

factors were part of a complex and evolving culture. The essays in this collection address such issues, paying special attention to the importance of what was characterized at the time as marginal or peripheral (English Catholic, Jews and Hebraism, religiously active women, secularists or atheists). A master narrative of English religious and cultural history that does not highlight their importance distorts our sense of the past (17-18).

Despite the book's emphasis on diversity, all the essays in this volume have one thing in common: they are all firmly grounded in sound critical theory, yet none suffers from excessive theoretical jargon. In this regard, this text echoes one of the most traditional of religious paradoxes: there is unity in diversity.

Nicky Hallett. *The Senses in Religious Communities, 1600-1800: Early Modern "Convents of Pleasure."* Farnham, Surrey, England: Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. xii+249. \$109.95. Review by ELENA LEVY-NAVARRO, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN AT WHITEWATER.

In the last thirty years, scholarship of early modern religions has expanded our understanding of religious experiences and traditions by focusing less on a singular monolithic religious tradition, often assumed to be governed by a central official institutions, and more on multiple, more seemingly marginal religious experiences. Nicky Hallett's work has played no small part in this shift as she has immersed herself in the lives of early modern English Catholic nuns who left their Protestant homeland to become nuns in Carmelite convents in northern Europe (especially Antwerp). These nuns, unlike their more dogmatic militant brethren like the Jesuits, pursued a devotional life which seems rather indifferent to the authority of the Church. Hallett's nuns touch each other through their writing and reading lives. The book forms part of a diptych with her previous scholarly edition of their life writing, *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the Early Modern Period* (Ashgate 2007). That edition made their writing broadly available to scholars; this one suggests a method of

reading those texts that illuminates their method of spiritually embodied reading.

Despite references to contemporary theorists such as postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha and queer theorist Eve Sedgwick, the strength of the book comes from her own intense engagement with the archives, the texts, and the writing, reading, and praying women themselves. Her careful readings of specific experiences and specific senses serve to frustrate modern secular sensibilities and expectations, especially of our own bodies. Unlike secular moderns, who since the enlightenment have typically seen bodies as distinct, and as objects to be examined by the investigator, the nuns took no such separation for granted. Indeed, they developed a “spiritual materialism,” in which their own embodied encounters with texts brought nun together with nun, even when they are divided by time, space, or even death (3). Theoretically, her book places the sense of touch methodologically front and center. As she announces, “Mine, I might say, is a history of contingency: things (most of all humans) touching” (3). Resisting even her organization of chapters, in which she approaches each sense individually, Hallett summarizes the organization of the book as follows: “I will focus in separate chapters on the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting nun” (9). The gerund here underscores the extent to which each chapter gropes towards describing the “spiritual materialism” of the nuns, in which senses serve to bring the nuns in communion with each other.

Chapter one and two offer the methodology of the work in describing the “sensory reading” cultivated among these convents. Chapter one places the reading of the nuns’ lives with their experience of reading conduct manuals in England. Accomplished readers of conduct manuals, the nuns gradually learned to read the nuns’ lives with a similar goal of learning how to behave, comport themselves, and pray. The form of instruction, however, is not from the top down; instead, the nun learns to touch the other nun by their soulful engagement with the text. When two nuns were separated from each other, the Prioress of the Antwerp convent, Anne of Ascension (Anne Worsley) sent to her Carmelite sister, Catherine of the Blessed Sacrament (Catherine Windoe), a scapular. A text with a prayer written on it, a scapular was worn next to the body; thus in this piece of writing, the text serves

“as a means of keeping in touch both metaphorically and literally reducing the women’s separation” (74). What Hallett is underscoring would seem nonsensical to a (late) modern mind, since it depends on a “spiritual materialism.” The “literal” here is, as Hallett later suggests, something more like “sacramental,” as the two nuns’ are united with each other through a shared understanding of and commitment to a spiritual communion.

The way sense experience can touch others in unexpected ways is prominent throughout the chapters, but especially in chapter three on touch and chapter six on smell. Both suggest the extent to which experiences bring the sisters into communion with each other, including especially with the founder of their order, St. Teresa. Chapter three centers on the literal inheritance of Teresa’s hand, left to the Carmelite sisters at Avila. Hallett uses this story evocatively to suggest the extent to which they encounter Teresa bodily in encountering her in her writing. As Hallett explains, “The hands of Teresa are literally (well, literarily) central to her self-writing, and figuratively central to her posthumous iconography” (103). She explicitly argues that the hand of a St. Teresa functions very differently than other hands because, while other hands might signify a loss of individual agency, this hand defies such distinctions. When touched, kissed, and revered, it comes alive, “the dead giving something in return for the sign of lips’ fidelity” (107).

In chapter six, Hallett explores the transformative possibilities of smell. Arguing that it is a sense that is particularly challenging to modern linear understandings of time and space, Hallett focuses on how smell brings the nuns closer to their dead foremothers. Their experience of “sweet” smells brings them closer to their sisters. The nuns, for example, had communal experiences of the “sweet” smell of their deceased sisters, often on the anniversary of their death. Hallett describes this experience as having a sacramental quality, but one that is not mediated by a priest, but by their collective experiences: “Another account of the anniversary smell of Margaret of Jesus likens the scent specifically to the Teresian model, referring to ‘a Spanish perfume, which we call our BD Mother St Thereses smell’” (164). Her analysis demonstrates finally that, “sensory experience is quasi-sacramental and here specifically Carmelite.”

In short, this book will be of interest to a wide range of early modern scholars, whether interested in the history of reading, English Catholicism(s), or women's embodied experiences. Contemporary theorists of the body would do well to attend to the experiences of this small group of women precisely because they challenge some of our most basic assumptions of what be.

Susanne Woods. *Milton and the Poetics of Freedom*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2013. ix + 289 pp. \$58.00. Review by ANNA K. NARDO, LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY.

*Milton and the Poetics of Freedom* places itself alongside three "books arguing for Milton's continuing relevance" (247) that appeared between the turn of the millennium and the four hundredth anniversary of Milton's birth: Stanley Fish's *How Milton Works* (2001), Joseph Wittreich's *Why Milton Matters* (2006), and Nigel Smith's *Is Milton Better than Shakespeare?* (2008). Despite their considerable differences, all three of these Milton scholars would, I believe, agree with Woods's assertion that Milton matters now because he was "an important voice for defining freedom within the contestations of English-speaking culture" (1). Always aware of the plastic meanings and contradictory uses of the term "freedom" in Milton's culture and our own, Woods argues that Milton "more than any previous English writer, centers freedom in the act of rational, knowledgeable choice" (3). Woods's book approaches Miltonic freedom by mapping its antecedents in both political and literary history and by analyzing what she terms Milton's "invitational poetics" (5). She identifies a constellation of rhetorical and poetic techniques that take "advantage of interpretive spaces in metaphor and in varieties of indirect syntax" (196), through which Milton invites "his readers ... to enact their own freedom by choosing" (5).

Woods's readings of the 1645 *Poems, Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Areopagitica, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes* will be familiar to most readers. "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" "set choices before the reader and invite the exercise of thoughtful choosing" (76); the stance of the Attendant Spirit at the end of *A*