

lies in the nature of scholastic medicine: "such dialectic acrobatics may have tested the extent to which the play of logic usefully enhanced medical discussion" (97). In reaching beyond the confines of a single discipline and beyond the literary canon to uncover primary textual evidence, Mary Wack's study of medieval lovesickness stands as a model for future research on gender and culture in the Middle Ages.

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Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, editors, Women and Power in the Middle Ages.
Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988

This collection of essays, many originally presented at a Fordham Center for Medieval Studies Conference in 1985, explores a wide range of women's activities in the Middle Ages. The authors consider women appearing in rural courts, disappearing from rolls of citizens, sealing documents, running households, brokering patronage, loving lovers (and even husbands), writing stories, and creating books. In evaluating these varied endeavors, the authors attempt to formulate definitions of power more expansive (and ultimately inclusive) than the traditional equation of power with public authority. The result is a collection which contributes much to our knowledge of women in the Middle Ages and raises numerous significant issues for reflection and further research.

The best of these essays focus on changes in women's access to power. Martha Howell's study of citizenship lists in northern European towns in the late Middle Ages is a good example. From changes in the number of women enrolled and a comparison of enrollment rates in different towns, Howell charts the emergence of a new definition of citizenship of profound significance for women and for the entire subsequent political development of the West. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, in another fine contribution, surveys changes in the number and type of female saints over the entire Middle Ages and connects them to increased centralized authority and the more circumscribed role of aristocratic families in the church. These essays and others in the collection contribute to a vital reexamination of the development of order and institutions in medieval Europe. Significant new works, such as R. I. Moore's The Formation of a Persecuting Society, underscore the need to understand more fully how some people's power became institutionalized and legitimized in western society at the expense of that of others. While these essays contribute to this broad and ongoing reevaluation of medieval history, they also suggest several problems which demand greater attention.

The first is the dichotomy of "public" versus "private" spheres. Despite fleeting acknowledgments of the inadequacy and difficulties of employing this division in the Middle Ages, authors in this volume frequently resort to it. Their difficulties and unease at times in doing so suggest that the dichotomy itself should become a focus of research and reflection. How were public and private understood and defined over the Middle Ages? Why do some activities, like penance, become more "private" and others, like law, become "public"? The household seems a fruitful point of departure for feminists. How did its definition and roles change over the Middle Ages? In what ways, roles,

times, places, or contexts was it considered a private sanctuary or a public institution?

Another issue raised by these essays is the notion of power in suffering or self-abnegation. Both Joan Ferrante's study of the roles women play in medieval literature and those they adopt in their own writings, and (more explicitly) Elaine Hansen's reading of Chaucer's *Griselda*, assert the possibility of power through self-denial and patient endurance of oppression. This concept will seem, no doubt, repugnant to many modern feminists and very much like grasping at straws to those unsympathetic to feminist scholarship. It is, nonetheless, quite a commonplace in medieval texts. The authors' use of it here, however, remains unsatisfying in several ways. First, one obviously needs to consider this theme in relation to the Christian tradition. Second, if we look more broadly at victory through suffering in Christianity, we need to consider men's uses of this source of empowerment as well as women's. Did men and women in the Middle Ages draw differently upon this tradition? Did their use of it change over the course of the Middle Ages? Did this route to empowerment become more specifically feminine by the late Middle Ages?

The rich variety of questions raised by these essays is an indicator of the lively scholarship which informs the collection. The editors provide an excellent introduction, placing the work of the contributors in theoretical context and setting out important issues which are and are not treated in the essays. The collection also provides a valuable resource for teaching: these essays could be profitably employed in seminars and used to integrate women's issues into survey courses. Women and Power in the Middle Ages is, in short, a provocative as well as useful compendium of recent scholarship.

Maureen C. Miller, Hamilton College

Carolyn Dinshaw, Chaucer's Sexual Politics. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989

A learned, engaging, and useful book, Carolyn Dinshaw's Chaucer's Sexual Politics should be welcomed by both Chaucerians and many other readers interested in the history of gender and the ongoing project of interpreting canonical male authors with feminist questions in mind. Dinshaw situates her reading of Chaucer in the context of a traditional assumption about the gendered nature of literary activity: namely, the pervasive and influential idea that the written text is a woman, the reader/interpreter a man. Careful to resist the totalizing moves for which she critiques patriarchal hermeneutics, Dinshaw notes from the outset that this historically influential metaphor reflects only one of several models of gendered reading, and is not in itself a static or seamless tradition (for example, she details distinctions between Pauline theories and Jerome's "more subtle" thinking about the text as the female body). At the same time, she persuasively argues for the continuity of patriarchal hermeneutics from Augustine to Levi-Strauss and Lacan. She uncovers telling presuppositions about gender underlying modern textual editing practices as well as in the two apparently opposing schools of twentieth-century criticism represented by D. W. Robertson and E. Talbot Donaldson. For all their differences, as she astutely observes, both of these influential medievalists "perform 'masculine' readings...while each critic implies that his reading is finally neuter and normative" (29).