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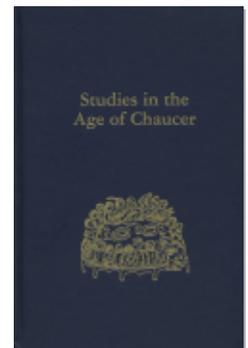
*Imagination, Meditation and Cognition in the Middle Ages* by  
Michelle Karnes (review)

Michael G. Sargent

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multifunctional” (158). These compilations, by the draper Robert Fabyan, the grocer Richard Hill, and the mercer John Colyns, show the “wide-ranging interests” and “diverse linguistic capacities” of their authors (191), as mercantile producers with aesthetic as well as practical concerns.

The book’s “Coda” returns to Charles d’Orléans, as he negotiates the divide in status between French and English to achieve, in Susan Crane’s formulation, “an early, elite version of post-colonial hybridity” (quoted on 195). Hsy explicates the intriguing image on his book’s cover, reprinted on 208, which is from British Library, MS Royal 16 F.II, a manuscript of Charles’s French and English poetry. It shows Charles writing in captivity in the Tower of London, surrounded by the boat-filled Thames and the London cityscape, with Charles himself, a “poet in perpetual motion,” represented three times: writing his text while seated at a long table; at a window of the Tower looking out; and standing outside, handing his text to a kneeling recipient. All of this “evinces the poet’s parallel existence on solid ground and water; his capacity to think across terrestrial and fluid domains of linguistic difference” (207–9)—and the image serves as a fitting reprise of Hsy’s argument.

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MICHELLE KARNES. *Imagination, Meditation and Cognition in the Middle Ages*. University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pp. 280. \$50.00 cloth.

Michelle Karnes has written a thought-provoking argument for the elevation of the role of the imagination in our perception of late medieval contemplative and devotional thought. Specifically, she argues that a synthesis of elements of Scholastic and Augustinian psychology achieved by Bonaventure led to the promotion of the power of imagination from its lower role (as it is usually conceived) in the memory and projection of sense impressions into the cognitive faculty, so that it came to have a function in the higher cognition of those ideas that are eternally in the mind of God: that it is through the functioning of the power of imagination that we know the highest truths that the human mind is capable of knowing. This synthesis worked out in Bonaventuran psychology,

Karnes goes on to point out, characterizes Bonaventure's authentic works of devout, imaginative meditation, and further influences the circle of works attributed to him in the later Middle Ages, like the *Stimulus amoris* and the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. But it was dismissed by later medieval English writers like Walter Hilton (if it was indeed he who wrote the *Prickynge of Love*) and Nicholas Love, in whose vernacular versions of these pseudo-Bonaventuran works imagination was reduced once more to the lower rank that it had held in the monastic tradition as a helpful but problematically illusory aspect of sensuality.

Karnes's study is divided into six chapters: the first provides an overview of classical and early medieval thought on the imagination, beginning with Plato and the Neoplatonists; focusing on Aristotle; and continuing through the medieval Aristotelian/Scholastic tradition, including Avicenna, Averroes, and Aquinas. The second chapter treats first of Augustinian thought on imagination (particularly in *De Trinitate*) before proceeding to deal with Bonaventure's philosophical writings. The third shows how the Bonaventuran philosophical position on imagination expressed itself in the devotional writings that were assuredly written by him; the fourth follows this emanation of influence into the most prominent Latin devotional writing in the "Bonaventuran" tradition, the *Stimulus amoris* and the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, as well as Suso's *Horologium sapientiae* and Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*. The sixth chapter follows directly on from this, demonstrating what happened to the Bonaventuran strand of imaginative contemplation in the two prominent Middle English versions of the *Stimulus* and the *Meditationes*, the *Prickynge of Love* and Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. The fifth chapter interrupts the flow of this argument, in an excursus on "Imaginatif" in *Piers Plowman* that demonstrates the usefulness of this study to those other than specialists in contemplative and devotional literature.

The crux of Karnes's argument lies in her observation that Bonaventure synthesized the late medieval Aristotelian conceptualization of the operation of the agent intellect in illuminating the intelligible species abstracted from common sense perception as phantasmata by a higher-level form of imagination, with Augustine's trinitarian psychology, according to which reason illuminates the intelligible species that reside eternally in memory. For Augustine, as Karnes demonstrates with admirable lucidity, the soul is a created trinity made in the image and likeness

of the uncreated Trinity: memory in the individual human soul is the image of the Father, in whom eternal truth resides; reason is the image of the Son, the Word in whom/which eternal truth expresses itself; and will is the image of the Holy Spirit, the love that flows from this truth to this truth. For Bonaventure, as Karnes argues, the Son, the Word of the Augustinian Trinity—through which we know the ideas (“verba” or “species”) that reside properly in the Mind, the Father (to the limited extent that we do know them)—functions in the individual human soul in the same way as the Aristotelian/Scholastic agent intellect in illuminating the intelligible species. I am not certain that I am convinced by this, but I will admit that my undergraduate study of medieval philosophy in a Jesuit university nearly half a century ago may have left me with too much of a Thomistic bias to be truly receptive to Bonaventure. I am not certain, when Augustine uses the word “image” in *De Trinitate*—as he does frequently in saying, for example, that Christ, the Word, is the perfect image of the eternal Truth that resides unexpressed within the Father, or that the created trinity of powers in the soul is the image of the uncreated Trinity—that he has imagination in mind. To recognize that the human soul is the image of the Trinity is a cognitive recognition, but is it also an act of imagination? On the other hand, from the Scholastic/Aristotelian side, might the suggestion that Christ functions as the same agent intellect in all human beings simultaneously be inappropriately Averroistic?

Granted Karnes’s thesis, however, her observations on the primary role of imagination in Bonaventuran mystical theology are spot-on, as is her demonstration of the degradation of imagination in the Middle English versions of the *Stimulus amoris* and the *Meditationes vitae Christi* to a lower-order mental power dealing with the objects of sense perception. As she points out, the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* and the *Prickynge of Love*, although they occasionally include educated clerical readers within their intended audience, aim themselves primarily at a lay and female audience conceived of as limited in their intellectual (if not necessarily spiritual) capabilities. I do not disagree with the trajectory that Karnes describes, and her discussion is refreshingly complex (in particular, I appreciate her emphasis on Steven Justice’s observation that “the vernacular has in itself no fixed ideological function (212)”);<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See Steven Justice, “General Words: Response to Elizabeth Schirmer,” in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 377–94 (389).

my only demur is that I am not sure that the mid-point of the curve is quite as high as she sees it, or the end-point quite so low.<sup>3</sup>

All told, this is an excellent, very well-informed and well-argued study, a must-read for anyone who would understand the psychological assumptions underlying late medieval devotional and contemplative literature in particular, but also any literature of the period that deals with the cross-fertilization of imagination and spirituality—which is to say, with virtually all of late medieval literature.

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ALEX MUELLER, *Translating Troy: Provincial Politics in Alliterative Romance*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii, 253. \$69.95 cloth; \$14.95 CD-ROM.

Alex Mueller's learned and meticulous study of the long shadow of Troy upon alliterative romance joins a recent surge of scholarship in the politics of alliterative romance and late medieval vernacular romance more generally. Informed by anti-imperialist critical theory from Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt to Giorgio Agamben and Benedict Anderson, Mueller proceeds, through a combination of careful source comparison, manuscript analysis, and close reading, to situate late medieval alliterative romances within a historiographical tradition bifurcated between, on the one hand, the fantasies of empire he associates with Geoffrey of Monmouth and, on the other, the more ambivalent and skeptical anti-imperialist historiography that he associates with Guido delle Colonne. Mueller's argument thus reads the opening gestures that many alliterative romances make toward Troy as a significant claim about their historiographical sympathies, which almost assumes the potency of a party affiliation. The linchpin of Mueller's argument is to classify alliterative romances according to how they adapt the Troy

<sup>3</sup>See Ian Johnson's perceptive delineation of Nicholas Love's use of Augustine's *De agone Christiano* in "What Nicholas Love Did in His *Proeme* with St. Augustine and Why," in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition*, ed. Johnson and Allan F. Westphall (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 375–91.