sets a new agenda for the visual culture of the crusade in England and one that is sure to be influential on students and scholars alike.

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Lynneth Miller Renberg. Women, Dance, and Parish Religion in England, 1300–1640

Gender in the Middle Ages Series 19. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2022. Pp. 268. $85.00 (cloth).

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The relationship between dance and Christianity is under-researched and often misunderstood. Lynneth Miller Renberg's *Women, Dance, and Parish Religion in England, 1300–1600* is a game-changing study that will benefit scholars of dance, religion, and British history. Renberg opens her introduction with a thirteenth-century English text that describes how Christians can dance with God, both literally and allegorically. However, by the end of the Reformation, she identifies a "stillness of the saints," in which "dancers were described as dancing not with angels in heaven but with demons in hell" (3). Thus, the ambitious scope of this book sets out to explore the shifting attitudes of dance in medieval and early modern England and dance's relationship to religion and gender. As Renberg reveals, dance gradually congealed into a feminized and sexualized form of sin.

The first chapter examines major church councils and reforms, arguing that they affected the relationship between dance and faith. Renberg draws from a large corpus of vernacular English sermons and *exempla* (i.e., short, moralizing tales that were often inserted into sermons). While Renberg is aware of the crucial differences between medieval and early modern theology, she also highlights commonalities between 1200 and 1600 that involve the concern for laity and the place of dance in worship. Moving from clerical rhetoric to performance practice, the second chapter analyzes the fraught relationship between dance and sacred space. Here Renberg shows how dance shared a close proximity to sacrilege and pollution, but not necessarily sex and gender. By the Late Middle Ages, as the third chapter on sacred time indicates, dance became more associated with women. While previous scholarship has detailed the role of dancing in early modern witchcraft, Renberg contends that medieval Europe first forged the connection between dancing and female witches. As she writes, "against this inherited medieval theological backdrop and early modern parish tensions over sacrilege, belief, and practice, it is no surprise then that dance, already a mark of the sacrilegious woman, also became a mark of the witch" (102).

The fourth chapter traces the sexualization of dance through the biblical figure of Salome. Interestingly, Renberg notes that, before the fourteenth century, biblical commentators often interpreted Salome in a more positive or allegorical light. In time, commentators reoriented Salome and her mother Herodias as more of the focus of the Bible story. In consequence, they became more guilty of the murder of St. John the Baptist. The fifth chapter

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continues the study of the dance of Salome, and illuminates how late medieval and early modern exegesis had an impact on all women and parish dance practice.

In the sixth chapter, Renberg scrutinizes the construction of gender (both femininity and masculinity) within a variety of early modern materials. Her conclusion makes an important point about how historians must be attuned to the subtler, but no less insidious, operations of power. For medieval and early modern England, dance played a key role as a gradual, yet extremely effective, mechanism of misogyny. According to Renberg, this slow entrenchment of gender inequity is especially dangerous, since it is less noticeable than a dramatic change, and thus is less likely to be questioned. She concludes that "by the end of England's long Reformation, Satan danced not on one specific damsel, but in every woman" (194).

Women, Dance, and Parish Religion is the first book-length monograph on medieval and early modern English dance. The text covers over four centuries of British history. In the course of her research, Renberg consulted hundreds of medieval manuscripts and early modern printed books. Many of these sources are not especially well-known. Other sources were widely read in the premodern era, but are rarely cited by dance scholars today. For instance, when addressing Salome in the fourth chapter, Renberg marshals a wide variety of biblical glosses and exegetical texts, including the *Glossa Ordinaria*, Thomas of Aquinas's *Catena Aurea*, Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla*, and John Wycliffe's commentaries. In doing so, she reveals fascinating conceptions about dance and religion in the Middle Ages and early modernity. Renberg also incorporates a wide variety of gender scholars and theorists: Judith Bennett, Caroline Walker Bynum, Dyan Elliott, Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, Katherine French, Karma Lochrie, Mary Douglas, and Judith Butler. Unlike the reductive, over-sexualized representations of Salome from the drama of Oscar Wilde (1891) and the opera of Richard Strauss (1905), Renberg proffers an ambiguous and complex image of Salome, one that evolved and devolved with shifting attitudes toward religion and gender.

Although Renberg does not incorporate material culture into her study, her monograph can certainly inform art historical scholarship on premodern dance. For example, a thirteenth-century English manuscript contains a curious image of the dance of Salome combined with an illustration of Jesus's feeding of the five thousand (British Library, Arundel MS 157, fol. 7r). Read literally, the iconography seems to form a contrast between Salome's sin and Christ's sanctity. However, one could reinterpret the image using Renberg's insights, such that a more positive, allegorical rendering of Salome could introduce more continuity rather than discontinuity between her and Christ.

My main critique of this book is that Renberg's analysis occasionally lacks a sense of adventure. Admittedly, this is a finicky criticism for such a fine and well-researched book. Given that Renberg is a historian, I sense from her a mistrust of critical theory. When used irresponsibly, theory can produce ahistorical conclusions. However, it can also serve as a compelling metaphor with which to express and complicate complex ideas. The mysterious multivalence of the medieval Salome that Renberg discusses, for example, could be well theorized via Julia Kristeva's notion of the semiotic chora (see *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1984 [1974]). Now that Renberg has gifted us with her expert archival research, this is perhaps the task of future scholars.

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