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*Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of
Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (review)

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occasionally I felt that more explanation could have been provided to meet the needs of absolute beginners, especially as regards grammar: I found no explanation of “case,” for instance, even though it is referred to in passing as a concept, and case categories appear in the paradigms on pp. 97 and 100. In this connection, the Glossary of Linguistic Terms (pp. 192–93) strikes one as being too short realistically to aid the struggling novice (perhaps for fear of putting off nervous students by proffering too many technical terms in one place?). It also seems a pity that facsimiles of relevant manuscript folios could not have been introduced to accompany the discussion of scribal outputs and variant readings, adduced particularly at pp. 46–50. But these are quibbles. Attentive readers of this book will find themselves in command not just of the traditional “handbook” materials relevant to the study of Chaucerian English (grammar, phonology), but they should also come away with the linguistic tools required to analyze Chaucer’s texts in close stylistic detail, and most importantly will find themselves stimulated by Horobin’s canny examples to try their own hands at doing just this. The book will accordingly be a boon to undergraduates, particularly (but not only) those preparing for examinations that require detailed commentary on passages of Middle English. Issued with careful direction by teachers, its contents should also be of no little benefit and interest to high school students encountering medieval English for the first time.

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KATHRYN KERBY-FULTON. *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006. Pp. lii, 562. \$50.00.

Books Under Suspicion “explores censorship and tolerance of controversial revelatory theology in England from 1329 to 1437” (p. 2) and the “history of dissent *before* Wycliffism” (p. 30). Yet Wycliffism remains on the table throughout most of this book, beginning with the assertion that this particular heresy “represents a confluence of several different, indeed larger, kinds of struggle and dissent” (p. 4). Quite rightly, Kerby-Fulton states that “Wycliffism . . . would have looked [to medieval

authorities] like part of a long-standing tradition of academic inquiry and interclerical controversy that periodically exploded into public struggle . . . with external authorities" (p. 5). She adds to the call for scholars of Wycliffism to broaden their insular view of heresy (see pp. 37, 100, 135); Pamela Gradon, Wendy Scase, and Rita Copeland have already made important strides in this respect, teaching us, as Kerby-Fulton plans to show here, that Wycliffism "was not unique (it was not even wholly original), and it was not alone in being suspect" (p. 3). For her, other modes of dissent "also deserve fair hearing" (p. 4). So *Books Under Suspicion* begins the hearing in its exploration of Hildegardian, Joachite, Olivian, and Rupescissan radicalism in late medieval England.

Readers of *Books Under Suspicion* will find some useful summary of these radicalisms (pp. 38–62). They will also learn about the circulation in late medieval England of books (including derivatives and extracts) by Hildegard of Bingen, Joachim of Fiore, Peter Olivi, and his student John of Rupescissa—mainly between pages 81–108. There are also provocative arguments later in this study, such as the suggestion that Guillaume Court, "one of FitzRalph's supporters" (p. 135), introduced the anti-Joachite Protocol of Anagni to England (and, specifically, to Richard Kilvington) as a means of bolstering their attacks against the friars with fresh facts. And there are especially stimulating paragraphs on the surge of Hildegardian extracts in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century (191 n. 12). It is in light of these particular and important contributions that much of *Books Under Suspicion* shows itself to be beholden to a judgment call not to write about those tantalizing books per se (p. 81; see p. 88), but rather to argue about the influence of their contents among fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vernacular writers: "This study, which has to be pioneering and cover so much ground at once, has only been able to gesture at much that still lies buried in manuscripts and archives. . . . Attempting to discuss both the intellectual issues and the manuscript evidence, throughout the study I have had to balance this history against the question of its impact on vernacular literary writers" (p. 396). Some of these readings are refreshing, such as the line-by-line comparison between Marguerite Porete's *Mirror*, its Middle English translation, and the articles of the Council of Vienne's *Ad Nostrum* (pp. 285–88); the questioning of the work of Walter Brut (pp. 305–8); and the parallels between Chaucer and Langland (pp. 343–44). Much of this book, however, pursues the additionally difficult and not entirely successful agenda of proving that "the major literary writers

of the period show at least as much, if not more interest in kinds of radicalism other than Lollardy" (p. 12).

Kerby-Fulton finds Wycliffism to be inconsequential in the grand scheme of things because Wyclif and his followers, unlike "the major literary writers of the period," are claimed to be hostile to prophecy and visionary theology (pp. 70, 142, 230, 304). To my mind, the book itself disproves this point, once the arguments over some 500 pages are distilled. Wyclif did warm up to Hildegardian prophecy (pp. 194–95); Wycliffites do engage in revelatory modes, such as Walter Brut (pp. 79, 305–8), William Ramsbury (pp. 266, 270–71), the author of *Opus Arduum* (pp. 99–100, 218), and the priest William Taylor (pp. 197–98); Wycliffite and prophetic texts travel together in mixed compilations (pp. 66–67 cite three manuscripts; see pp. 42, 466 n. 7); perceptions about Wycliffism and radical visionary theology are blended by chroniclers—in Henry Knighton's Amourian description of the Wycliffites preaching the "Eternal Evangel" (p. 161) and the accounts of Peter Patteshulle, the friar turned Wycliffite. Anyone who reads Wycliffite texts closely knows that what is said in this book of Amourian, Hildegardian, and Joachite eschatology—all merged terms here—could be said of numerous Wycliffite materials: "a sense of the periodization of history that included waves of Antichristian forces, such as the Pharisees, the heretics of the early church, and the present pseudo-apostles" (p. 134); "the view that it was against scripture that ecclesiastics might have temporalities" (p. 138); "the wisdom of the nobility in taking church restoration in hand" (p. 180). None of this convinces me that the "Wycliffites were desperately trying to keep their agenda apart from the revelatory one" (p. 393), and scholars of Wycliffism who wish to build on the author's arguments will have to turn the other cheek during the assertion of hyperbolic claims *cum* epithets about their subject of study, such as "new-fangled Wycliffism" (p. 4), "just Johnny-come-latelys" (p. 5), authors of "romantic nonsense" (p. 175), "new-fangled reformers" (p. 232), the "fashion of our time" (p. 388), and figments of the modern scholarly imagination (see pp. 37, 120, 233, 295, 378).

To me, it seems that the author's own examples show that Wycliffism matters *more*, in collective terms, than the many single instances she cites and potentially oversells. I say this because there is the frequent tendency here to treat one particular event, text, manuscript book, or even passage from a large literary work as singularly representative of a state of affairs. A condemnation of a friar at Oxford indicates that the

“Continental Inquisition Comes Calling” (pp. 135, 139). One Amourian passage of fifteen lines in the *Romaunt* (7107–21) “packed a punch” and “made notorious among vernacular readers the sensational doctrine of the ‘fals comparisoun’” (p. 148; see also p. 161)—yet surely the fact that the *Romaunt* survives in one manuscript copy and one fragment must mitigate this claim of notoriety and the intention of the “Middle English writer.” One surviving manuscript book, Cambridge University Library MS Dd.i.17, indicates that “the York Austins . . . were at the forefront of the study and transmission of radical prophecy” (p. 125)—letting alone that the provenance of this manuscript is an unknown (see pp. 115, 439 n. 26). One reference in *Opus Arduum* to friars absconding with suspect books becomes, after many iterations (pp. xlv, 9, 11, 39–41, 74, 79, 95, 103, 105, 154, 159, 201, 210, 271, 332, 348), the “confiscation campaign c.1389” (p. 378)—an event uncorroborated by any other source, including metropolitan and episcopal registers. In an effort similar to the tendency to take the one for the many, any and all inspired events—be they the anti-Lancastrian Bridlington prophecies (pp. 17, 213, 245) or the miracles associated with the cult of Archbishop Scrope (pp. 16, 238–39)—are swept up into the category of special “revelation” and taken as evidence of the purported hyper-charged background of Joachite, Olivian, and Rupescissan controversy.

Readers will have to handle with care the book’s effort to insist upon connections between insular and Continental works. Take the Wycliffite *Opus Arduum*, whose writer, so it is argued, was “once exposed . . . to apocalypticism like Rupescissa’s” (p. 225). The proof that he was “reading John of Rupescissa” (p. 216), at least when it comes down to passages that cite or mirror his work, is in one exact phrase: the writer speaks of *Opus Arduum* as a product of divine inspiration and not “from his own head” (*ex capite meo*), and Rupescissa says, “those things I say concerning the future I do not say from my own head [*de capite meo*]” (p. 211). The expression “*de capite meo*,” however, is not limited to Rupescissa and is rather a piece of scholastic phraseology used to describe unwarranted, fanciful philosophizing and theologizing. Why could not the expression come from, say, Bonaventure’s much earlier ninth colloquy in *Collationes De Septem Donis Spiritus Sancti* (“*Nunquid eas fabricabo de capite meo?*”). To take another example, Julian of Norwich’s description of the “chongyng of colour” of Jesus’ face during the crucifixion—“this image . . . he portraied it”—is taken to mean that “*Christ himself [is] the artist*, creating his own self-portrait” (p. 320). By

this reading, the author concludes that Julian's "scientific" approach to images "springs" from an "older tradition" in the likes of the twelfth-century "*De diuersis artibus* by Theophilus" (p. 319).

Then there is William Langland, who in this book is the first (see p. 4) and most frequently cited of Middle English authors. This poet, we are told, "went into battle against . . . the piracy of Wycliffism and its pernicious doctrine of predestination" (p. 378) by adopting Uthred of Bolton's inclusivist theologies of salvation. Kerby-Fulton's theses about the "radical predestinarian view" (p. 365) of Wycliffism, and its "draconian positions" (p. 391; see also pp. 222, 332, 360, 377–78), are, frankly, blanket statements and will appear to scholars as such once J. P. Hornbeck II's 2007 Oxford D.Phil. thesis, "The Development of Heresy: Doctrinal Variation in English 'Lollard' Dissent, 1381–1521," is consulted: it shows the breadth and variety of Wycliffite salvation theology. Had Kerby-Fulton included more Wycliffite texts in her analysis, she might have found what Hornbeck found. Meanwhile, I was not persuaded by any of the readings of Langland, because to me they seem like overreading. For instance, a passage in *Piers Plowman* (B.X.328–32), with the lines "And þanne shal þe Abbot of Abyngdoun and all his issue for euere / Have a knok of a kyng, and incurable þe wounde," is said to be "exactly" like "Olivi's exegesis of the beast's 'mortal wound' (plaga mortis) of Revelation 13:11," a wound "dealt by clerical poverty" (p. 144). This is not the only place where Middle English lines are supposedly "exactly" like statements in visionary revelation (see pp. 339, 345). Notwithstanding, as Langland has it, the "wound" is dealt by Constantine ("kyng"), not by "clerical poverty" (see also C.V.175; B.X.314–15; 326). It also matters that Langland, unlike Olivi, grounds his reflections in Isaiah 14:5–6, not Revelation. Other readings could use more work. The point that Langland "makes allusion to [the pseudo-Hildegardian] 'Insurgent'" in C.XV.51*a* seems unlikely (see p. 191). So too does the suggestion that the line "Lawe wolde he ȝoue hym lyf *and be loked on hym* (C.XX.423–24)" is a "dramatic allusion to God's absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) in the Ockhamist sense" (p. 382), or the notion that John But's words in the A text of *Piers Plowman*—"þou shalt be lauȝth into lyȝth with loking of an eye"—is "an overlooked allusion to Uthred's condemned doctrine of *clara visio*" [p. 388]. Then there is the reading of the B text of *Piers Plowman* in Cambridge University Library MS Dd.i.17. The *Regnum spiritus sancti*, which is said to bear "a Joachite exegetical twist" (p. 117) in the way its material is extracted from its

source, the *Belial*, also appears in Dd.i.17, along with many other items. And because *Piers Plowman* is compiled with *Regnum*, Langland's alliterative poem seems "nearly Joachite in exegetical complexity" (p. 119). Not only that: Langland's work could be "*mistaken* for Joachism" (p. 119; see pp. 156, 159, 338). I detect some problems with this analysis of *Piers Plowman* B, beginning with the curious citation of passages from a C-text edition of the poem ("C.III.436ff.," "C.XXI.219–24; BXIX.217 [*sic*]," "C.V168," "C.VIII.343ff," "C.XX.408–14" [pp. 118–20]) in the midst of a potentially important codicological reading of Dd.i.17. There is also no demonstration of how "C.XX.408–14" displays the "same combination of apocalyptic exegesis and salvational generosity [that] appears in various Joachite contexts" (p. 120); rather, we are told it is the same. Lastly, and as Kerby-Fulton acknowledges, Dd.i.17 exhibits "scribal highlighting" (p. 122) of choice prophetic passages in *Regnum*, but scholars might like to know that no such activity is on display in Dd.i.17's copy of Langland's poem, nothing in the relevant passages under discussion save a postmedieval note (according to Benson and Blanchfield) on the Abbot of Abingdon lines. I do not think it can be claimed, even as a hypothetical, that medieval readers could mistake the Dd.i.17 *Piers Plowman* for Joachism.

In view of the analyses mentioned above, it seems overconfident to my ears to claim with special emphasis that a particular kind of revelatory influence "was much more pervasive among all our writers than *concrete* evidence of Wycliffism" (p. 335; see also p. 12). The charges could be very easily reversed. It's one thing to grow weary of a critical paradigm that is much the sensation at conferences and goes by a funny name ("lollardy"), even if that paradigm is centered on massive amounts of textual and historical evidence. It's quite another to tire of that paradigm but endeavor to explain away its supporting evidence as just so much modern scholarly myopia, insularity, and pseudo-historiography. The latter is the impossible task pursued in *Books Under Suspicion*, which knows (but quickly forgets) that there was a copious secular, ecclesiastical, and authorial response to Wycliffism: "hundreds of pages of trial records, condemned articles, chronicle accounts, treatises, and anti-heterodox legislation" (p. 12). If we are to believe that such cultural activity is suddenly outshone by the aforementioned, often one-word allusions to the "*more* dangerous" forms of "controversial thinking" (p. 14), then this book has set the bar too high for itself. To be clear, there is smart material here; readers especially will want to engage Kerby-

Fulton's analyses of the *Chastising of God's Children* and the Middle English translation of Porete's *Mirror*. Indeed, the author asks a lot of good questions, but my sense is that her considerable talents in codicology should have been brought more fully to bear in an evaluation of Hildegaardian and Joachite books in England without the repeated turn to Middle English texts by Langland, Chaucer, Julian, and Margery to prove the value or ubiquity of this or that radicalism, as if ubiquity is the sole criterion for importance. It is fair to say that the author understands perfectly well the difficulty of this project and the controversy and doubt it not only describes but is likely to produce: "How or whether these things impacted on Ricardian and early Lancastrian writers is very difficult to assess, and much of what I hope to do here is to simply open up new possibilities to allow others to explore and judge for themselves" (p. 37).

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EMMA LIPTON. *Affections of the Mind: The Politics of Sacramental Marriage in Late Medieval English Literature*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. Pp. 246. \$32.00 paper.

Emma Lipton looks at four very different texts from the late Middle Ages in England—Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*, Gower's relatively ignored *Traitié pour Essampler les Amantz Marietz*, the plays dealing with Mary in the N-Town cycle, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*—for evidence that new views of marriage were developing with the increasing influence of the class she refers to as the "emergent lay middle strata of society." The nub of the argument has to do with the different concepts of marriage held by emerging new orders of society, as love became what she calls "a discourse of power" in the fourteenth century. This is obviously linked to other developments: the movement toward clerical celibacy from the twelfth century, and the growing emphasis in the late Middle Ages on the role of the marriage partners rather than the officiating cleric in the dispensation of the Sacrament. It is the emphasis that is new here, rather than the doctrine, and Lipton summarizes the argument succinctly: "The lay middle strata were specifically drawn to the sacra-