BILL BURGWINKLE AND CARY HOWIE, *Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture: On the Verge* (Manchester University Press, 2010) ISBN 9780719080296 (hardcover); xii + 216 pages; £55.

Studies of medieval hagiography have long grappled with graphic depictions of saints in *vitae*. Images of saints naked and beaten, penetrated by tormentors' weapons, and experiencing orgiastic rapture have often been described as 'pornographic', and Kathryn Gravdal, Robert Mills, and Virginia Burrus are among those who have explored the idea. In this book, however, Bill Burgwinkle and Cary Howie go beyond such earlier studies. Rejecting conventional notions of pornography and hagiography, the authors seek to re-orient research by redefining and refining the categories under investigation. From the

first page, familiar notions of pornography (as the graphic depiction of sex acts) and sanctity (as holy inviolability), are left by the wayside.

In *Sanctity and Pornography*, the authors are quite clear: 'you can't know pornography when you first see it' (53). Certainly, you can recognise it upon second look, when you are familiar with its generic gestures, but pornography is, in essence, that which is known only *when felt*. To be pornographic, they argue, an object must elicit a response: always, but not exclusively, bodily. It is this fundamental characteristic which, for Burgwinkle and Howie, defines both pornography and medieval hagiography, and which therefore grounds their text. In the medieval period, religious devotion shifted from a primarily public practice to a more private undertaking: devotees were increasingly urged to meditate on sacred images in private prayer, and iconography accordingly changed to feature more realistic bodies with which the devotee could identify more readily. Just as medieval iconography facilitated the union of viewer/reader with viewed body, the authors contend, so pornography's appeal is based on the imaginary transfer of sensations from another's body (on screen) to one's own. As the viewer reaches out to the image, s/he loses the sense of the image *as image*, instead locating it within the viewing self. Momentarily, then, the demarcation of subject/object is dissolved as the viewer is returned to his or her own body, the only body whose sensation s/he can actually feel. The image—pornographic or hagiographic—penetrates the viewer. Pornography, as the authors explain in their opening chapter ('Looking at Images'), is thus understood not as a genre in and of itself, but instead as 'a mode of reception, a collaboration with the text that elicits a particular [and expected] somatic reaction in the viewer' (21).

The rhetorical figure of parataxis, a form of juxtaposition denoting a lack of syntactical conjunction and subordination, is the focus of chapter two ('Pornography and Parataxis'). Parataxis as 'a process of visualization' is, the authors propose, one which governs medieval hagiography, medieval epic *and* modern pornography (67). Moreover, parataxis – which can be deployed both as syntax (the paratactic phrase) and as narrative (the paratactic passage) – is inherently '*paractactile*': its elements touch one another. This juxtaposition produces an intensification of our sense not only of the difference between things, but also of their interconnection, as each marks the other's limit. In this way, the body's incorporation in the world – the body is never totally distinct from the world outside itself – is highlighted. For Burgwinkle and Howie, that which is alongside me in parataxis cannot be recognised unless I abandon the desire for domination over it. Only once I recognise the paratactic object as non-subordinate, different to me but also implicated in me, can I myself become visible (66–8).

The third chapter ('Looking at Saints') deals directly with hagiography. Instead of experiencing annihilation, Burgwinkle and Howie argue, suffering martyrs 'become even more themselves' and provide a fantasy of transcendence over the body, through the experience of the body into which the viewer can tap (75-6). (Harnessing the fantasy of transcendence is similarly central to pornographic viewing, the authors claim.) The viewer's identification is mobile, shifting between the torturer and the tortured. In a detailed investigation of manuscript illuminations from the *Speculum historiale* and the *Legende dorée*, the reader is invited to situate him/herself in relation to medieval images, whilst the authors provide only scant categorical analyses alongside detailed description. The authors provide a list of organising questions, and a list of six axiomatic principles which repeatedly emphasise the ambiguities of the images, in which beauty and

ugliness, religiosity and aesthetically pleasing nudity co-exist. As the reader is encouraged to position him/herself across the temporal periods and discourses under discussion, the polysemous nature of the images is brought to the fore.

The reciprocal relationship between pornographic/hagiographic image and viewer—each both touching and being touched—is discussed in chapter four ('Saints, Sex and Surfaces'). The surfaces of images enter into haptic dialogue with the viewer, withdrawing or accepting touch, but always pushing the viewer back into their own body. By touching itself, an imagined body touches us. To touch, however, is not necessarily to take: in holding an object, a hand does not need to close, but can lay open and 'take precisely by being taken' (126). This is a form of analogical touch, touching across, which allows differing worlds (sacred/profane) to be made known as reciprocal and mutual entities. Analogical touch may be transcendent, but it is a decidedly material transcendence. Saints are 'intensifications of bodily surface', a surface which glows due to repeated touching (130). All objects and bodies have been repeatedly touched before, and an individual's act of 'retouching' (touching again) invokes the erotic presence of all these antecedents. Thus, as a viewer 'retouches' the saint or porn star they touch all those who have performed the action before, merging with a collective whilst simultaneously remaining single.

In chapter five ('The mundane and the mystical/sex and exchange') the authors reject the idea of mysticism as a highly subjective experience which impoverishes language and excludes others. Instead, they argue that mysticism is a movement beyond the self which depends on an encounter with an independent, physical other. Thus, any mundane interaction between self and other in society can be mystical, though not necessarily religious. The mystic is defined by his or her recognition of the brittleness of subjectivity, and by the move towards divine union in which subject/object boundaries are removed. Returning to the self after rapture entails the recreation of a functionally coherent subjectivity, usually by an act of confession which details the rapturous experience. Returning from ecstasy, however, the mystic may not be the same 'self' that entered divine union initially: subjectivity must be re-shaped, and a 'different sense of self and reality' established (156).

A final chapter ('On the verge') posits pornography and hagiography as likewise offering 'a glimpse into a normally invisible everyday erotics'. Such an erotics refers to the experience of being 'most fully within' time, inhabiting it to the point of stretching it towards both death and eternity. This experience the authors describe as 'being on the verge', a condition that closely resembles that most banal of states: boredom. Boredom, for these authors, is always 'a mode of asking,' since it rests upon waiting for things one thinks one wants (163-66). Pornography and hagiography each persist in deferring the satisfaction of such asking: for as long as possible, they resist giving us the money shot, or the saint's death. Both categories, moreover, can accommodate surprise alongside the expected events of death and orgasm: death can be recast as life in hagiography, and pornography endlessly arranges and rearranges bodies. Both can provide more than what we expected. Rather than being on the verge of *something,* pornographic and hagiographic bodies exist in the suspension of the verge itself: 'just as prayer is not merely *for* an object, so are these bodies on the verge given up, resiliently exposed' (176).

Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture is itself avowedly paratactic: it is a self-conscious exercise in non-conjunctive association—a linkage of medieval and modern material without subordination. This critical manoeuvre is mostly successful,

but at times it feels unsatisfying; connections between material from different eras are often oblique or not fully fleshed out. However, this intermittent denial of satisfaction is partly deliberate, and the authors assert that the book itself is 'on the verge', leaving the reader in suspended animation. Parataxis, we are told, challenges all readers 'to figure out how reflexivity might accommodate a world of objects' (63). The concluding remarks of the volume suggest one option. '[W]e', the community of scholars, are invited to 'caress me'—conflating in the pronoun 'me' the book, its authors, and the sources they 'touch'. This notion of the caress, taken from the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, is defined as a 'real, withdrawn, non-appropriative, non-identifying' touch, a touch which is in some sense both pornographic and hagiographic (184–6). This caress will, perhaps, reveal the reciprocal relationship between our academic selves and the objects of our study, and show us the mystical in our mundane work.

This volume ably responds to some critics' categorisation of hagiography as an 'over-privileged' and even hackneyed subject of medievalist research (74). Analysis of hagiographic sources, familiar and little-known alike, is here shown to be excitingly productive via the authors' innovative treatment of the material. Moreover, the text's engagement with both male and female saints is a welcome addition to the field, in which such a comparative approach is often sorely lacking. The body of the saint, male or female, takes centre stage in these essays, and contextualising comments on gender offer further avenues for investigation. Modern sources, often excluded from academic study due to their graphic or erotically populist content, are examined intently. The significance of these materials is drawn out deftly, with often surprising results. *Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture* has much to offer medievalists and modernists, inspiring new theoretical approaches and challenging academic praxis across the temporal divide.

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Saint Augustine: The City of God (De Civitate Dei) Books 1–10, Introduction and translation by William Babcock, The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century, Volume 1/6 (New City Press, 2012) ISBN 9781565484559 (paperback); liii + 348 pages; £21.50 ($29.95)

This first volume of the anticipated new two-volume translation of St Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* lays the groundwork for a grand and beautiful edifice within an even grander project. The New City Press has undertaken the first complete English translation of the entire corpus of the Bishop of Hippo (354–431 CE), and the series is now only 11 volumes short of the planned 48. Comprising full scholarly editions of each work, including a number of sermons and texts on the Donatist controversy never before translated, this series extends and perfects the availability of a late-patristic thinker whose importance to Western thought in the Middle Ages and beyond is incalculable.

The *City of God* (c.413–26) is a response to particular historical situation, but its scope is vast. Like a city, Augustine's argument is both sprawling and governed by