

Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred*, The Conway Lectures in Medieval Studies (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013). xvi + 399 pp. ISBN 978-0-268-03611-9. \$42.00.

In this engaging book, Barbara Newman presents a fresh approach to reading the interplay of sacred and secular in medieval literature, covering a wide range of French, English and Latin texts. Describing the dialectical relationship between the two modes as "crossover", Newman advocates a hermeneutics of 'both/and' which allows for double judgment of doubly-coded works—that is, a text can be examined from both sacred and secular standpoints, removing the imperative to designate either register as dominant. This is an elegant solution to the problematic task of hierarchizing these modes when they co-exist within a text; as Newman points out, the sacred and the secular may merge like water and wine, or lie close together whilst remaining stubbornly separate like oil and water. Double judgment banishes the Robertsonian "ghost of Criticism Past", and resists the critical urge to disinter a monolithic meaning, thus allowing the full complexity of medieval texts and their play in, through, and between these categories of signification to be explored and acknowledged. In addition to five chapters, each of which employs a separate corpus to address a different aspect of crossover, the book's appendices offer a new translation of one of the texts under discussion, the Medieval Latin *Passion of the Jews of Prague*, and a new edition and facing translation of another, the Middle French *dit, La Desputoison de Dieu et de sa mère*.

Newman's first chapter, 'Theorizing Crossover', illustrates the hermeneutics of 'both/and' and the principle of double judgment, and presents some examples of double coding and crossover: the liturgical paradox of the *felix culpa*, or 'fortunate fault'; the ways in which a pagan *matiere* can be combined with a Christian *sen* to produce a secular *conjointure*; and the hybrid genre of hagiographic romance. A number of illustrative examples are drawn from medieval texts in several languages.

The second chapter, 'Double Coding', examines shifting emphases between terrestrial and celestial chivalry, pagan *matiere* and Christian *sen* in the Matter of Britain, as well as ambiguous or duplicitous moral coding. Newman addresses four texts: Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charrette*; two Grail romances, *Perlesvaus* and *La Queste del Saint Graal*; and the dénouement of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

In the third chapter, 'Conversion', Newman considers thirteenth-century mystic

Marguerite de Porete's *Mirouer des simples ames* and its responses to the *Roman de la Rose* in the context of the dialogue between discourses on courtly and sacred love, including the mutual exertion of influence between secular *amoureuses* and Marian *serventois*.

The fourth chapter, 'Parody', investigates parodies of the sacred through readings of three little-known texts, *Le lai d'Ignaure*, *La Desputoison de Dieu et de sa mère*, and *The Passion of the Jews of Prague*. The appended new edition and translation of the latter two texts respectively provide valuable support for this chapter, furnishing access to texts with which many readers will not be familiar.

Newman's fifth chapter, 'Convergence', addresses a pair of parallel works by René d'Anjou, *Le Mortifiement de vaine plaisance* and *Le Livre du Cuer d'Amours espris*, examining the convergence of sacred and secular on both textual and visual planes. This chapter includes ten of the book's twelve monochrome images; the visual component contributes a new and thought-provoking dimension to the subject under consideration.

*Medieval Crossover* is written with verve and humour. Newman has a neat turn of phrase, and her pages are strewn with memorable descriptions: Chrétien's Lancelot, for example, is designated 'part Messiah, part Don Quixote'. This book offers a refreshing perspective, and provides much stimulus for further work.

Blake Gutt, King's College, Cambridge

369,  
King's College,  
Cambridge,  
CB2 1ST

bag28@cam.ac.uk