

Burrow's title perhaps invokes the ghost of Erich Auerbach's classic work *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946). Certainly, Burrow's work places the Western rhetorical tradition back into its proper place, from which Auerbach expelled it. Burrow's scholarship is extensive, his close readings of classical and early modern texts exemplary, and his occasional humor delightful. Scholars of the early modern period will find much of value in the first two parts, while others may join them in appreciating the arguments of the third part and postscript. Burrow makes an utterly persuasive case for the continuity between ancient thought on imitation and that of the modern world.

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Vernacular Aesthetics in the Later Middle Ages: Politics, Performativity, and Reception from Literature to Music. Katharine W. Jager, ed.
The New Middle Ages. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. xii + 312 pp. €83.29.

The concept of vernacularity has proved extremely productive as a category in literary and cultural analysis for over three decades, and might be thought to have had its day. The premise of Katherine Jager's collection of nine new essays is that there is an aesthetics of the vernacular that requires investigation. According to Jager, work to date has focused on "aesthetic texts and objects created for elite, textually literate, often wealthy audiences," neglecting "vernacular, popular audiences" (9). The volume examines this topic in three sections, the first on the Peasants' Revolt, the second on music, and the third on "Vernacular Practices."

John Gower's learned Latin poem *Vox Clamantis* is important in the first section in the volume. Joel D. Anderson's "The Weight of Experience: John Gower and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381" seeks to revise the view that Gower represents his poetry as entirely distinct from the peasants' animal-like, monstrous sounds by stressing the role of the sensory in the poem; the dream vision is loaded with sensory experience. Jager proposes that the brief vernacular texts associated with John Ball and others associated with the rising of 1381 repay formalist analysis as poetry, claiming that "the *Letters* worry over and declaim questions of poetics, authorship, vernacularity, and masculine truth" (50) and arguing that the letters attributed to Schep and Treweman are "lyric products of performative practice . . . representations of aestheticised speech" (80). Adin Lears's essay focuses on Gower's representation of a revolt leader as a jay who works up the crowd through the power of sound rather than meaning, exploring the "auditory imagination" and focusing on John Ball's announcement that he has "rung your bell." Lears's essay works commendably hard to engage with the

other two essays in the section; it also extends to the idealization of medieval communal song and chant in Victorian medievalism.

The second section turns to “Music and the Multimodal Manuscript.” Lisa Colton and Louise McInnes consider a corpus of ca. five hundred English carols from the period ca. 1360 to ca. 1520, arguing that “vernacularity in the carol is about far more than its base language”; it may derive from incorporating popular song alongside fragments of liturgy (134). This essay stands out in the volume by confidently revising the term *vernacularity* and using it to frame analysis of a large corpus of material. Barbara Zimbalist examines Middle English lyrics in “Christ’s voice,” offering Passion lyrics as a “poetics of comfort” (154). Kate Maxwell’s essay on manuscripts of Guillaume de Machaut’s Mass gives valuable insight into manuscript production but it is hard to see how it engages with vernacularity or aesthetics.

The neatly alliterative title of section three, “Vernacular Practices: Alchemy, Aesthetics, Affect,” does not solve the problem of unifying the essays in this part thematically. David Hadbawnik discusses alchemical language in Thomas Norton’s *Ordinal of Alchemy*, John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, and Chaucer’s *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*, arguing that poets are alchemists who guard the secrets of their craft, while vernacular reading is also a kind of alchemy. Noëlle Phillips’s essay on the “aesthetics of antifraternalism” begins with a discussion of philosophies of beauty that would have made a useful frame for the whole volume. She focuses on the *Jack Upland* series as “a trio of antifraternal fifteenth-century poems that respond to one another” (241); *Jack Upland* itself is in prose, but is said to have a “poetic flavour” (253). Phillips proposes that we should “diversify our assumptions about how medieval readers and writers experienced the pleasures of the text” (236). Jessica Barr investigates the reading experience in the *Book of Margery Kempe* and Rolle’s *Meditations A and B*, arguing that Kempe cultivates a literate response to the text while Rolle generates an affective response.

Collections of essays are difficult to edit, and this one appears to have been more challenging than most. There is no shared definition of *vernacularity* here, nor of *aesthetics*, and the volume does not offer any proposition for what *vernacular aesthetics* might be. Despite the limitations of the volume as a whole, some essays stand out as important contributions to their fields. I would include in this group the essays by Adin Lears, Kate Maxwell, and Noëlle Phillips, and the excellent discussion of carols by Lisa Colton and Louise McInnes. More careful copyediting and proofreading, and perhaps a more generous publishing budget, might have caught some rather depressing errors and mitigated some production issues. These include “littera notabiliores” and a missing subject, “The manuscript folio page . . . he” (62); use of uppercase thorn and italicized thorn for lowercase thorn and use of the Arabic numeral 3 for yogh (e.g., 164, 252, 258n71); and the inclusion of images that appear to have been photographed on mobile phones.

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