the voice of the people is the voice of God' (line 12725-6; Wilson p.174) marks Gower's interest in what will be the theme of *Vox Clamantis*, though Wilson's note merely calls attention to the Latin proverb.

For easy reference, each stanza in Wilson's translation carries a line number corresponding to Macaulay's edition, but cost cutting has meant that there is no running head to help the reader navigate round this huge text, and there is no index. This translation has been carefully proofread; I noted only one major error: a duplication of text on the turn of pages 301-2.

The usefulness of Wilson's translation for Gower studies generally, especially in the classroom, is clear: for the first time Gower may have a whole undergraduate course devoted to his work in all three languages. More advanced students of Gower will still need Macaulay's edition for which this may act as an accurate, if unpoetic, prompt or crib.

ROSAMUND S. ALLEN

MEDIEVAL ILLUMINATORS AND THEIR METHODS OF WORK.

Jonathan J.G. Alexander. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, \$50, £35.

ISBN 0-300-05689-3

What is mosaic gold? Why is it that the silver in certain fifteenth-century manuscripts does not tarnish? Did illuminators use optical aids? Anyone seeking the answers to these questions in this book would be disappointed. As it is made clear in the preface, *Medieval Illuminators and their Methods of Work* is a re-working of Professor Alexander's 1983 Lyell Lectures and displays both the strengths and the weaknesses of a published lecture series. It teems with novel insights into the material, but many of those ideas are inchoate. Some hitherto neglected subjects are treated in detail, but there are also obvious *lacunae*, such as

those indicated by the above questions.

The first chapter is devoted to a survey of the status of the medieval illuminator, especially as it is revealed by self-portraits from the sixth-century Vienna Dioscorides artist to Simon Bening, spectacles in hand. Of the many images, familiar and unfamiliar, which testify to the individuality of the artist, perhaps the most delightful is that in a Lorsch Gradual of 1512 now in the Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart. At a desk sits the bespectacled scribe, the Benedictine Leonhard Wagner, carefully copying the notation from an exemplar. Nearby the weary illuminator, Nicolaus Bertschi, working at a lectern, is consoled by his wife Margaret with an embrace and a *Mass* of beer. Alexander adheres to the conventional view of the craft as increasingly dominated by lay practitioners, and yet acknowledges the existence of a number of late medieval mendicant illuminators. The involvement of members of religious orders in late medieval art is attracting increasing scholarly attention with good cause, for it is clear that artists such as John de Tye, a household illuminator for the Bohun family (an Austin Friar and not a Dominican, as stated), and the Dominican John Siferwas were no convent amateurs, but made a significant contribution to the culture of their time. Another important instance not cited by Alexander, who is self-confessedly weak on developments in Germany and Eastern Europe, is the Cistercian Stanislaw Samostrzelnik, the leading miniaturist at the court of King Sigismund I of Poland.

The least satisfactory chapter of this book, as has already been hinted, is that devoted to technical aspects of illumination. In sixteen pages, about half of which consist of illustrations, it is impossible to do little more than give an account of the stages of book production. The copious footnotes provide a good guide to the riches of the subject, although curiously there is no reference to Nigel Morgan's important article on 'Aspects of Colour in English and French Manuscript Painting of the Late Thirteenth Century', published in the proceedings of the XXV. Internationaler Kongress für Kunstgeschichte CIHA, held in Vienna in 1983. The literature will be further supplemented by the publication, in September 1994, of *Making the Medieval Book: Techniques of Production*, the proceedings of the 1992 Conference of the Seminar in the History of the Book to 1500.

Alexander is on surer ground when he turns to programmes and instructions for illuminators. Of particular interest are those notes which reveal something of the organization, and even the mood, of the artists. Thus in a 1393 copy of Deguilleville there is the instruction 'Remiet, do not put anything in here as I will do the miniature which should be there'. Another copy of Deguilleville includes the damning note: 'This miniature is badly done'. The fifteenth-century French illuminator Jean Colombe relieved his feelings in jottings such as 'Time wasted for Colombe'. Alexander has gathered over seventy instances of preliminary marginal drawings. Fortunately his insights as to what these reveal about working methods are clearer than the photographs of the sketches themselves, several of which were scarcely worth reproducing. A working list of these sketches is provided in Appendix 2.

The last three chapters, divided chronologically, are primarily devoted to a survey of the role of models in illuminators' work and the mechanics of the transmission of motifs. Of particular interest are those cases where a much earlier model has been copied. As well as familiar examples, such as the fifteenth-century

copies of the *Notitia Dignitatum* and the various versions of the Utrecht Psalter, Alexander cites some less well-known instances. The Mont St. Michel scribe Hervardus, while on a visit to Corbie c. 1000 in order to copy a text of Persius' *Satires*, was evidently captivated by the decorative initials in a late eighth-century Psalter there, since he based the opening initial of his text on one of the designs. Illuminators might be inspired by works of art in other media. Alexander cites an early fourteenth-century French Arthurian romance which echoes a schema found in ivory carving, Paduan *corali* which mirror Giotto's compositions in the Scrovegni Chapel, and a fifteenth-century Dutch artist who makes use of a Schongauer print. Even mediocre works can be of value in illustrating how a novel image might be constructed of stock motifs. Drawing on the research of Nigel Morgan and Suzanne Lewis, Alexander shows how Matthew Paris made use of the elements of his pictorial vocabulary in different contexts. It is possible, in effect, to establish something of the contents of Matthew's pattern book. Alexander's discussion of the development of the model book, which might serve as teaching manual, source of exemplars for assistants, and advertisement of the master's skills, is particularly useful. As he notes, several late medieval model books, such as the Jacquemart de Hesdin sketchbook in the Pierpoint Morgan Library, were primarily intended as virtuoso displays to impress potential clients. A similar element of advertisement can be detected in the grisaille miniatures of fifteenth-century Flanders or the elaborate borders of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves. Alexander contends that the textual constraints and collaborative nature of book production were inimical to artistic individuality, and that this contributed to the decline of illumination as an artistic activity. But in fact it was those very constraints which enabled the Master of Mary of Burgundy or his sixteenth-century successors to display their inventiveness. That there was less call for their skills is primarily a question of a change in the aesthetics of the book.

The bibliography of this volume extends to seventeen pages, and appears at first sight to constitute a thorough survey of the literature on manuscript illumination down to 1991. However, there are some curious gaps. There is no reference to any of the works of George Henderson, neither his Apocalypse studies nor *From Durrow to Kells*, published in 1987, which contains many valuable observations about the transmission of motifs in the Insular Gospel-books. Alexander does not cite Morgan's analysis of the artists of the Rutland Psalter in *British Library Journal* for 1987, nor any of Lynda Dennison's important studies of fourteenth-century workshop practice.

In general the book conforms to Yale's high standards of production, but occasional lapses in the quality of illustration remind one how dependent art historians are on institutional resources. A particular shocker, which should not have been allowed by the editor, is fig. 44, from Bonn, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. 384, in which the parchment seems orange in colour. Despite these caveats, however, *Medieval Illuminators and their Methods of Work* is a stimulating introduction to the subject.

NICHOLAS ROGERS

BEVERLEY MINSTER FASTI. Being Biographical Notes on the Provosts, Prebendaries, Officers and Vicars in the Church of Beverley Prior to the Dissolution. Richard T.W. McDermid. Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Volume CXLIX (1993 for 1990). £24.

ISBN 0-902122-63-0

In this, the most recent of the YAS record series, Canon McDermid lists and describes the pre-Reformation clergy of Beverley: the canons, vicars and other officials of the minster. The biographical material was assembled as an appendix to his 1981 MA thesis and has not been significantly updated. The author has not, for instance, used the Beverley volume of the Victoria County History of the East Riding, which was published in 1989. This would have added one more vicar to his list but, more importantly, would have drawn his attention to the surviving cartulary of the Beverley vicars which yields many more names for his lists – not only of the vicars themselves but of early canons and officials – and allows a fuller identification of several men whom he does include.

The details are drawn very largely from published material – the main exception being the unpublished registers of the archbishops of York. The author has not, for instance, made full use of the unprinted material among the Lansdowne manuscripts in the British Library. The printed material searched is, unsurprisingly perhaps, almost entirely ecclesiastical; references to the parallel governmental careers of the canons are drawn mainly from Tout's *Chapters*, and are as a result fairly thin for the fifteenth century, although this is precisely the period when, as the author admits, the canons were most likely to be chosen for their closeness to the centre of government. The detail which he has collected does, however, give tantalising glimpses of the old boy network in action. The 'Cambridge mafia' was alive and well in the late fifteenth century.

Several associates of the Duke of Gloucester turn up, as one might expect, although the chapter was never exclusively Ricardian: Thomas Morton, the nephew of the Bishop of Ely, retained his prebend throughout Richard's reign. Gloucester's chancellor, Thomas Barowe, was a prebendary of Beverley from 1475. Edmund Chaderton, later to be Richard's treasurer of the chamber, was an even earlier arrival. One of their colleagues was Richard Kelsey, about whom McDermid has little to say, but who was to be one of the canons of the royal free chapel which Richard III founded in All Hallows by the Tower. Edmund Chaderton was appointed dean of that chapel, and was perhaps responsible for Kelsey's selection. A late recruit to this Ricardian contingent at Beverley was George Fitzhugh, the brother-in-law of Francis Lovell, who received his prebend on 28 September 1485. By contrast, the clerical connection of the earl of Northumberland is largely unrepresented in the 1470s, in spite of the earl's stronger links with the East Riding. Here, as in so many other aspects of northern affairs, Percy found himself eclipsed by the king's brother.

ROSEMARY HORROX

STAINED GLASS IN ENGLAND DURING THE MIDDLE AGES. Richard Marks. 1993. (301 pages; 200 b&w illustrations; 30 colour plates). Routledge, London, £80.

ISBN 0-415-03345-4

This is the book that will surely become essential reading for all those with an interest in English stained glass. Its readership will no doubt be far wider, however, for the author offers the first scholarly and comprehensive account of one of the leading medieval figurative arts, placing the medium firmly in its social, artistic and iconographic milieu. His command of the literature of the subject is formidable; the bibliography and footnotes offer a wealth of related material while the main text covers a wide and varied selection of works, some of them well known and some less familiar. The selection of illustrations is both judicious and stimulating, with a balance between the justifiably well-known and often-reproduced and the unexpected and hitherto unpublished. There are also a number of telling comparisons with works in other media and with continental parallels.

The book is divided into a thematic section and a longer chronological survey embracing the period c.670 to the Reformation and beyond. Part one covers topics such as patronage, techniques, iconography and domestic glazing, the welcome inclusion of a subject for which the surviving evidence and the literature is limited. This dual approach affords the author a greater degree of flexibility than the more straightforward chronological narrative alone, although it is certainly the second half of the book, with its systematic stylistic analysis that is the most valuable. It is here that Professor Marks' scholarship and familiarity with English medieval art in general is shown to best advantage. Although the author makes many comparisons between stained glass and the art of the illuminated manuscript, he also demonstrates the close links with the other monumental and architectural arts. Stained glass is no longer discussed as a medium on the side-lines, but is shown to have been a formative influence in the development of English medieval painting. One of the book's most attractive and valuable features is its presentation of so many of the documentary sources, adding an immediacy and authenticity to the discussion lacking in most books on the subject. One suspects, however, that many readers will regret the absence of translation of some of the longer Latin passages. The numerous references to antiquarian and topographical sources is another welcome feature of the text and illustrations from the work of authors such as J.T. Smith, J. Browne and particularly Charles Winston are well represented. English stained glass has been extraordinarily well-served by its antiquarian scholars and artists and it is fitting that modern students of the subject be reminded of the immense value of this material in the study and interpretation of what remains.

Any criticisms must be reserved for the production of the book and would perhaps seem churlish were it not for its high price. The paper quality is indifferent and many pages in the review copy have irritating flecks and smudges on the text. The binding is not one likely to appeal to the bibliophile. Although quite generously illustrated with black and white plates, thirty colour illustrations is hardly generous for a book costing £80. Indeed, it is the high price that is the most disappointing thing about this important book. Few students will be able to afford it and its price may well rob it of the wide audience it deserves. One can only hope that the publisher is persuaded to produce a more affordable paper-back edition in due course.

In this book Professor Marks has set the agenda for English stained glass studies, defining many of the issues to be discussed and resolved in the future – the relationship between stained glass and the other arts and crafts; the role of the glass-painter as designer and originator; the degree to which stained glass as a public art form developed its own range of distinctive and specific pictorial formulae. This book raises an enormous number of these questions and it would be ungenerous to complain that because of limitations of space many of them can only be only be touched upon in passing. This is a feast of a book, but it is one that leaves the reader only partially satiated and eager for more.

SARAH BROWN

THE CREATION OF A COMMUNITY: THE CITY OF WELLS IN THE MIDDLE AGES. David Gary Shaw. 1993. Oxford University Press, £40.

ISBN 019-820401-9

Here is a valuable addition to the small corpus of modern monographs devoted to individual English towns in the medieval period. To a greater degree than some others, it lays convincing claim to illuminate not only a singular locality, but also the wider urban scene. And although the policies of kings and courtiers generally appeared remote from the perspective of the inhabitant of this particular late-medieval town, all students of the politics of the period will benefit from David Gary Shaw's sensitive account of the workings of political society at the level of the urban grass-roots.

The claim to a significant degree of typicality, in Shaw's argument, rests in Wells's status as a seigneurial borough. To those who know the town today it is hard to imagine this seemingly quintessential Barchester as anything other than the pocket-sized dependency of the bishop. Such, indeed, was the constitutional status of the town in the Middle Ages: a status which Wells shared in common, as Shaw rightly emphasizes, with the majority of medieval European towns. Modern scholars have distorted our perspective by the disproportionate attention they have devoted to the smaller number of cities which rejoiced in extensive rights of political and economic autonomy. Shaw helps significantly to rectify the balance by demonstrating the development in medieval Wells, notwithstanding the town's limited legal standing, of a varied economy, including a prosperous cloth industry, and of a rich urban political culture. The population of Wells, some 2500 in 1300 and half that figure in the 1520s, places it in a large class of urban places intermediate between provincial capitals such as Bristol or Exeter and the smaller market towns like Radstock or Chewton Mendip. Shaw sees the relative success of Wells's industry as a particular triumph, in the absence of urban control over the rural hinterland such as was exercised by the greater Italian cities. However, one might reverse the argument, to suggest that it was the very limitations imposed on urban autonomy, in both large and small towns, under the powerful English monarchy, which freed the countryside from the suffocating burdens imposed on the *contado* by a Milan or a Florence, creating in England a relatively enhanced

potential for civic prosperity.

Although sometimes frustrated by the limitations of his sources, Shaw acknowledges his good fortune in the survival of the Convocation Books of the Borough Community, which from 1377 onwards record the meetings of the burgesses. Since the latter group comprised almost half of all adult male inhabitants, their proceedings reflected upon the town as a whole – even allowing, as Shaw does, the importance of those inhabitants who never aspired or troubled to acquire full citizenship through becoming a burgess. What is striking is the evident attraction of the formal Community of burgesses, even in this town in which the status of burgess did not carry the extensive economic privileges enjoyed by the citizens of grander cities. The political culture of that Community is Shaw's principal focus of interest. In his plausible account, the Community found its origin and continuing identity in contradistinction to the authority of the bishop. While accepting Susan Reynolds' insistence that collective action was natural in the Middle Ages, and not necessarily contentious, Shaw – reasonably, I believe – sees the creation of the Community as the result of a perceived opposition between episcopal and civic interests. In the 1340s the burgesses attempted, by means of a sworn commune, to wrest extensive political rights from the bishop. Following the failure of this attempt, they developed and used the Borough Community, throughout the Middle Ages, as a more or less effective means 'to limit the lawful authority of the lord of the town'. The Borough's considerable measure of success is attributable in part to rugged determination, but in part also to a series of negotiated compromises with the bishop, carefully analysed by Shaw. The Community of burgesses had, as Shaw says, the nature of a sworn fraternity; it had close links with a guild of the Holy Trinity; and the 'hypothetical' suggestion that this guild was the origin of the Community is entirely plausible. An apt comparison would be with the small cathedral town of Lichfield, where the borough community was focussed throughout the later Middle Ages in a guild of St Mary and St John, which successively appropriated a series of secular functions in the town.

Shaw writes shrewdly about 'community', conscious of the voguish and treacherous nature of the concept. He urges that 'it is insufficient to describe community solely in terms of interested actions', which may be to underestimate the potential affective consequences of participation in such specific actions. He goes on, however, to stress the need for an enduring formal framework for communal identity, which in this case was provided by the institution of the Borough Community. Shaw is far from romanticising medieval urban life when he argues that the Community established a powerful moral imperative to find a peaceful resolution to disputes, the better to sustain the prestige and solidarity of the association. The semblance of unanimity was most critical at moments of negotiation with external powers: the bishop, other cities, or the king himself. Every fifteen years or so during the fifteenth century, monarchs sought to mobilise support in Wells by making 'royal entries'. The receptions orchestrated on these occasions by the Borough Community were designed to increase 'the honour and worship of all the town'. Shaw's book, while acknowledging the gap between pious ideal and reality, goes far to demonstrate the practical and ideological impact on one medieval urban society of that communitarian discourse.

GERVASE ROSSER

THE STRIPPING OF THE ALTARS. *Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c.1580.* Eamon Duffy. 1992. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, £29.95.

ISBN 0-300-05342-8

Eamon Duffy's massive and handsomely illustrated volume, *The Stripping of the Altars*, represents a landmark in the study of religion in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England. In particular, it constitutes an important attempt to bridge the historiographical chasm between medievalists and early modernists which has blighted debates over the origins and impact of the Reformation for so long. For historians from each side of the chronological divide, Duffy's book offers a feast of rich evidence and thoughtful reflection.

The first and longest part of the book deals with what Dr Duffy calls 'traditional' religious belief and practice in the period before the Reformation. This is a tour de force of sensitive and informed scholarship: a rich and fully integrated analysis of virtually every aspect of late medieval religion, supported by a dazzling array of source materials. The author examines late medieval English religion from liturgical, iconographic and theological perspectives, and argues for the existence of a rich, spiritually fulfilling and unified religious culture. In the process, he rejects the division between 'elite' and 'popular' religious consciousness and that between 'religion' and mere 'superstition'. Duffy contends that previous historians have used these categories to produce a fractured picture of what he believes to be the unified Christian identity of late medieval religious life.

The final section of the book studies the destruction of this religious world through the impact of Protestantism, from the reign of Henry VIII to 1580. Along with much recent 'revisionist' scholarship, Duffy emphasizes the reluctance with which the population adapted to enforced religious changes. The burden of explanation for these changes, Duffy argues, rests on the coercive powers of government upon 'mercenary, wordly and weak men and women, grumbling, obstructing, but in the end taking the line of least resistance'.

Dr Duffy has written a striking and illuminating book which will be the starting point for the study of late medieval spirituality for many years to come. It may seem churlish to enter some reservations over a book of such undisputed quality, but a few caveats should be entered concerning general points of interpretation, especially since this volume will doubtless remain the standard work of reference in the field for many years to come. Although some historians may feel that Duffy's work is an excellent evocation of the medieval world which treads less surely when dealing with the Reformation, it should be emphasized that the two parts of the book are, in fact, intimately related. Duffy's analysis of medieval piety still often seems to be shaped by the specific agenda of the Reformation debate. It is this debate which encourages scholars to consider 'medieval religion' as a single homogeneous entity, almost a confessional allegiance, to be juxtaposed (in positive or negative terms, depending on the historian's predilection) with a soon to emerge Protestantism. Accordingly, the book attempts to build a holistic view of the medieval world, and yet it frequently does so by citing uncontextualized material from all over the country. Local differences, while alluded to, are seldom seen to be significant, while too little attention is devoted to the sources and dating of visual or written material used. Churchwardens' accounts, for example, are often employed, but with little discussion of the

community which actually produced them.

It is the failure to interrogate local and social contexts which also underpins the less persuasive parts of the book. These difficulties emerge most clearly in chapter four, 'Corporate Christians', a chapter crucial to the author's idea of how religion and society relate. Duffy quite rightly chooses to emphasize the important role played by religious activities in defining and reinforcing the social bonds of local communities. Yet the concept of community tends to be invoked rather than analyzed. There is little reference to the specific local context of religious practice, while the social role assigned to religion is usually limited to that of promoting harmonious relations within local communities. The idea of 'community' sometimes plays a key role in patterns of his argument, but since for a historian such as Duffy religion is assumed to transcend social boundaries, he is all the more loath to consider the social contours of individual communities, or to discuss how the impact of specific religious practices might differ within particular localities.

Here too, it seems that the agenda of the Reformation debate leads the book away from addressing some areas of genuine importance. A discussion of the relations between parishes and guilds, for example, is hijacked by his concern with a straw man of an argument over whether guilds undermined the structure of the parish. Duffy finds that they did not – but by focussing on the generally harmonious relations between guild and parish (both institutions in which local notables played a key role), the book avoids looking directly at the question of the exclusivity of some manifestations of late medieval religion. The role played by the urban and rural poor, the extent to which guilds acknowledged social groupings within the parish and even the potential social control wielded by 'respectable' guild members are all questions which the book uncomfortably side-steps. More generally, the argument here turns on the assumption that the parish, as a self-conscious grouping, with funds at its disposal, was not in itself an organization which acknowledged social hierarchies nor was it run by individuals commanding a certain level of status within their own communities.

Ultimately, Duffy's search as a religious historian for evidence of abstract religious ideas at work in society is informed by a notion of spirituality as an irreducible force. Also implied at times – as in his quotation of the seventeenth century Protestant minister, George Herbert, amid a discussion of medieval rogation-tide processions – is the belief that certain forms of religious behaviour manifest the same rationale in the individual participant independent of time, space, or social position. In the process of elaborating these convictions, the book engages very little with much penetrating recent medieval scholarship that has drawn attention to the wide range of forces which helped to shape the expression of religious impulses and the variety of purposes that a religious association might serve.

Links between religion and society were not straightforward ones which the Reformation complicated – rather, the pre-Reformation links may have been a good deal more complex than many religious historians allow. It is in these complexities that the key to the nature of the impact of the Reformation may yet be found. In the meantime, however, all historians of the period have been left with much to ponder and admire in a challenging, formidable work of scholarship which has single-handedly reinvestigated its subject.

JULIA MERRITT

RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND ECCLESIASTICAL CAREERS IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND. Edited by Christopher Harper-Bill. 1991. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, £39.50.

ISBN 0-85115-296-1

This book comprises the proceedings of a most enjoyable conference held at Strawberry Hill in 1989. The enthusiasm one felt on hearing most of the papers returns on reading the finished product. The articles range over a wide variety of topics encompassed within the history of the late medieval English church. Most wide ranging, in date at least, is Benjamin Thompson's article '*Habendum et Tendendum*' which traces attitudes to church property from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. It shows how patrons changed from being prepared to hand over land in free alms in return for unspecified spiritual benefits to founding chantry colleges with specific statutes. This reflected the concomitant idea that if spiritual services were not being properly rendered then the clergy might be deprived of the temporalities for which they were owed. Thompson illustrates his argument by examining the fate of the alien priories in England and the foundation of secular colleges in East Anglia. Clive Burgess's article on chantry foundation in Bristol looks in more detail at the results of this new attitude, tracing the changing strategies with which founders sought to ensure the continuation of their foundations. The continuing nature of his research, and the real contribution made to it by other participants at the conference, is illustrated by the addition of an appendix of further material to his original paper.

Robert Swanson continues the temporal theme with his characteristically detailed look at the frustratingly incomplete sources for a study of parochial revenues, using the rare survivals of accounts from the parishes of Yarmouth (a cell of Norwich cathedral priory) and Great Walford to illustrate his theme. He concludes that, difficult as it is for us to see, the matter of how the values of benefices varied from each other and within a changing economy would have been of very real moment to the potential incumbent deciding whether to accept a benefice or not. Such considerations would have been of concern to the 321 men examined in David Levine's prosopographical study of origins and careers of the canons of Exeter cathedral. Most interesting to me of his many conclusions are the very high proportion of men who originated from the Exeter diocese and the (?consequent) high degree of residence by the canons. My hunch is that this differs considerably from (for example) the much richer cathedral of Lincoln, and I echo the editor's call for further such studies to enable comparison with Levine's conclusions. Many of Levine's canons were local men prepared to live locally. Some, for example John Stafford, were more at home in the atmosphere of high politics delineated by Margaret Harvey in her carefully constructed narrative of the relations between Pope Martin V and the English in the period 1422 to 1431. In tracing Martin's attempts to secure the repeal of the Statute of Provisors, achieve peace in France, and unite powers behind his Hussite Crusade, Harvey explains how his aims conflicted with, and were influenced by, the minority council's attempt to maintain Henry VI's inheritance, the council's and Bedford's determination to control clerical appointments in England and France, and the Duke of Gloucester's disastrous marriage to Jacqueline of Hainault.

It is with some relief that one turns from such heady political and temporal affairs to Robert Dunning's paper on the West-Country Carthusians. Using the

very few sources available, he successfully shows that there was spirituality in the religious orders on the eve of the Reformation and more to religious belief than mere ecclesiastical careerism. Similarly encouraging is Michael Haren's article which traces how the ideas of twelfth century moral theologians found their way into the pastoral literature of the fourteenth century. This taught confessors to prepare for the sins that might be associated with the class of their penitents, indicating that at its best the church was more concerned with social ethics than social control. This is one of many themes explored in Colin Richmond's *tour de force* on 'The English Gentry and Religion c.1500', an article that tries to explain the ease with which the 'so-called Reformation' in England occurred. Ranging from the themes explored by Thompson and Burgess to the suppression of the feminine in late medieval religion, Richmond touches not only the interest of his reader, but also the emotions, and this paper certainly provoked the most controversy at the conference. All the articles are worth reading by anyone interested in the late medieval church, but this is a must.

Finally, in a useful introduction which surveys the work done on church and religion in late medieval England since the publication, in 1984, of *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. R.B. Dobson, Christopher Harper-Bill emphasises how the themes explored by the articles interrelate. It is, therefore, doubly disappointing that this book, costing nearly £40, has no index.

ROSEMARY C.E. HAYES

CONQUERORS AND CONQUERED IN MEDIEVAL WALES. Ralph A. Griffiths. 1994. Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd. Stroud, £39.95. ISBN 0-312-12119-9

For most of us, Professor Ralph Griffiths is first and foremost a historian of fifteenth-century England: author of the best book on Henry VI and of 21 papers on contemporary national and regional politics collected in his *King and Country* (1991). Griffiths writes as convincingly on the northern Percies and the Midland Mountfords as on the house of Dinefwr. However, he is also historian of his native Wales. Nineteen of his Welsh papers are included in this handsome volume. They are collected from diverse and often obscure sources, have been reset and are often updated. Here again, as we have learnt to expect, is the skilful exploitation of national and local records, often newly discovered or appreciated; the discussions of local society, this time of West Wales, of families such as the Stradlings of St Donat's and Fords of Llanstephan, and of rebellions and conspiracies from Rhys ap Maredudd (1287) and Llywellyn Bren (1316) to Owen Glendower. Less familiar to the English reader are the sense of local topography and culture, a chronology that ranges from 1100 to 1600 and beyond and of Welsh historiography from the middle ages to the present day, and Ralph Griffiths, the outstanding historian of the medieval Welsh borough. The collection is not quite comprehensive: some of the best known papers, on Gruffydd ap Nicholas for example, are in *King and Country* and are not cross-referenced to it. Strangely neither collection takes an overview of the author's *oeuvre* and development. Dates of publication indicate a sustained

interest, from the early 1960s to the present: if the young Griffiths moved from Welsh to English history, he nevertheless retained his roots and his latest books, on Swansea and Rhys ap Thomas, revisit older concerns. The quality throughout, of course, is excellent: well-researched, well-written, lively and witty. What other fifteenth-century region, one asks with English bias, has been so well served? And yet, undoubtedly, the proliferation of Welsh names and detail does oppress. Hence, no doubt, his publisher's decision to set the price so high and thus probably to restrict it to a Welsh audience. If that results, it will be a pity, for there is so much for the English historian of Richard III's kingdom to learn. But not much about Richard III himself, who crops up only on pages 36 and 348. For material directly relevant to him, Ricardians are referred to Griffiths' excellent *Making of the Tudor Dynasty* (1985) and *Sir Rhys ap Thomas* (1993).

MICHAEL A. HICKS

BESTIARY. Translated and introduced by Richard Barber. 1993. Boydell Press, Woodbridge, £35.
ISBN 0-85115-329-1

This book, as its subtitle states, is 'an English version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bodley 764, with all the original miniatures reproduced in facsimile', and is a very enjoyable introduction to the delights of original manuscripts, even if through the medium of a translator!

As a person devoid of any real knowledge of medieval history I found this book more inviting than I originally imagined it would be. The text is a very accessible and readable translation of the original Latin, and the reproduction of the 136 minatures in stunning colour is excellent, with their original positions alongside the text faithfully maintained. Of course, this is undoubtedly an easy way to produce a pleasing book, but nonetheless it has been done with skill and great sympathy for the original manuscript. The original mid thirteenth century Latin is apparently difficult, but the translation reads smoothly and naturally.

The introduction is very informative and to the point. It explains that bestiaries were luxury books, describing a delicious mixture of myth and nature, fantasy and fact with regard to the animal kingdom. This intriguing concoction is as tantalising for us as it must have been to medieval readers, fantasy being as popular today as any number of 'Life on Earth' television documentaries. A list of suggested further reading for novices such as myself is also helpfully included.

The introduction also makes several interesting points. Firstly, that not only were the bestiaries a mix of fact and fable, but both the factual and the mythical elements were most often collected and accumulated from one written source after another through generations, so that the content became more and more exaggerated, like a game of Chinese whispers. Observation of the animal kingdom was seen as an inferior method of gathering information for a bestiary compared to the written word. Compared to twentieth century obsessions with scientific rigour and observation this makes an important context in which to set the bestiary. Automatic repetition without question ('it is said..' is a constant refrain) led to

discrepancies and contradictions, which of course make the bestiary even more interesting and endearing, as the inaccuracies and hearsay mingle with things we know to be true.

Secondly, writers of bestiaries were also keen to use the animals and their supposed personalities to show moral lessons. The bestiary is therefore littered with such statements as 'mice represent greedy men who seek earthly goods and make the goods of others their prey'.

The illustrations alone immediately draw one into the manuscript. The animals are depicted with great style and wit. The illustration for the personality of the cat (being the creature I am most familiar with – in fact sitting on my paper as I write!) is particularly memorable – the cat is seen sleeping by the fire, and catching birds and mice by moonlight with great stealth and cunning, brandishing mice a little like a gangster with a gun! Here, for once, the artist's actual observation of cats as he knew them has won over his imagination more than the simply fantastical.

The descriptions of the considerable number of animals are delightful and amusing, combining the deeply serious authoritative tone of a textbook, with a homely and affectionate air at other times., Dogs 'will lay down their lives for their master' whilst elephants 'have a lively intelligence and memory. They move about in herds... the elephant strikes terror into bulls and yet is terrified by a mouse.' Apes, on the other hand are deemed as being 'so called because they ape the behaviour of rational human beings' – an interesting pre-Darwin explanation! Lions 'will spare men lying on the ground, and will lead captives whom they meet to their home. They will attack men rather than women. They only kill children if they are exceptionally hungry.' What we would now see as the common or garden animals (dogs, cats, hens, goats) are happily thrown together in amongst the truly fantastical – the seducing sirens, the two headed amphisbaena, and the lion-bodied scorpion-tailed flesh-eating Indian mantichore.

To conclude, this book is a more lively and engrossing offering than one would at first suppose, and for those entirely ignorant of medieval belief systems and attitudes (and the delights of miniatures!), it is an excellent introduction to another world at once so different, and yet often so similar, to our own. Our modern anthropomorphic tendencies and our love of pets, as well as our fascination with fantasy creatures, would not have been alien to the medieval world. No doubt the writer and illustrator of MS Bodley 764 would have relished a viewing of 'Jurassic Park' as much as we now enjoy his bestiary.

URSULA S. CARLYLE

POLITICAL PROTEST AND PROPHECY UNDER HENRY VIII. Sharon L. Jansen. 1991. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge. £29.50

ISBN 0-85115-258-9

It was acknowledged long ago – by Rupert Taylor in 1911 – that the subject of political prophecy in the middle ages and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is too large to be tackled in its entirety. It is a fascinating field but prophetic texts had very long and eventful lives and even if their origins can be established their

meaning usually became hopelessly obscure with the passing of time. Every generation of 'users' interpreted them for their own purposes and according to their own knowledge. Even today commentators are not always immune to the spell of these prophecies and their 'demand' for explanation, though we delude ourselves by thinking that our interest is academic and impersonal. As far as actual and personal use of prophecies is concerned Professor Jansen rejects the comparison recently made between past faith in prophecy and present belief in astrology. Personally I fear the trust people in the past sometimes put in prophetic texts and their interpreters rather resembles modern faith in the expositions of political and economic scientists.

In view of the complexity of the subject the present study focuses on just one decade, the 1530s, a time of unrest – particularly in the north – when there was also a threat of foreign invasion and government was suspicious and tended to over-react. In the fifteenth century prophecy had been an instrument used by (new) governments to prove the rightness and legality of the status quo, in the 1530s prophetic texts were used by ordinary men and women to prove that all was not well with England. In both cases prophecy was appealed to because it had such great authority, the 'authority of tradition'. Several people were arrested in Henry VIII's reign because they owned, discussed or interpreted prophecies, a number were executed.

After a very brief general introduction Jansen discusses some of these cases in the political context of the decade, including the government's attempt at 'counter prophecies'. She lists and prints in full ten texts, teeming with symbolic and heraldic animals, garbled quotations from ancient prophets, dead men and unborn princes. The manuscript sources of each are given but only in so far as they cannot be found elsewhere; the history of each text is also briefly discussed. The bibliography is necessarily not very long, the index is unnecessarily 'selective'.

This book will be useful and revealing to people interested in the reign of Henry VIII and provide a helpful start for anybody brave enough to tackle prophetic texts in general. For those concerned with earlier periods its usefulness is limited, but as it is well written it can be read on its own merit.

LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS

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Instructions to Contributors to the Ricardian

Contributions are welcomed on any subject relevant to the aims of the Society. These may be illustrated by photographs (glossy prints showing good contrast) or by line drawings. All contributions, including letters, must be typewritten, with double spacing and adequate margins, on one side of the paper only. Permission must be obtained for the use of copyright material, but this is not usually necessary for short quotes. References and footnotes must be given in one sequence at the end of the article. Details need not be given in full for second and subsequent references to the same source. They must take the form of the following examples: R. Horrox and P. W. Hammond eds., *British Library Manuscript 433 4* vols. Upminster and London 1979-83, vol. 1, pp. 45-6. Daniel Williams, The hastily drawn up will of William Catesby Esquire, 25 August 1485, *Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions*, vol. 51 (1975-6), p. 48.

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