DOMESTICATING THE VIRGIN: 'HOLY LABORE' AND THE LATE MEDIEVAL HOUSEHOLD[1]

Abstract

Scholarly recognition of the Virgin Mary's central place in Incarnation history, her power as an intercessor, and uniqueness among women has often overshadowed the importance of her social role in contemporary medieval society (Sheingorn 1993: 71). Relatedly, scholarly emphasis has been placed on the portrayal of St. Anne, Mary's mother, rather than Mary herself, as a model for the contemporary medieval woman in a domestic setting. The paper will examine the way in which the apocryphal and legendary depiction of the life of the Virgin Mary in literature and art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England and the North places the 'middle class', merchant wife at the centre of the Christian story. Focusing on Annunciation and Nativity accounts, it will identify how Mary's activities engage with the social practices of this aspirational late medieval group. The paper intends to highlight the historical importance of vernacular religious works in understanding the lives and mentalities of their lay audiences.

Keywords: Virgin Mary, Annunciation, Nativity, merchant-classes, women.

Resumen

El reconocimiento académico del lugar central de la Virgen María en la historia de la Encarnación, su poder como intercesora y de su singularidad entre las mujeres ha oscurecido con frecuencia la importancia de su papel social en la sociedad medieval contemporánea (Sheingorn 1993: 71). En relación con este punto, el énfasis se ha puesto en la representación de Santa Ana, madre de María, más que sobre la propia María como modelo a seguir en el escenario doméstico para la mujer medieval contemporánea. El artículo examina la manera en la que la descripción apócrifa y legendaria de la vida de la Virgen María en la literatura de los siglos catorce y quince de Inglaterra y el Norte coloca a la mujer del mercader de 'clase media' en el centro de la historia cristiana. Concentrándose en las narraciones de la Anunciación y la Natividad, identifica cómo las actividades de María se ajustan a las prácticas sociales de este grupo con aspiraciones tardomedieval. El artículo pretende poner de relieve la importancia histórica de las obras religiosas vernáculas para entender las vidas y mentalidades de sus audiencias laicas.

Palabras clave: Virgen María, Anunciación, Natividad, clases comerciales, mujeres.

Socio-economic transformations had produced a discernable, powerful urban élite including merchants and some prosperous artisans and landlords who profited greatly from trade, industry and property ownership in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and

[1] I would like to thank Dr. Debra Strickland and Prof. Graham Caie for their helpful comments on this paper, a preliminary version of which was presented at the 18th SELIM conference at Málaga in 2006.

who undoubtedly thought of themselves as forming a distinct class in society (Aers 1988: 13, 75; Hanham 1985: 3). The dominant position that this 'merchant class' held in late medieval English towns and cities certainly shaped their aspirations, driving them, as David Aers observes (1988: 75), to desire yet more 'economic success and security ... political power, and social recognition'.[2] At the same time, these ambitions affected the symbolic forms by which they chose to represent themselves to the world. Participation in vernacular religious culture, in particular, could improve reputations and enhance positions in society, just as it increased a person's chances of achieving salvation. For female members of this social group especially, an involvement in vernacular religious culture as 'investor(s), producer(s) and consumer(s)' (Aers 1988: 87) was crucial, not only to reinforcing their dominant class position, but also to achieving a sense of their autonomy and identity in a society that condemned them to subordination through marriage. As Aers (1988: 87) identifies,

> Wives in the merchant class élite generally seem to have been in a far more passivized and domestically powerless position than those of the lower-class urban and rural families ... because in [their] class wives' work, and the relative increase in autonomy and domestic power this could bring was *not* an economic necessity.

Of the representations of virtuous women encountered by late medieval readers, listeners and viewers through an engagement with vernacular religious literature, drama, and pictorial art (Larrington 1995: 227–29), depictions of the life of the Virgin Mary provided the most encouragement for women whose lives were solely connected to the household. As Sue Niebrzydowski argues (2006: 26), 'most persuasive of the rise in the

[2] Since Sylvia Thrupp's 1948 study on medieval London, scholars have regularly referred to a 'merchant class'. Janet Coleman (1981) talks of a 'middle class' as a distinct social category in the late medieval period, represented mainly by the merchants, but which also extended to country gentry and free tenant farmers. Heather Swanson (1989) identifies merchants as forming an urban class distinct from that to which artisans belonged in the late medieval period. However, as P. J. P. Goldberg (2004: 101) identifies, the distinctions between these groups are not always clear. See also Jenny Kermode (1998) on the merchants of York, Beverley and Hull in the later Middle Ages. In this paper the terms 'merchant' and 'middle class' are used broadly in reference to members of urban communities whose wealth gave them access to a wide range of publicly and privately encountered vernacular religious literature and pictorial art.

esteem of the married woman is the interest in this period in representing the Virgin Mary as a holy housewife'. This paper examines some of 'the behaviours, attitudes, and ways of inhabiting the social role of 'woman'' exemplified by Mary and supports the view that devotional literature and art could empower the bourgeois housewife by 'idealizing and affirming her conception of herself' (Larrington 1995: 228; Grisé 2002: 209).

The Virgin Mary occupied an important place in Christian piety throughout the Middle Ages and by the late medieval period she had become the most important devotional figure besides her son. As a number of scholars have identified, there 'is nothing more characteristic of late medieval urban piety than its persistent appeals for the guidance, aid, and above all mercy of the Virgin Mary' (Ellington 2001: 26). However, while her status as an intercessor and Queen of Heaven is widely accentuated, her materially unachievable combination of virginity and maternity has led some critics to deny her the possibility of role model status on the grounds that she projected a feminine ideal that was unattainable for 'ordinary' women (Warner 1976). And yet, to assume that the Virgin Mary had no relevance to 'real' women is also to deny that women living in a patriarchal society would aspire to the feminine ideals created by men even if they could not live up to them entirely. Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn (1990) have shown how Saint Anne functioned as a cultural symbol, supporting the practices of a number of different groups in late medieval society. The same may be said for her daughter. 'How', Sheingorn asks (1993: 78), 'could we expect that one of the most central constructions of medieval culture, the Virgin Mary, would not forward the dominant ideologies of that culture?'

Although officially Mary's intercessory role was of primary importance, in practice she may have been regarded more as a role model by the aspiring domestic women of late medieval society. This relates to the observation by Raymond Williams that '[p]ractical consciousness is almost always different from official consciousness', in his concept of 'structures of feeling' (1977: 130–1). In recent scholarship on the medieval period, Henrietta Leyser highlights that it is not clear that medieval women were even concerned by the disparity between their experience and Mary's, or convinced by works advocating celibacy (1996: 123). Housewives were unable to remain virgins *in et post partum*; however, in

all other respects their domestic conduct finds a clear model in the Virgin Mother's example as set forth in the apocryphal and legendary depictions of her, in the vernacular art and literature of the late medieval period. 'To argue that she represents a pinnacle of unattainable goodness', Henrietta Leyser stresses (1995: 223), 'is seriously to underestimate her versatility'. Mary's role bears enough resemblance to that of merchant-class wives and mothers to govern their domestic behaviour, while her exceptional qualities satisfied their desire for self-improvement. The less attainable aspects of her nature they could choose to ignore or regard symbolically, and although the central importance that Mary achieves in late medieval accounts of the Christian story may not be a realistic representation of female status in the Middle Ages, the opportunity to imagine themselves in a more authoritative position than medieval patriarchy permitted, can only have furthered the identification. It is the complex relationship between everyday experience and a religious ideal, symbolized by Mary and depicted in late medieval portrayals of her life, that makes her a likely figure for ordinary women to aspire to.

Critics have also expressed concern over Mary's contribution to the denigration of 'real' women who could never actually achieve her level of 'perfection', to the exclusion of them from the public sphere and their relegation to the domestic domain (Warner 1976: 191). Marina Warner discusses the damaging effects of Mary's association with the virtue of humility, arguing that by 'defining the limits of womanliness as shrinking, retiring acquiescence, and by reinforcing that behaviour in the sex with praise, the myth of female inferiority and dependence could be and was perpetuated' (1976: 191). Nevertheless, in late medieval vernacular literature and pictorial iconography Mary is seen participating in a number of activities that were of practical use to ordinary, Christian laywomen. Though the scope of her activity does not breach the boundaries of acceptability set in accordance with patriarchal ideals of womanhood, it does reflect the range of social practices pursued by merchant-class wives. Consequently, the roles to which Mary was limited at least allowed a number of medieval women to feel represented, affiliated with a biblical figure who held 'great cultural power', 'part of a universal pattern', and with a realistic possibility of achieving personal salvation (Grisé 2002: 220; Warner 1976: 190–1).

Correspondences between Mary's activities and those of her contemporary medieval audience are apparent in medieval drama and other contemporary literary works. The N-Town play of the marriage of Mary and Joseph concludes with Mary disposing herself dutifully to prayer and praising the psalms she reads in her 'Sawtere-book' (l. 424) while her husband goes out to find them a house.[3] She describes this employment as 'holy labore' (l. 456), a term which encourages audiences to appreciate the virtue of engagement in work of all kinds. Christian belief in the value of hard work originates in the image of 'the Creator-God' who in the Book of Genesis creates the Universe *ex-nihilo* and in Isaiah 45.9–12 is the potter moulding man from the clay of the earth and modelling him in His own image, 'ut operaretur' (Gen 2.15). George Ovitt (1994: 71–94), arguing that the stress placed by many early Christian writers on the spiritual utility of manual work resulted in the technological advances of the Middle Ages, states that what is most compelling in early Christian literature is 'not the sanction of manual labour or craftsmanship in the interests of dominating the physical world but rather the consistent view of the centrality of labour as a means of developing the spiritual self' (77).

The emphasis in early Christian writing on the spiritual value of working hard is maintained in late medieval vernacular accounts of the life of Mary. In Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ*,[4] where Mary's revelations to Saint Elizabeth are recounted, she corrects Elizabeth's assumption that God's grace was bestowed on her without her having earned it through work, saying:

> trowest þou doghter, þat alle þe grace þat I hade, I hade withoute trauaile? Nay not | so. Bot I telle þe & do þe to witte þat I hade no grace, 3ifte nor virtue of god, withoute grete trauaile, continuele praiere, ardant desire, profonde deuocion, & with many teres & mich affliccion spekyng, þenkyng & doing alwey as I kuoþe & mi3t, þat plesyg to god, þat is to sey, outtake þe holy grace, þorh þe which I was halowed in my modere wombe. (ll. 10–16)

[3] *The N-Town Plays*. Ed. Douglas Sugano (2007: 90–102). All quotations from N-Town cycle plays are taken from this recent edition.

[4] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ: A Reading Text*. Ed. Michael G. Sargent (2004: 21). All subsequent quotations of Love's work are taken from this edition.

Such an endorsement of 'grete trauaile' can only have validated the arduous work being done by women at home, which may have gone unnoticed in the public domain.

Merchant-class women of the late medieval period, for whom the pursuit of profit, spiritual or otherwise, was a prevailing concern, must have felt particularly reinforced by this message. A sense of the profit orientated and aspirant nature of this social group is ascertained from the Ménagier de Paris' instruction to his wife:

> La seconde distinction est neccessaire pour le prouffit du mesnaige acroistre, acquerir amis, et sauver le sien ... Le premier article est que vous aiez soing de vostre mesnaige, diligence et perseverance et regard au labour. Mectez peine a y prendre plaisir, et je feray ainsi d'autrepart afin d'avenir au chastel dont il est parlé.
>
> (The second section is necessary to increase the profit of the household, gain friends, and save one's possessions ... The first article is that you have care of your household, with diligence and perseverance and regard for work; take pains to find pleasure therein and I will do likewise on my part and so shall we reach the castle whereof it is spoken.)[5]

The general concern with work in accounts of Mary's life must have instilled in the late medieval housewife a positive perception of her own varied, daily household tasks, whether overtly pious or not, as forms of 'holy labore' with the potential to, in the words of Margery Kempe (ctd. Aers 1988: 78), 'purchasyn hir mor pardon' in the afterlife.

By Mary's own definition in the N-Town play of her marriage to Joseph, 'holy labore' comprises three elements: piety, reading, and domestic confinement, all of which correspond to the experiences of the burgeoning class of merchant wives newly responsible for the running of the household. This is one of a number of instances where medieval biblical drama 'invokes roles for Mary that directly link her to historical women' (Coletti 1993: 82). Private prayer is the most conspicuous form of 'holy labore' exhibited by Mary in this scene and a prescribed activity for merchant-class wives, especially from the late medieval period onwards due to the increasing 'internalization' of sanctity. In accordance with this view

[5] *Le Menagier de Paris*, ll. 15–16, 13–16. Ed. G. E. Brereton & J. M. Ferrier (1981: 3–4); trans. Eileen Power (2006: 33).

the Ménagier de Paris begins his instructions to his wife with mention of her overtly religious duties, including private as well as public forms of piety, because, he explains, they are the most necessary to gain God's love and the salvation of one's soul.[6] Thus, when shown praying privately in her room with the assistance of books in Annunciation scenes, the Virgin Mary had a powerful presence among housewives as an exemplar for religious devotion practiced routinely by women in the home.

The proliferation of books of hours for private use during this period testifies further to the importance of domestic piety at this time, especially for women whose wealth enabled them to count such works among their cultural activities in addition to the works encountered publicly by everyone. These were the most common prayer-books of the late medieval laity, and as Paul Saenger identifies (1989: 156–7), indicative of the 'new intimacy between the praying individual and the book', an intimacy he argues 'both stimulated more individualistic practices of devotion, and kindled the desire for control of text and accompanying illustrations that would culminate in the Counter-Reformation's zeal for the censorship of the printed page'. Books of hours, as Kathryn A. Smith asserts in her study of illustrated examples owned by women (2003: 2), are valuable as markers of their 'owner's piety', as well as their 'literacy and pious and literate aspirations, and the means to his/her achievement of them'. While men also owned such books, it seems that there was a significant connection between women, particularly wives, and their books of hours, not least because they were likely to receive them on occasion of their marriage. Sandra Penketh (1997: 266–81) has demonstrated female owner portraits and the feminine ideals of purity, humility and obedience extolled in their illustrative content to be indicative 'not only of strong female patronage but also of an active participation in personal worship on the part of their owners' (280). These affordable, portable, prayer-books were invaluable to the development of more private forms of lay female piety.

Presumably, it was not possible to represent Mary praying with the assistance of a book of hours given that they are dedicated to her; hence,

[6] Ed. Brereton and Ferrier (1981: 3); trans. Power (2006: 32).

she is portrayed making use of the Psalter in the traditional way.[7] In Nicholas Love's Annunciation account, Mary is said to be 'in hir prayers, or in hire meditaciones perauentur redyng þe prophecie of ysaie touching þe Incarnation' (ll. 12–16).[8] Similarly, as Douglas Sugano notes (2007: 368), the N-Town plays highlight Mary's exemplary piety through her extensive praise of the Psalter.[9] As Dennis H. Green has shown (2007: 92), the Psalter, in addition to the Book of Hours, was one of the most common forms of prayer-book in the Middle Ages and largely read by women, although he acknowledges 'this could often be memorised reading, prompted by a written cue'. By 1400 in England, the ladies who imitated Mary are more likely to have been using books of hours and not the Psalter itself. Nevertheless, Mary's use of a prayer-book of any kind identifies private piety as a necessary form of 'holy labour' for the ordinary Christian women.

The use of books by Mary in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Annunciation accounts to facilitate the private act of prayer also suggests an ability to read at a time when the merchant classes, and women in particular, were commissioning many luxury manuscripts, such patronage having been formerly the purview of the nobility. In the N-town play, Mary specifically mentions reading ('on my sawtere-book I xal rede' [l. 424]). This suggests she recites the Psalms and she later demonstrates her competence in doing so by quoting aloud the line she has reached: 'Benedixisti, Domine, terram tuam' (l. 455). She appears to 'read' in the sense of *legere*, meaning to voice the text correctly and may also 'read' in the sense of *intellegere*, with comprehension.[10] This literary suggestion of Mary's reading abilities is supported by the frequent depiction of her with books in late medieval pictorial iconography where her engagement in some form of reading is inferred by the way in which she follows the

[7] I would like to thank Prof. Michael Clanchy for sharing this observation with me in a recent personal correspondence.

[8] Ed. Sargent (2004: 23)

[9] See explanatory note to lines 421–56.

[10] I am indebted to Michael Clanchy for articulating the *legere/ intellegere* distinction to me in recent correspondence. See also Clanchy (1997: 191–96).

text with her finger or is seen turning the pages.[11] In some cases, her expression of concentration and closed mouth has been interpreted as an indication of the silent devotional reading habits of the late medieval laity (Saenger 1997: 276).

Fig. 1. The Annunciation and the Nativity.

A number of these visual signs of reading are exhibited in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century pictorial versions of the Annunciation. In a mid-

[11] See Susan Groag Bell (1988: 168–72), M. T. Clanchy (2004: 106–22) and D. H. Green (2007: 118–19) where presence of books in Annunciation scenes and the act of reading from open books in art historical examples is discussed.

fifteenth-century tapestry from France/Flanders contained in Glasgow Museums' Burrell Collection depicting the Annunciation and Nativity [Fig. 1] Mary holds a sizable book open on her lap to which she appears intimately attached, as indicated by its close proximity to her body and its red binding that matches the colour of her dress.[12] The protective blue cloak she wears shields Mary's reading activity from her companions who figure distantly in the background, adding to the suggestion of intimacy between her and the prayer book. The portrayal of the Annunciation to the Shepherds on the high ground above the Nativity scene suggests that the scene directly above the Annunciation to Mary relates an episode in her early life. Consequently, the two women seated in the bedroom may be her companions in the temple or possibly even Mary herself being instructed by her mother Anne. Whatever their identity, their corresponding possession of an open book presents reading, and the association of reading with women, as an especially strong motif of this tapestry. Mary's lips are sealed as she reads, implying that she is quietly absorbed in the text, and the archangel's kneeling position in front of her ensures that her attention need not be divided noticeably from her reading matter. As in many other comparable depictions of Mary holding an open book at the Annunciation, she is captured midpoint in turning a page, indicating that 'the act of reading has been caught in process' (Green 2007: 119).

Similarly, in an Annunciation illumination from a *Legenda Aurea* manuscript contained in Glasgow University Library the way in which Mary points with her finger to keep her place in the book she is busy reading while turned to receive the angel's message suggests not only a close, linear engagement with the words on the page, but also the momentary interruption of an ongoing activity of considerable duration [Fig. 2]. As she appears to be pausing with the intention of returning to the text, the possibility that she is merely glancing at or engaging superficially with it is lessened. Late medieval art historical examples of this kind, showing Mary in the act of reading at Annunciation, are abundant. However, as Susan Groag Bell recognizes (1988: 168), the Virgin can also be witnessed reading in the context of various other episodes: 'while two midwives

[12] I am indebted to Patricia Collins, Curator of Medieval and Renaissance Art, for introducing me to the Marian tapestries in The Burrell Collection.

prepare for her confinement at Bethlehem; ... while recuperating from childbirth, relegating Joseph to rocking the baby, or while sitting in the garden, watching the children at play'. Additionally, she can sometimes be seen reading at the end of her life, as an angel appears to announce her death. A crucial question arises in relation to these scenes: to what extent does this motif mirror medieval reading habits and denote a culture in which laywomen had some form of literacy?

Fig. 2. The Annunciation

The fact that this specifically late medieval association of Mary with books occurred simultaneously with a significant rise in the number of women who read, owned, and sponsored the production of books in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was surely not a coincidence. For this reason, Bell argues that 'artists' insistence on portraying the most

significant medieval female ideal, the Virgin Mary, as a constant reader was surely based on the reality of their patrons' lives', rather than the need to symbolise the Word made flesh through the incarnation of Christ, or the wisdom and learning that made Mary worthy of bearing the son of God (1988: 173). For the same reason, Pamela Sheingorn asserts that, 'rather than interpret the presence of a book as a general indication of female piety, as is often done, we should take it as evidence of a literate woman, an owner of books, and possibly even a patroness' (1993: 75).

A number of scholars, most recently, D. H Green, in his 2007 study, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*, have noted that late medieval laywomen were readers and principal agents in the expansion of literacy from formal Church institutions to the home, increasing the likelihood that the depiction of Mary with book in hand was regarded by this female audience as an affirmation of their own occupation with books. As Green identifies (2007: 256), 'the number of women readers was far greater than commonly assumed, especially when account is taken of women's spiritual reading-matter'. Evidence of this has come from a wide variety of sources, including historical testimonies acknowledging actual women's reading activities or abilities, and works of literature and art that appear to either target female audiences or portray female characters as accomplished readers (Green 2007: 122). In particular, he emphasises the importance of laywomen in encouraging the domestication and vernacularisation of literacy. Their acquisition of reading skills, he argues, was facilitated by the existence of 'female reading communities' in which women supported one another as readers through the exchange of books among their contemporaries as well as the transmission of books over generations (2007: 87–88).[13] Felicity Riddy identifies a number of 'female reading communities' in describing the sub-culture that developed out of, as Carol M. Meale describes it, women supporting one another in their spirituality (Riddy 1996: 107–10; Meale 1996: 2). Mary and her companion readers seated in the bedchamber behind her in the Burrell Collection tapestry depicting the Annunciation and Nativity can be likened to these contemporary medieval communities of pious women readers [Fig. 1].

[13] For an example of one such reading community that includes not only lay women, but also learned clerics in the lending and giving of religious literature, see the testamentary evidence relating to Margaret Purdans in Mary C. Erler (2002: 68–84).

A considerable amount of empirical research into book ownership, largely using evidence from wills, has shown that by the fifteenth-century women of varied social status had access to and bequeathed books and, moreover, that the majority of the texts they possessed were religious and written in the vernacular.[14] Anne M. Dutton (1995: 41–54) has studied the testamentary transmission of religious literature to and by women in England from the middle of the fourteenth century until the end of the fifteenth century, and given particular consideration to the effect of class status on the level of involvement in this activity and the kinds of literary material that was passed on. As this study highlights, over the course of the period religious literature was increasingly included in the wills and inventories of merchant-class women. While initially only those with connections to the aristocracy participated, later those without apparent noble connections were making wills that contained books similar to the ones bequeathed by their social superiors (Dutton 1995: 52). This suggests the emergence of a devotional culture common to women with the wealth to acquire books, irrespective of their class. Evidence of book ownership cannot prove conclusively that women 'read' in the modern sense of the word, however it does demonstrate that they had in their possession the requisite materials to practise or acquire reading skills. Book owners may have read the written contents of their books aided or unaided, orally or silently.[15]

Not only did more women than is commonly assumed have the ability to read, it has also been shown that they occupied a number of readerly stances, through the process of creating meaning out of the pictorial and literary works they encountered. The reading positions they adopted ranged, as C. Annette Grisé summarises (2002: 209), from those they were asked to assume by the author or artist, 'to resistant reading strategies, and to tactical or strategic reading practices that allow readers to read for their own purposes'. This made it possible, as Carol M. Meale identifies (1996: 2), 'for women to extract meaning relevant to their own lives and experiences from male-authored texts, as well as from those which they

[14] See Bell (1982: 742–69); Meale (1996: 128–58).

[15] Silent reading is discussed by Paul Saenger (1982: 367–414; 1989: 142).

wrote themselves', and thus to read the extra-biblical portrayal of Mary's devotional reading habits as positive reflections on their own.

Housewives' engagement with vernacular devotional literature was especially empowering given the lack of formal education available to them and the significant opposition to the idea that they engage directly with Scripture. Equally empowering was the frequent depiction of the Virgin Mary devoting herself to reading religious texts in works of this kind. The medieval patriarchy prohibited women teaching and being taught to read in Latin on the authority of St. Paul's injunction that they neither speak nor teach in public. As Alcuin Blamires has identified (1995: 1–12), this left women 'disenscriptured' to an even greater extent than other lay unlearned groups.[16] On the grounds that the womanly intellect was 'weak' compared to the male, the only education deemed suitable for a wife was that with which her husband cared to provide her at home. The universities supported this exclusion of women from higher learning. However, there were a number of dissenting voices arguing that education and an engagement with 'substitute scripture' in the interest of securing personal salvation was an acceptable pursuit for women. Geoffroy de la Tour-Laudry instructed his daughters in his 1370s handbook, to 'rede' so that they 'may better knowe the peryls of the sowle and her sauement' (Caxton 1971: 122).[17] This kind of reading could be justified as recompense for the inherent sinfulness of the female sex and was thus considered a virtuous occupation for respectable women, which formed a valuable part of their education.

At the very least, the inference that Mary is reading in various episodes of her life appealed to 'middle class', female aspirations. While it is possible that Margery Kempe could not read and for this reason had the priest read to her, reading was clearly a desirable skill for a woman of her stature and by listing 'many a good boke of hy contemplacyon' (l. 4818) read to her it is as though she is laying claim to the cultural status of literacy by proxy.[18] D. H. Green (2007: 87) highlights the importance of female role

[16] See also Green (2007: 84–99) on women's education.

[17] See also *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*. Ed. Thomas Wright (1906: 118–19). This instruction by Geoffroy de la Tour-Laudry is quoted in Alcuin Blamires (1995: 3).

[18] *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Ed. Barry Windeatt (2004).

models, especially saintly ones, in strengthening this desire for literacy. He identifies them as the other context 'in which encouragement for women to read came not from men, but from other women, constituting a feminine solidarity in reading' (Green 2007: 88). The incentive to 'rede' in some manner is evident in the following statement by Mary in the N-Town marriage play:

> With these halwyd psalmys, Lord, I pray thee specyaly
> For all the creatures, qwyke and dede,
> That thu wylt shewe to hem thi mercy
> And to me specyaly, that do it rede. (ll. 449–52)

By Mary's reckoning those who read piously are worthy of greater heavenly returns than those who do not. Any residual association of reading with the occupations of high-ranking noblewomen can only have made acquiring this skill more desirable, and laywomen of lesser rank who imitated Mary's reading habits would have gained added respectability.

Prayer and reading are not the only pursuits that can be identified as 'holy labore' in late medieval Annunciation accounts. Through her example, the medieval housewife must also have identified a number of her other more monotonous daily tasks, with no obvious spiritual significance, as 'holy labore' of sorts. Early medieval images ordinarily show Mary spinning, not reading at the Annunciation (Clanchy 1997: 192). In Love's *Mirror*,[19] Mary's bodily occupation with weaving supplements her prayers:

> fro þe morn tyde in to þe trece of þe day. she 3af hire alle to prayers,
> & fro terce in to none. she occupied hire bodily with weuyng werke.
> And eft fro none she went not fro prayers, to þe angele of god came
> & apperede to hire ... And so she profited algate bettur & better in þe
> werk & [in] þe loue of god. (ll. 29–34)

With repeated mention of the profit that can be accrued, in Passus VIII of *Piers Plowman*,[20] the C-text, William Langland advocates suitable forms of 'holy labore' for laywomen of differing social status:

> What sholde we wommen worche the whiles?'
> 'Y preye yow, for youre profit,' quod Peres to the ladyes,
> That somme sowe the sak for shedynge of the whete,

[19] Ed. Sargent (2004: 21).

[20] *Piers Plowman*. Ed. Derek Pearsall (2008: 156).

> And ye worthily wymmen with youre longe fyngres
> That ye han selk and sendel to sowe whan tyme is
> Chesibles for chapeleynes churches to honoure.
> Wyues and wyddewes wolle and flex spynneth;
> Conscience conseyleth yow cloth for to make
> For profit of the pore and plesaunce of yowsuluen. (ll. 6–14)

Spinning is stipulated as the way in which 'middle class' women might plough their 'half-aker' (l. 2), where lower ranked women are advised to 'sowe' sacks and noblewomen to embroider mass-vestments.

In *The Canterbury Tales*,[21] the Wife of Bath also identifies spinning as a desirable skill for a 'middle class' woman to have by listing it as one of her own accomplishments:

> Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive
> To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve.
> And thus of o thyng I avaunte me:
> Atte end I hadde the bettre in ech degree,
> By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng
> As by continueel murmur or grucchyng. (ll. 401–6)

The Virgin's charge with spinning and weaving at the Annunciation not only may have reminded spectators of the *Ave/Eve* connection —since Eve was also shown spinning after the Fall— it also verified the daily spiritual benefits for ordinary women making use of these skills.

The demeanour with which Mary fulfils her responsibilities offered inspiration to medieval housewives in their behaviour towards their spouses. In the first section of his book, the Ménagier de Paris draws a parallel between a wife's duty to God and her duty to her husband:

> La premiere distinction d'icelles trois est neccessaire pour acquerir l'amour de Dieu et la salvacion de vostre ame, et aussi neccessaire pour acquerir l'amour de vostre mary et donner a vous en ce monde la paix que l'en doit avoir en mariaige. Et pour ce que ces deux choses, c'estassavoir la salvacion de l'ame et la paix du mary, sont les deux choses plus principalment neccessaries qui soient, pour ce sont elles mises cy premierement; et contient icelle premiere distinction.
>
> (The first section of the three is necessary to gain the love of God and the salvation of your soul, and also to win the love of your husband and

[21] *The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson (1988: 110).

> to give you in this world that peace which should be in marriage. And because these two things, namely the salvation of your soul and the comfort of your husband, be the two things most chiefly necessary, therefore are they here placed first.)[22]

Although there is no compulsion for Mary to obey Joseph, her humility and obedience to God —conveyed ubiquitously in medieval art, drama, and literature through her meekness and voluntary compliance with His command in Annunciation accounts— must have served as a compelling example for the contemporary medieval housewife in her marriage role. As Marina Warner appreciates (1976: 188), the 'cult of humility, understood as female submissiveness to the head of the house, set the seal on the Virgin's eclipse as a matriarchal symbol'. Although this aspect of Mary's conduct stresses the subordinated role of women in the household, it contributes to the realistic representation of their experiences, and is counter-balanced by more dignified depictions that permit them at least a degree of symbolic agency.

It is not only the type of work that Mary engages in at the Annunciation or the manner with which she conducts it that is exemplary. The environment in which Mary carries out her spiritual duties also corresponds to that of domestic women. Her situation in enclosed interiors is consistent with their position in domestic spaces. As Sarah Salih observes (2003: 125), the Book of Proverbs defines female morality in relation to domestic space, locating the good woman in the house and the bad woman in the street. In accordance with this biblical ideal, the Virgin Mary's virtuosity in Annunciation episodes is partly attributed to her voluntary domestic confinement. In one late medieval Middle English sermon (ed. Ross 1940: 241–261), providing an elaborated account of the Annunciation episode, the fact that she is 'not walkynge abowte in þe stretis but in hur*e* deuocions in hur chamb*ur*' (ll. 22–23) is deemed worthy of specific mention.[23] In the late fifteenth-century tapestry depicting the Annunciation and Nativity in the Burrell Collection [Fig. 1] the distinction between indoor and outdoor settings of the two adjacent scenes is clearly drawn. When praying alone in Annunciation scene Mary is

[22] *Le Menagier de Paris*, ll. 7–14. Ed. Brereton & Ferrier (1981: 3); trans. Power (2006: 32).

[23] Ed. Woodburn O. Ross (1940: 258)

clearly confined within a Gothic building, in stark contrast to the Nativity scene which takes place on the ground in front of an open shelter. The building she inhabits contains features of both contemporary medieval domestic and church interiors —as seen through the juxtaposition of her bedchamber and adjoining oratory— reflecting the variety of secular and spiritual duties carried out by women indoors. Similarly, though with a greater emphasis on recreating the appearance of a typical prosperous urban family home, the artist, Robert Campin gives contemporary relevance to Mary's enclosure in his well-known fifteenth-century image of the Annunciation (Mérode Altarpiece). The central panel of this triptych represents Mary in a fully furnished living room, complete with everyday objects.[24] These items have been interpreted as allegorical signs by Erwin Panofsky (1953) and subsequent art historians who have long recognized the domestic sphere as a place of spiritual significance in pictorial works of art.[25] Cynthia Hahn (1986: 54–66) has discussed in broader terms how the Mérode Annunciation triptych functions as a model for daily living in the Middle Ages, demonstrating the ways in which it creates 'a vision of the sacral quality of marriage and family' (55) that corresponded with new conceptions of the ideal family model emerging at the end of the period. It is not simply that the contemporary domestic setting provides the lay audience with a more comprehensive understanding of the symbolic therefore, but that it imbues even the most mundane aspects of medieval culture with spiritual significance so that ordinary Christians might feel sanctified in their surroundings.

Mary's enclosure was all the more relevant to the urban merchant class wives of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries who, unlike peasant women, were not expected to have a major role in the family economy and for whom, as Sarah Salih puts it (2003: 125), the house was '*the* privileged locus'. In her instructions to the female urban elite, Christine de Pizan (ed. Lawson 1985: 145–9) firmly locates the duties of the bourgeois wife in the household; and even when celebrating the non-domestic achievements of women, as Salih identifies (2003: 126), she 'locates them

[24] The Annunciation Triptych. Robert Campin, Netherlands, ca. 1425–1430. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 56. 70.

[25] See also Meyer Schapiro (1979: 1–20).

firmly in an architecture, a City of Ladies conceptualized as a household headed by the Virgin Mary'. Hearing the Virgin praised for remaining at home, medieval housewives would certainly have interpreted their very housebound existences in positive moral terms.

The spiritual incentive to domestic labour that Mary's depiction provided aspiring urban women of the late medieval period is evident from various other examples of domestic spiritual labour in which both parties engaged. 'Labore' can of course be taken literally to mean the act of childbirth, and yet this aspect of Nativity accounts appears to contradict the painful and often life-threatening experience of childbirth for medieval women. Late medieval vernacular accounts of the Nativity, in accordance with their apocryphal sources, including the Gospel of *Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Protevangelium*, maintain the emphasis on the canonical doctrine of the Virgin birth. They do so by likening delivery to a sunbeam passing through glass, as in the *Cursor Mundi* [26]:

> But as the sonne goth thorog[h] glas
> And levith yt hole as it was
> So come the sonne of rightwysnes
> In-to oure ladijs clene flesh
> kyndly he come & yode
> And sauyd his modir Maidynhode
> Thus bare she þat barnitem
> That blisfull birþ in bedlem (ll. 11227–34)

This image is supported by the suggestion that Christ-child's entrance into the world was instantaneous and without incident, as can be seen in the Nicholas Love's *Mirror* where the baby Jesus 'goyng out of þat wombe without trauaile or sorowe. Sodeynly was vpon hey at his modere feet' (ll. 27–29).[27]

Despite this seemingly unrealistic representation of childbirth, similarities do exist between Mary's experience of motherhood and that of the ordinary medieval women. Firstly, Mary was not exempt from the pain experienced by other mothers in childbirth; she was thought to have experienced this pain when witnessing her son's suffering from the foot of the cross (Leyser 1996: 123). And secondly, if interpreted in metaphorical

[26] Ed. Richard Morris (1875–6: 644).

[27] Ed. Sargent (2004: 38).

terms as a purity of mind and spirit, Mary's virginity was not without immediate relevance to ordinary mothers anxious about the potential repercussions of their bodily impurity. The fact that St Margaret —to whom many women in the Middle Ages appealed for assistance with childbirth— was a virgin-martyr shows the potential breadth of appeal that Mary herself could have. St. Paul taught that women would 'be saved by the bearing of children in faith, love, and holiness, and with discipline' (1 Timothy 2.15) and Mary's representation of motherhood at the Nativity, despite its unachievable aspects, helped medieval women to realise the spiritual value of childbearing. [28]

To medieval mothers who were fearful of giving-birth, Nativity scenes offered an ideal vision of childbirth, minus the pains of labour, which, however unattainable, encouraged them in their important work as procreators. Hence, the physical experience of giving birth is not depicted in Nativity imagery and what is represented instead is 'the moment after' Christ has been born (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990: 57). Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (1990: 87) has pointed out that the lack of 'obstetrical reality' in Nativity illustrations makes them less informative sources for the study of medieval birth and that their dominant influence over artistic representations of birth in the Middle Ages has made the study of childbirth in the Middle Ages more problematic from a medical point of view. Even representations of Caesarean births, which are not typically dependant on the Christian model, Blumenfeld-Kosinski identifies (1990: 87–9), occasionally appear to have been modelled on the Nativity, revealing 'a tension between iconographic tradition and realistic observation' in the iconography of childbirth 'different from that found in the iconography of surgery in general'. In fourteenth-century Nativity scenes Mary is generally shown lying down at a point in time soon after the birth has taken place, with her body clothed or covered, while midwives or other female attendants see to the newborn. These supporting female

[28] The complex relationship between the everyday experience of motherhood and the religious ideal depicted in late medieval Nativity scenes was the subject of a paper which I gave at Leeds International Medieval Congress, 7th–10th July 2008, entitled: 'Negotiating the Nativity: Motherhood and Meaning in Late Medieval Society'. For further discussion of the model that Mary's pregnancy and childbirth provides historical women see Sue Niebrzydowski (2006: 155–165).

figures are a reassuring presence and contribute to the overall vision of domestic life in the Middle Ages that these scenes create, given that only women were supposed to assist in delivering children.[29] Thus, the focus in late medieval Nativity images on the successful aftermath of delivery was upheld as the ideal outcome of pregnancy for expecting women. In failing to represent the actual experience of labour for 'ordinary' women, Nativity accounts reflected their desire for uncomplicated births. Rather than prohibiting female identification with the Virgin Mother, these idealised projections of motherhood appealed to the aspirations of laywomen and enabled them to transgress imaginatively the unpleasant reality of their own situations.

The dynamic that exists between Mary and Joseph is another aspect of the domestic situation frequently depicted in Nativity and Adoration accounts that does not entirely correspond to the experiences of ordinary medieval women within the home. Like the vision of childbirth, it presents an ideal situation to which they might have aspired. The portrayal of Joseph in a 'subsidiary' role to Mary is common in lyrics, drama, and pictorial art of the late medieval period, although as Cynthia Hahn has shown (1986: 54–66), by the end of the fifteenth century he begins to occupy a 'supportive' role that is more representative of the powerful *pater familias*.[30] In images that show Joseph in a subordinate role, such as Glasgow University Library's *Legenda Aurea* Adoration of the Magi illumination, Mary is centre stage and her husband is a peripheral figure engaged in some kind of domestic chore, typically cooking [Fig. 3]. The portrayal of Joseph as family cook, also presented in the Nativity image contained in this work, shows a man occupied with a task that was in reality the sole responsibility of female members of the household. Only in noble houses did female heads of household have the luxury of male servants to whom they could delegate domestic chores. Joseph's separation from the central action symbolises his exclusion from the holy family unit and emphasises the Virgin birth. At the same time his domestication

[29] For further discussion of childbearing and the role of midwives see Steven Ozment (1983: 100–31), Henrietta Leyser (1996: 122–33), and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (1990: 61–74).

[30] See Gertrud Schiller (1971: 72–3, 80) on the changing pictorial portrayal of Joseph in late medieval Christian art.

signifies a reversal of the roles normally performed by men and women in the medieval household that must also have caused viewers to reconsider their own positions within the family. Although Joseph's occupation with cooking fails to meet contemporary medieval expectations, housewives must have found it an emancipating notion to imagine themselves in Mary's position, relieved of their household chores by their husbands. Moreover, this imbalanced relationship between Mary and Joseph, also arguably improved the self-perception of medieval mothers, as they perceived the central importance that was attributed to Mary as holy mother. In this instance, the subversion of everyday norms offered merchant-class, female audiences an imaginative alternative to the less desirable aspects of their daily lives. In this way, the ideal domestic situation that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vernacular accounts of Mary's life often present did more than sanctify the social practices of domesticated women of this period: it also enhanced their sense of symbolic agency.

Depictions of Mary's motherly attentiveness in the episodes that follow the Nativity sustain the engagement with ordinary women's experiences. Once Mary has parted her cloak to reveal the baby Jesus lying on the ground, as was the method employed in dramatic versions of the Nativity, the emphasis is on her nursing and caring for the child, activities that *do* correspond to medieval womens' experience of motherhood and, as David Herlihy argues (1985: 112–3, 120, 125–7), provide an added insight into their emotional lives. As Karen Saupe observes (1998: 22), English Nativity lyrics of the period pay particular attention to the manner of the relationship between Mother and Child, in contrast to their other European counterparts that emphasise her perpetual virginity. Thus, medieval mothers must have regarded the depiction of Mary looking after her son in Nativity and Adoration accounts as representing and validating their own experiences of motherhood. As Christine Peter's puts it in *Patterns of Piety*, from the late medieval period onwards, the 'humanising tendencies of both Marian and Christocentric devotion, despite their limitations, encouraged the acceptance of the carnal life of the devout laity and lessened the importance of virginity as a religious aspiration' (Peters 2003: 95). At the same time, through their own involvement in motherhood, medieval Christian women could feel themselves more disposed to strong spiritual relations with Mary and the Christ-child

(Nieuwland 1995: 317–21). Ultimately, the central position occupied by Mary when demonstrating the role of mother results in a model that promised women whose lives were devoted to procreation and the raising of children a degree of social as well as spiritual elevation.

Fig. 3. The Adoration of the Magi

This paper has focused on some of the roles performed by late medieval housewives and exemplified by Mary in the narration and depiction of specific key episodes in her *Vita*. There are other activities, however, that could be discussed in relation to her life. One of the most crucial roles performed by medieval mothers was in educating their children; having learnt to spin and read themselves, inspired by Mary, it became imperative to pass on these skills. The instruction to mothers at the beginning of

Fig. 4. St. Anne, Virgin and Child

Passus VI of *Piers Plowman*, the B-Text to 'Maketh cloth ... and kenneth so 3owre dou3tres' (l. 14) stresses their importance as educators.[31] Michael Clanchy (1984: 33–9) has indicated the importance of mothers teaching their young the basics of reading and the contribution that they made to increasing literacy among the laity. Numerous late medieval pictorial works of art show Mary teaching Jesus to read, like those showing a young Mary being taught by St. Anne. As D. H. Green (2007: 88) recognises, to the extent that depictions of Anne and Mary teaching their children to read was 'meant as a stimulus to women to instruct their young the transmission continues over untold generations of women'. Some represent Anne and Mary simultaneously in their roles as teachers, evoking the sequence of women passing on literacy to their children in the late medieval period. A fifteenth-century tapestry in the Burrell Collection shows St. Anne, bearing a book that reminds the viewer of her former occupation with educating her daughter [Fig. 4]. Seated beside Anne is Mary holding out an open book for the appreciation of the infant Christ, appearing to convey the knowledge she has acquired from her mother to her own son. Demonstrating their support for this activity, on either side of this central group St Catherine and St Barbara are also seen clutching books. Pictorial works of this kind mirrored what was arguably the most influential work of medieval mothers, since in the fourteenth century, as today, social advancement might be achieved through education, and education was begun at home.

The depiction of Mary in her role as teacher, as well as pious reader, mother and accomplished housewife thus acknowledges the agency that 'real' women had in a changing late medieval world where 'holy labour' and social elevation went hand in hand and were increasingly tied to literacy. As Marina Warner observes, the 'convergence of a social code of behaviour with a spiritual ideal becomes more pronounced during the course of the later middle ages and the growth of the prosperous urban class, which permitted an exclusively domestic life to the wives of merchants and tradesmen' (1976: 185). As this examination of biblical and extra-biblical narrative has identified, literary, aural, and visual vernacular culture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was especially constructive in establishing the Virgin Mary, through her domestication,

[31] *Piers Plowman*, B-text. Ed. Walter W. Skeat (1869)

as a force that helped to stabilize merchant-class housewives in their 'new' social position.

Jennifer F. Scammell
University of Glasgow

Images descriptions

Fig. 1. The Annunciation and the Nativity.
Tapestry, France/Flanders, third quarter of the fifteenth century. The Burrell Collection, 46.115. Photograph courtesy of Culture and Sport Glasgow (Museums).

Fig. 2. The Annunciation.
Illumination, Flanders, ca. 1400–1410. MS Gen IIII (vol. 1) fol. 71r. Photograph courtesy of University of Glasgow Library, Department of Special Collections.

Fig. 3. The Adoration of the Magi.
Illumination, Flanders, ca. 1400–1410. MS Gen IIII (vol. 1) fol. 35r. Photograph courtesy of University of Glasgow Library, Department of Special Collections.

Fig. 4. St. Anne, Virgin and Child.
Tapestry, France/Flanders, late fifteenth century. The Burrell Collection, 46.14. Photograph courtesy of Culture and Sport Glasgow (Museums).

References

Aers, D. 1988: *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*. London, Routledge.

Ashley, K. & P. Sheingorn eds. 1990: *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society*. Athens (Ga.) & London, University of Georgia Press.

Beckwith, S. 1996: *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*. New York, Routledge.

Bell, S. G. 1988: Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture. In M. Erler and M. Kowaleski eds. *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*. Athens (Ga.), University of Georgia Press: 149–187.

Benson, L. D. ed. 1988: *The Riverside Chaucer*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Blamires, A. 1995: The Limits of Bible Study for Medieval Women. In L. Smith and J. H. M. Taylor eds. *Women, the Book, and the Godly*. Cambridge, D. S. Brewer: 1–12.

Blumenfeld-Kosinski, R. 1990: *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*. Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press.

Brereton, G. E. & J. M. Ferrier eds. 1981: *Le Menagier de Paris*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Caxton, W. 1971: *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*. Ed. M. Y. Offord. London, Oxford University Press.

Clanchy, M. T. 1984: Learning to read in the Middle Ages and the role of mothers. In G. Brooks and A. K. Pugh eds. *Studies in the history of reading*. Reading, University of Reading School of Education: 33–39.

Clanchy, M. T. 1997: *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066–1307*. Oxford, Blackwell.

Clanchy, M. T. 2004: Images of Ladies with Prayer Books: What do they signify? In R. N. Swanson ed. *The Church and the Book*. Woodbridge, Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by Boydell & Brewer: 106–122.

Coleman, J. 1981: *English Literature in History 1350–1400: Medieval Readers and Writers*. London, Hutchinson.

Coletti, T. 1993: Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary's Body and the Engendering of the Infancy Narrative in the English Mystery Cycles. In L. Lomperis and S. Stanbury eds. *Feminist Approaches to the Body*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press: 65–95.

de Pizan, C. 1985: *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Ed. S. Lawson. Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Dutton, A. M. 1995: Passing the Book: Testamentary Transmission of Religious Literature to and by Women in England 1350–1500. In L. Smith and J. H. M. Taylor eds. *Women, the Book, and the Godly*. Cambridge, D. S. Brewer: 41–54.

Ellington, D. S. 2001: *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Washington D.C., The Catholic University of America Press.

Gies, F. and J. 1978: *Women in the Middle Ages*. London, Barnes and Noble.

Goldberg, P. J. P. 2004: *Medieval England: A Social History 1250–1550*. London, Hodder Arnold.

Green, D. H. 2007: *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Grisé, C. A. 2002: Women's Devotional Reading in Late Medieval England and the Gendered Reader. *Medium Ævum* 71: 209–225.

Hahn, C. 1986: Joseph Will Perfect, Mary Enlighten, and Jesus Save Thee. *Art Bulletin* 68: 54–66.

Hanham, A. 1985: *The Celys and their World: An English merchant family of the fifteenth century*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Herily, D. 1985: *Medieval Households*. Cambridge (Mass.) & London, Harvard University Press.

Kempe, M. 2004: *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Ed. B. Windeatt. Cambridge, D. S. Brewer.

Kermode, J. 1998: *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley, and Hull in the Later Middle Ages*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Langland, W. 1869: *Piers Plowman*, B-Text. Ed. W. W. Skeat. London, N. Trübner.

Langland, W. 2008: *Piers Plowman*, C-Text. Ed. D. Pearsall. Exeter, University of Exeter Press.

Larrington, C. 1995: *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe*. London & New York, Routledge.

Leyser, H. 1996: *Medieval Women*. London, Phoenix Press.

Love, N. 2004: *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ: A Reading Text*. Ed. M. G. Sargent. Exeter, University of Exeter Press.

Meale, C. M. 1996: Introduction. In C. M. Meale ed. *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1-6.

Meale, C. M. 1996: '... alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch': Laywomen and their Books in Late Medieval England. In C. M. Meale ed. *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 128–158.

Morris, R. ed. 1875–6: *Cursor Mundi*. London, Kegan Paul, Trench and Trübner.

Niebrzydowski, S. 2006: *Bonoure and Buxum: A Study of Medieval Wives in Late Medieval English Literature*. Bern, Peter Lang.

Nieuwland, J. 1995: Motherhood and Sanctity in the Life of Brigitta of Sweden. In A. B. Mulder-Bakker ed. *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*. New York & London, Garland Publishing: 297–330.

Ovitt, Jr., G. 1994: The Cultural Context of Western Technology: Early Christian Attitudes Toward Manual Labor. In A. J. Frantzen and D. Moffat eds. *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*. Glasgow, Cruithne Press: 71–94.

Ozment, S. 1983: *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe*. Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press.

Panofsky, E. 1953: *Early Netherlandish Painting*. Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press.

Penketh, S. 1997: Women and Books of Hours. In L. Smith and J. H. M. Taylor eds. *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*. London, The British Library & University of Toronto Press: 266–281.

Peters, C. 2003: *Patterns of Piety*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Power, E. ed. & trans. 2006: *The Good Man of Paris*. Woodbridge, Boydell Press.

Power, E. 1975: *Medieval Women*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Riddy, F. 1996: 'Women talking about the things of God': a late medieval sub-culture. In C. M. Meale ed. *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 87–103.

Ross, W. O. ed. 1940: *Middle English Sermons from British Museum MS. Royal 18 B. xxiii*. London, Humphrey Milford & Oxford University Press: 241–261.

Saenger, P. 1982: Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society. *Viator* 13: 367–414.

Saenger, P. 1989: Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages. In R. Chartier ed. *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, Polity Press: 141–173.

Saenger, P. 1997: *The Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*. Stanford (Ca.), Stanford University Press.

Salih, S. 2003: At Home; Out of the House. In C. Dinshaw and D. Wallace eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 124–140.

Saupe, K. 1998: *Middle English Marian Lyrics*. Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University.

Schapiro, M. 1979: 'Muscipula Diaboli,' The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece. In *Late Antique Early Christian and Medieval Art: Selected Papers*. New York, Braziller: 1–20.

Sheingorn, P. 1993: "The Wise Mother": The Image of St. Anne teaching the Virgin Mary. *Gesta* 32.1: 69–80.

Schiller, G. 1971: *Iconography of Christian Art*. Vol. 1. London, Lund Humphries.

Smith, K. A. 2003: *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours*. London, The British Library & University of Toronto Press.

Swanson, H. 1989: *Medieval Artisans: an urban class in late medieval England*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Sugano, D. ed. 2007: *The N-Town Plays*. Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University.

Thrupp, S. 1948: *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Warner, M. 1976: *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*. London, Vintage.

Williams, R. 1977: *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Wright, T. ed. 1906: *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry* (rev. ed.). London, Trübner.

Received 01 Aug 2008; *revision received* 03 Dec 2008; *accepted* 24 Mar 2009