



Strong Women: Life, Text, and Territory 1347-1645 (Clarendon Lectures in English)

David Wallace

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It takes a strong woman to secure bookish remembrance in future times; to see her life becoming a life. David Wallace explores the lives of four Catholic women - Dorothea of Montau (1347-1394) and Margery Kempe of Lynn (c. 1373-c. 1440); Mary Ward of Yorkshire (1585-1645) and Elizabeth Cary of Drury Lane (c. 1585-1639) and the fate of their writings. All four shock, surprise, and court historical danger. Dorothea of Montau punishes her body and spends all day in church; eight of her nine neglected children die. Kempe, mother of fourteen, empties whole churches with a piercing cry learned at Jerusalem. Ward, living holily but un-immured, is denounced as an Amazon, a chattering hussy, an Apostolic Virago, and a galloping girl. Cary, having left her husband torturing Catholics in Dublin castle, converts to Roman Catholicism in Irish stables in London. Each of these women is mulier fortis, a strong woman: had she been otherwise, Wallace argues, her life would never have been written. The earliest texts of these lives are mostly near-contemporaneous with the women they represent, but their public reappearances have been partial and episodic, with their own complex histories.

The lives of these strong women continue to be rewritten long after this premodern period. Incipient European war determines what Kempe must represent between her first discovery in 1934 and full publication in 1940. Dorothea of Montau, first promoted to counter eastern paganism, becomes a bastion against Bolshevism in the 1930s; her cult's meaning is fought out between Gunter Grass and Josef Ratzinger. Cary's Catholic daughters, Benedictine nuns, must write of their mother as if she were a saint. Ward's work is not yet done: her followers, having won the right not to be enclosed, must now enter the closed spaces of Roman clerical power.

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