

2016

## Review of Sara S. Poor and Nigel Smith, eds., *Mysticism and Reform, 1400–1750*

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### Original Published Citation

Review of Sara S. Poor and Nigel Smith, eds., *Mysticism and Reform, 1400–1750*. *Renaissance Quarterly* 69:3 (2016), 1147–49.

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*Mysticism and Reform, 1400–1750*. Sara S. Poor and Nigel Smith, eds.  
ReFormations: Medieval and Early Modern. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame  
Press, 2015. x + 408 pp. \$45.

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This capacious and stimulating collection brings together scholars working on texts from across Northern Europe and the colonial New World and spanning more than 300 years. Despite the range of these essays, they are united in their

conviction that the mysticism that flourished during the High Middle Ages did not disappear with the advent of Protestantism. At the same time, this collection insists on a focused definition of *mysticism*, avoiding the pitfall of using the term so broadly that it becomes virtually meaningless. Instead, this volume focuses on negative or apophatic mysticism, and especially the way that such mystical experiences resist imagery. Other emphases are on the relationship between written text and mystical practice, gender, and how mysticism works either to challenge or uphold dogmatic authority. Throughout, the chapters chart a circuitous and often-surprising path from Rhineland mysticism through Lutheranism, Pietism, Counter-Reformation Catholicism, English Dissenters, and the ecstatic movements of colonial America.

The editors' introduction, together with an opening chapter by Euan K. Cameron, provide a helpful framework for understanding and locating the chapters that follow. Cameron gives an overview of ways of knowing in pre- and post-Reformation Europe, arguing that, in general, mysticism thrives "in the times when dogmatic debates have least impact on the political stability of the church" (30). This explains some of Luther's famous hostility toward mysticism: early Protestantism's crisis of authority could not brook what Luther saw as arrogant self-assertion and a privileging of personal revelation over the Word. Later-generation Protestants, however, living in more stable times and reacting against what they perceived as an "excessive quest for dogmatic definition" (41), often found in mysticism important intellectual and spiritual resources. Alana King shows the way one sixteenth-century Lutheran minister interpreted Meister Eckhart, seeing his notion of spiritual poverty as a kind of intellectual humility with the potential to "generat[e] agreement among a group hopelessly divided by dispute and debate" (52). Sarah Apetrei argues for a similar role for mysticism in the Enlightenment — though the Enlightenment is generally seen as even more hostile toward mysticism than the early Reformation. According to Apetrei, the Enlightenment critique of Christian orthodoxy and religious controversy actually spawned movements that understood mysticism as that which transcends politics.

Post-Reformation and Counter-Reformation Catholicism also responded to religious conflict by turning inward. Chapters by Kees Schepers and Kirsten M. Christensen each focus on the learned female mystics at the Saint Agnes Convent in Arnheim, while Arthur F. Marotti investigates the works of a similarly learned and original woman, Dame Gertrude More, the granddaughter of Thomas More, a member of a Benedictine order at Cambrai. All three of these chapters address the occasional conflicts of these female mystics with male clerical authority and the authority they claimed for themselves in their interior lives. Female self-assertion continues to be a focus in several subsequent chapters that return to Protestant contexts: Genelle C. Gertz reads female Quaker prophets in terms of both their continuities and discontinuities with the female mystics of the Middle Ages; Franz M. Eybl considers the poetry of Catherina Regina von Greiffenberg and the erasure

of her language of specifically female eroticism in a later, male-edited edition of her work; and Bethany Wiggin investigates another kind of erasure — the elimination of any account, in the sisterbook of Ephrata, of the defection of Marie Christine Sauer from the celibate community in Pennsylvania.

Two of the chapters gesture further forward while remaining rooted in earlier forms of mysticism. Alison Shell finds in John Austin's Restoration-era "original psalms" — formally experimental poems inspired by the Daily Office and intended for collective worship — a poetry that seems to anticipate twentieth-century free verse, while Niklaus Largier considers the relationship between negative theology and the experimental aesthetics of artists such as Huysmans, Baudelaire, and Bataille. But Largier, like Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Hildegard Elisabeth Keller in their chapter, is cautious about making sweeping claims, recognizing that the uses to which later generations put patristic and medieval mysticism are, at bottom, reflections of their own values and assumptions. For as Hamburger and Keller note, too many well-intentioned defenses of mysticism celebrate mystics as radical opponents of authority — when, in fact, mysticism is as often a support to orthodoxy as to radicalism. It is to the credit of this collection that it provides a complex and nuanced account of mysticism's persistence through the Reformation and beyond.

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