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Medieval Academy of America

The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama. by Henry Ansgar Kelly
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to serve as propaganda for the real-life Crusades that were still being planned at the time it took shape.

Those scholars who wish to maintain as broad a view of medieval literature as possible would be well advised to peruse the essays in Keller's volume. The collection is not flawless; it would have benefited from greater attention to format and proofreading, and yet it did not appear until six years after the most recent papers in it were read, a delay that inevitably blunted their impact somewhat and indeed induced some of the authors to publish their articles elsewhere. Yet in the main, the material seems surprisingly fresh — surprisingly, or disappointingly, depending on one's sense of what remains to be accomplished in epic studies. In particular, it is difficult to recall earlier, lively discussions of the generic limits of chanson de geste without a tinge of regret that the question seems to have found no working resolution: authors continue to write extensively about the epic qualities of chanson-de-geste texts without taking into account the poems of the middle period upon whose generic importance Calin insists, let alone the really late chansons of the fourteenth century, to which even Calin does not refer. As for *Romania* and the question of whether she spawned a single epic genre, the accelerating multiplication of specialized studies makes it ever harder to take up the comparative study of works as varied as the *Orlando innamorato* and the *Gormont et Isembard* — this despite the clear and intensely problematic relations between later French texts and Italian and Spanish ones. The recent extensive work on Franco-Italian poems carried on by such scholars as Günther Holtus, Peter Wunderli, Alessandro Vitale-Brovarone, Franca di Ninni, Aldo Rosellini, and many others would surely merit a place of importance in any such discussion today.

Robert Francis Cook, University of Virginia

Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama.* Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1985. Pp. 301. $33.50.

This comprehensive study of the presence (and absence) of the demonic at baptism ranges from antiquity to the present and through all the homelands of the Christian tradition. A dramatic confrontation with the spirit of evil first appears in mainstream initiation rites in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, written in Rome at the beginning of the third century. Behind Hippolytus's rite lie Judaic stories of fallen angels and their demonic progeny, the New Testament's elevation and rejection of Satan as "world ruler," Christian-gnostic prebaptismal exorcisms, and Jewish-Christian notions of in-dwelling "sin demons." Its dramatic structure derives from traditional responses to the presence or threat of demonic influence, which quite naturally lent themselves to ritual use. Exorcisms pitted God's power against the enemies of his kingdom as they struggled over the soul of the initiate. Formal renunciations gave the initiates an active role. Apotropaic signings, anointings, and sealings fortified the new Christian for future conflict. Together they formed a "prototypical plot" of "rescue, reversal of allegiance, and armament against renewed attack" (p. 122).

Ritual history forms the backbone of Kelly's discussion. From Rome, the basic outlines of the baptismal drama passed to Africa and the East. While all subsequent rituals made some use of the three dramatic elements, the West generally gave more attention to prebaptismal exorcisms and the East more to postbaptismal apotropaisms. By the tenth century the basic lines of all the modern rituals had taken shape in Rome and the Frankish lands and in Constantinople, Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Egypt. Reformers, from the Nestorian Ishoyabh in the seventh century to Martin Luther and the Fathers of Vatican II, have tended to reject the demonological and

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reduce any reference to it in baptism. Others have preserved the traditional words and gestures by reinterpreting them. In the fourth century John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem maintained the traditions of ritual exorcism they had inherited by giving them a symbolic or "liturgotropic" interpretation. They kept the prayers and actions for their dramatic effect but rejected any implication that demons actually possessed the unbaptized. Similarly, Augustine developed the doctrine of original sin to preserve the traditional performance of the old rites, especially when performed over infants. This is where theology enters the discussion. In his conclusion Kelly makes the claim that the theological precedent for a symbolic interpretation of the demonic aspects of baptism provides a basis for undoing their excision from Catholic ritual in the latest round of liturgical reforms. He recognizes that they might, by suggesting too concretely the real presence of demonic forces, be a danger to the psychologically unstable. But he apparently feels that the gain in reinvigorating the ancient dramatic aspects of the ritual, when properly understood, is worth the risk.

This book is, thus, like much writing on the history of the liturgy, concerned in part with how the past can inform present practice. It is also, however, the product of thorough and sophisticated scholarship, and there is much to be gained from its pages, especially for students of ritual studies, medieval drama, demonology, and the formative stages of the Christian liturgy. While neither theology nor drama gets the sustained attention given to exorcisms, prayers, and ritual traditions, the sum of the scattered discussions is of much interest. As I have suggested, the main theological problem concerns the "reality" of the demonic presence in the unbaptized. Christianity delivered its converts from the fear of the demonic but raised the issue of how real the power of the devil was over non-Christians. The ritual forms that developed implied the actual presence of the devil and his possession of the initiates — a theologically untenable position. The solution of the Fathers was to interpret them symbolically. Kelly suggests that understanding them in accordance with "the canons of dramatic convention" (p. 178) provides another way out. The Greek dramaturgical impulse entered into Christian ritual in the rites of baptism, and the most dramatic of the rituals surveyed have their origins in the Greek East. In the West, moreover, the drama of initiation was joined with "the ritual drama of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ" through the association of baptism with the Easter season. But as the patristic understanding decayed over time, so did the dramatic unity of the rites. Bringing both back would reestablish contact with a rich tradition.

I leave it to individual readers to decide if the engagement of the author in present questions of ritual reform makes his work less useful for scholars interested in the topics he covers for other reasons. The book is immaculately edited and thoroughly documented. It provides a guide not only to the development of the baptismal liturgy but also to most of the important early liturgical sources in general. The scores of quotations from the various ritual traditions provide a rich base for further reflection. The discussion of the Eastern rites, especially Theodore of Mopsuestia's rescripting of the baptismal confrontation as a courtroom drama, is fascinating. (I was, however, confused by the claim that the Armenian John Mandakuni, writing in the mid to late fifth century, could not have been familiar with Theodore's ritual, which was in place no later than 428 [p. 148], or with the Nestorian rite of Edessa, which the author dates to the mid-fifth century [p. 153].) But there, as elsewhere, I wished for some cultural context. Did the notion of Satan as "world ruler" imply a dualist cosmology? It may have to the Egyptian gnostics, who first used exorcisms in initiation rites, but what about others? Did the Nestorian rejection of the demonic in the seventh century have anything to do with the coexistence of Nestorian Christianity with Persian dualism? Kelly suggests at one point a correspondence between the language of a

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Roman-Frankish exorcism over oil and "the dualistic tendencies of the Celtic and Germanic peoples" (pp. 211–12), but he does not explore it further. I wish someone would, for it might throw new light on the complex origins of heresy in the West around the year 1000. He does conclude that, in the West at any rate, the baptismal ritual of the high-medieval church was not dualistic. It reflected more than a cosmic struggle over helpless souls, by giving the initiates an active role in the renunciation while assuring the ultimate triumph to God (pp. 277–78). Finally, was the Roman rite so free of interaction with the Irish, Visigothic, and Ambrosian traditions that they can be dealt with in a separate chapter after consideration of the Frankish-Roman synthesis? I do not think so. Historians of the liturgy have been far too uncritical of the notion that Roman practices were central to the ritual history of the late-antique and early-medieval West and local and provincial practices of little or no importance.

The liturgical sources of antiquity and the Middle Ages have yet to be fully utilized, but works like this expand the field. Besides providing a provocative discussion of theological and dramatic responses to the devil at baptism, Kelly gives more than a glimpse of the richness of those sources — and of the light they might shed on the cultural histories of the men and women who produced them.

FREDERICK S. PAXTON, Connecticut College

LAURA KENDRICK, *Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in the "Canterbury Tales."* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988. Pp. xii, 215; 24 black-and-white plates.

Since George Lyman Kittredge first pronounced the *Canterbury Tales* a "Human Comedy," Chaucer criticism has been particularly prone to approaches aimed at articulating an underlying "dramatic principle" for the poem. As literary theory currently embraces a number of theatrical approaches — built in part upon Mikhail Bakhtin but also borrowed from the discourses of anthropology, folklore, psychology, and social history — Laura Kendrick's *Comedy and Control in the "Canterbury Tales"* serves both an aging scholarly tradition and a vital new moment in medieval studies.

The opening pages of *Chaucerian Play* reveal its hybrid heritage. Inscribing her work with a quotation from Johan Huizinga's *Homo ludens,* Kendrick honors a universalist reader of play whose theories exerted enormous influence on E. Talbot Donaldson and other Chaucerian New Critics at mid-century. Huizinga in hand, Kendrick invokes an image of Chaucer as cosmic comic whose transcendent vision requires us to don "the child's soul like a magic cloak" (p. xii, quoting Huizinga's *Homo ludens*) if we are to understand the secrets that his — like all great — poetry has to offer. Yet the extended example to which Kendrick keys her reading of Chaucer is inspired by art critic Leo Steinberg, a contemporary master at locating specific social changes and subtle conceptual nuances in the context of broader theoretical understandings. Kendrick thus announces that her inquiry will be both broad based and specific; it will also be ambitious, as revealed in this partial list of "the questions I will explore in the present book": "Why does Chaucer's writing move in the direction it does, toward the comedy of the *Canterbury Tales,* toward laughter? Is he just being devilish or 'elvish' — or are we, to perceive humor where we should not — or is it more complicated than that? What are the mechanism and meanings of medieval mirth, and, more especially, of Chaucer's literary play?" (p. 2). Convinced that Chaucer shared with Huizinga, Clifford Geertz, and Sigmund Freud an understanding that play enables people both to endure the world's afflictions and simultaneously to improve that world, Kendrick grounds Chaucer's fiction in a medieval tendency to

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