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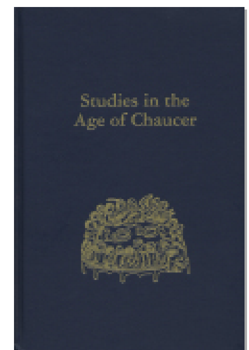
The Culture of Inquisition in Medieval England ed. by Mary C. Flannery and Katie L. Walter (review)



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tize the very particular poetics of fame Flannery attributes to Lydgate, this argument raises the question of how Lydgate's self-presentation fits within the broader developments in poetic self-fashioning outlined at the beginning of this review.

Attractively produced and helpfully indexed, this is an important and interesting book that will provide thought-provoking reading for anyone interested in Lydgate and the literary cultures of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

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MARY C. FLANNERY and KATIE L. WALTER, eds. *The Culture of Inquisition in Medieval England*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013. Pp. viii, 194. $99.00.

This cogent, exciting collection of essays argues for the centrality of inquisition to England's cultural and literary imagination in the late Middle Ages. The editors claim that inquisition "has been the subject of historical rather than cultural investigation," and so they offer this collection, which persuasively and persistently shows inquisition to have been a creative activity for ecclesiastical authorities, jurists, and vernacular authors alike. In doing so, the collection argues both that inquisition dialogues often assumed a kind of "literary" quality and that vernacular literature often took inquisition as an imaginative opportunity to explore constructions of authority, interiority, and community.

Although the essays display a range of interpretive approaches and objects of analysis, two thematic threads emerge throughout. First, as the introduction makes clear, inquisition here functions broadly as a flexible discourse, rather than as a specific legal practice. Second and more specifically, inquisition is conceptually and procedurally affiliated with confession, insofar as it negotiates between a private self and a public persona. Thus the collection seeks to "recognize the potential of inquisition alongside confession to form a hermeneutics for medieval subjectivity and narrativity." Edwin Craun's essay, which reads *summae confessorum* alongside canon law, most clearly explores affinities between

confession and inquisition, though all of the essays pursue the overlaps and frictions between the two to some degree.

The collection is organized chronologically, moving from the fourteenth century into the sixteenth. Its narrow temporal and geographical focus is both its strength and its limitation. Although inquisition was first codified as a legal process in the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council, most of these essays (with the notable exceptions of H. A. Kelly's and Ian Forrest's) gloss over the thirteenth century. Moreover, although many essays gesture to the specificity of England's use of inquisitional procedures compared to the way they were used on the Continent, none provides a sustained discussion of the particular ways English law absorbed and reframed inquisition. This focus permits the collection to be coherent overall, but it doesn't quite do justice to inquisition's long history, nor does it explain why England should be of special interest to scholars thinking about inquisition.

Nonetheless, the collection compellingly describes how inquisition worked and the ways it seeped into the late medieval consciousness in England. Indeed, H. A. Kelly's wide-ranging opening essay is essential reading for anyone thinking about medieval inquisition. In it, Kelly disabuses common, erroneous assumptions about the principles and processes of inquisition, including the all-too-easy conflation of inquisition and heresy inquisition, and he outlines the peculiarities of English inquisitional procedures. By establishing when and how inquisition became the primary form of prosecution in English ecclesiastical courts, Kelly provides a critical overview that supports the following essays' interpretive work. In the next essay, Craun likewise offers a broad view that marks conceptual distinctions between confessional systems, which sought to rehabilitate the sinner through private penance, and legal systems, which sought to establish legal and ethical norms by making private sins available for public admonishment. Craun surprisingly reveals that sacramental confession and juridical inquisition both operated according to charitable impulses, seeking to protect the innocent from sins/crimes and to persuade the offender to amend his or her life.

Subsequent essays offer arguments that are more historically or textually specific. Forrest and Diane Vincent both track the use of inquisition in the persecution of Lollardy. Forrest argues that the problem of heresy in late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England revived English churchmen's interest in provincial canon law and resulted in a flurry of scribal and juridical productions. He rightly points out that the "ener-

getic updating of old manuscript volumes containing provincial constitutions and the intensive production of new ones" has not been fully explored either in Lollard studies or in canon law scholarship; this is a rich field for further work.

Vincent shows that heresy inquisitions against Lollards offered Wycliffites an opportunity to assume authorial control over the inquisitional process. She looks particularly at Wycliffite use of public bills and broadsheets as a way to shape public opinion regarding inquisition itself, provocatively arguing that "the public imagination of the process was just as important as the public knowledge of the verdict." In addition, she shows that literary texts were as likely to participate in these debates as legal or bureaucratic ones; Vincent reads Capgrave's *Abbreuiacion of Cronicles* and Hoccleve's "To Sir John Oldcastle" to reveal the multiple sources and methods by which public opinion about the legality and fairness of inquisitional process was formed.

The next three essays concentrate on how inquisition emerged as a crucial discourse through which interiority and authority could be articulated. In "'Vttirli Onknowe'? Modes of Inquiry and the Dynamics of Interiority in Vernacular Literature," Mary C. Flannery and Katie L. Walter emphasize one of the collection's unifying claims: that inquisition, like confession, sought to root out the individual, private intentions of the sinner. They distinguish inquisition from confession through the role of community: whereas confession ideally maintains the privacy of the individual sinner, inquisition requires that sin become common knowledge. Inquisition's external focus puts pressure on sacramental confession, they argue, insofar as it reframes selfhood as a dialogic relationship between interior and exterior knowledge. Strikingly, for Flannery and Walter, this relationship is most profoundly explored in pastoral and literary texts like *Dives and Pauper* and Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*; in these texts, the differences between confession—a process devoted to the interior self—and inquisition—a process devoted to communal knowledge—suggestively blur.

Jenny Lee offers a different take on the distinction between confession and inquisition: "Broadly speaking," she writes, "whereas sacramental confession led to the effacement of sins, inquisitorial discourse led to the defacement of their subjections, their names, their bodies, their lives." Turning to Thomas Usk's *Appeal* and *Testament of Love*, Lee argues that Usk exploits the first-person voice of inquisitional form to represent the legal constraints upon the confessing subject (in the *Appeal*) and to take

control of legal discourse and thus reclaim the public authority of the confessing subject (in the *Testament*). In the *Erle of Toulouse*, as James Wade shows, inquisition likewise negotiated private and public lives, particularly in terms of sexual practices and ethics.

The final two essays turn to the sixteenth century to examine how inquisition offered important vocabularies for constructing authorial personae in Protestant England. Genelle Gertz's essay examines heretics' abjurations to explore how they constructed an interior self in the service of legal and ecclesiastical institutions. In contrast, she argues, those abjurations written or revised by heretics themselves registered heretics' opposition to the proceedings and offered the opportunity to assert control over their public image. In "Imitating Inquisition: Dialectical Bias in Protestant Prison Writings," Ruth Ahnert emphasizes the self-consciously fictional quality of the writings produced by imprisoned heretics in the sixteenth century. Mapping the strategies deployed in prisoners' accounts of their trials, Ahnert shows that these documents vindicated the prisoners' theological and political positions under the guise of "fair reporting."

Emily Steiner's concluding response, which focuses on *The Legend of Good Women*, reminds us of the role of pleasure both in the power dynamics inherent in inquisition and in our own, occasionally self-interested, historiographies of medieval law. Indeed, the collection as a whole explores the sometimes surprising ways power and authority are navigated and transferred in inquisitional practices, and throughout it emphasizes that medieval inquisition itself was creative; dynamic; imaginative; and even, in some ways, pleasurable.

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ALAN J. FLETCHER. *The Presence of Medieval English Literature: Studies at the Interface of History, Author, and Text in a Selection of Middle English Literary Landmarks*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012. Pp. 302. €80.00.

This volume consists of six substantial essays bookended with an introduction and conclusion, which explain the overarching idea that is pursued within each: an exploration of "the presence of the text's original