

Keiko Hamaguchi. *Chaucer and Women*. EIHOSHA, 2007. pp. ix + 168.

In *Chaucer and Women*, Hamaguchi compiles a revised collection of her own essays, ranging in original composition from 1987-2005, which she has either previously published or presented at international conferences. Despite her chronological reordering of these essays, there are certain key thematic elements contained in each essay/chapter that not only reveal the author's own academic interests in philology with regard to Chaucer's writings, but also show just how astute Hamaguchi is in applying the critical interests of each decade to her own scholarship.

The first essay in this collection demonstrates the philological emphasis popular in medieval scholarship in the 1980s as Hamaguchi examines Januarie's various forms of physical and spiritual blindness in the *Merchant's Tale*. She accurately discerns that Januarie's physical blindness is the direct result of his spiritually blind marriage, for Januarie's choice of such

a young wife represents the profound spiritual dilemma "of a man who seeks salvation in heaven but still cannot give up his pleasures on earth" (19). She makes this connection through the detailed study of the two most provocative words used in this fabliau, namely "hoolyness" and "dotage" (4), and this early interest in philology continues throughout the remainder of this collection—often reemerging in order to anchor other critical emphases, such as second-wave feminist insights into patriarchal treatment of women-as-commodity, to her preferred linguistic methodology. Thus, as this volume further explores the notion of women as marriage property popularized in the early to mid-1990s, one can see that the author relies on her vast skills in dissecting language to reveal how the different definitions of "debt"—that is, as in money, as in social obligation, as in penance or sin, and as in marriage—all play a part in the dramatic action and resolution in every Chaucerian fabliau.

As one can see from this anthology's third essay, "The Adoption of Conventions in 'Alysoun' in the Harley Lyrics 2253, f. 63 and in *The Miller's Tale*," and its sixth essay, "*The Book of the Duchess* as *Consolatio*," the author is perfectly willing to depart from the arguments advanced by other scholars, who in some cases are far more well-known in their critical dissection of these texts, in order to show where their conjectures may fall short. She makes a specific case with regard to *The Book of the Duchess* where she rather convincingly argues, based upon the definitions of *consolatio* given in such classical sources as Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, that "Chaucer's purpose in this poem is not to give the Black Knight consolation but to give it to the audience of the poem which consists of John of Gaunt and the courtly people who mourn over Blanche's death" (112). She develops this thesis in direct opposition to the scholarship of Michael H. Means, who Hamaguchi believes has been remiss in excluding *The Book of the Duchess* from the *consolatio* genre.

The chapters in *Chaucer and Women* concerned most specifically with feminist and gender issues are "Medieval Antifeminism and the Women in Chaucer's *Fabliaux*," "In Defense of Dorigen: Dorigen's Complaint in *The Franklin's Tale*," and "Social Position of Women in Chaucer's England," and the most insightful and direct use of feminist theory is found in the second of these essays, where Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" is used to demonstrate that many of the women in Chaucer's audience also would have recognized the language of sexual commodity and exchange found in Dorigen's complaint as "a contemporary threat" (81).

Perhaps the most curious aspect of *Chaucer and Women* is the inclusion of a chapter on Shakespeare at the end of this collection. The author explains her reasoning by saying the decision to do so would allow readers "to realize the continuity in treatment of women between the late Middle Ages and Renaissance" (xii). However, in trying to "explore Shakespeare's originality in *Troilus and Cressida*" (133), Hamaguchi only succeeds in showing that

“the mercantile world of the Elizabethan age” (146) returns this narrative to the cupidinous tale told by Chaucer’s sources rather than advancing the more intricately woven love story-turned-tragedy written by Chaucer himself.

Overall, Hamaguchi’s body of work is diverse, and when examined solely as an argument that outlines the significance of language to gender relationships, it is well-constructed. The only real weakness of this text is that, as a volume on Chaucer and women, it often makes more use of philological concerns than it delves into the more complex concerns of feminist and/or gender theory. Thus, ultimately, this work will prove far more valuable to those wishing to explore how the close reading of words and their myriad meanings should influence how we interpret women in the Middle Ages, especially with regard to literature, theology, and history, than it will be for those who wish to use a more strictly theoretical approach to their study of both Chaucer and his female characters.

Joanna Shearer
University of Florida