Pardoner's Tale finally leaves us with a poetic based not on defining woman as lack, but on the body of Christ as the ground of "absolute Presence" (183).

Read as part of the current discussion among feminists about how we as writers and readers can interrupt the perceived continuities of patriarchal hermeneutics, this book should spark lively debate. Not everyone will agree, I suspect, with Dinshaw's readiness to assign control over contradictions and gaps in the text to the figure of the knowing, unified, empathic male author or, concomitantly, with where and how she draws the line between narrator and author. The equation of Chaucerian irony and ambiguity with a "'feminine' poetic strategy" merits fuller discussion; as it stands, it may not satisfy those who worry that the male writer's appropriation of feminine positions does not serve the interests of actual females. And if Chaucer finally turns away, as Dinshaw argues, from the human body to a poetics grounded only in the body of Christ, where does this leave the embodied woman reader? Chaucer's Sexual Poetics seeks to write Chaucer into the history of feminist theory and celebrates the author for his ability to mark "the flexibility and complexity with which language and literary acts, gender, and power are interrelated" (9). To me, these words more certainly describe Dinshaw's own aims and insights. The persistence and intelligence with which she attends to and fleshes out the category of gender in her historical reading of patriarchal hermeneutics makes this study a resource for medieval feminists, and her comprehensive placement of Chaucer in this context should help to persuade even Chaucerians uninterested in feminist theory that they can no longer ignore or readily answer all of the questions it poses.

Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Haverford College

REPORTS

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MEDIEVAL WOMEN: WORK, SPIRITUALITY, LITERACY & PATRONAGE

(University of York, September 10-12, 1990)
Conference organizers: Felicity Riddy, Jonathan Goldberg, Amanda Lillie, Peter Biller (University of York)

(A brief report: further comments are invited)

SIXTY or more "Medieval Women" identified themselves as such when they took their places in the dining hall of York University's Derwent College for three days in September and thus were distinguished from the other diners at tables which were labelled "International Befrienders." The two categories, quite obviously socially constructed, are not, of course, mutually exclusive and nor were they at the York conference, which was marked by its friendly and cooperative atmosphere. The program of papers read at the conference (listed below) reflected the organizers' commitment to

crossing the disciplinary boundaries which still shape the very constitution of medieval studies. There was a predominant interest in women's participation in the economy of late medieval England and its literary culture amongst speakers and participants who were mainly, but not exclusively, women from institutions of higher education. The timing of the conference obviously limited the level of international participation — but the next is planned for July 1993, which should make the event more accessible.

At the beginning of her paper, Sheila Delany reminded us of Frederick Jameson's injunction, "Always historicize", and asked, "But whose version of history are we to use/ construct?". This question, for me at least, sums up one of the central issues under discussion in these heady three days at York. The issue was addressed on a macro-level by Judith Bennett's paper which challenged the organization of women's history into "medieval" and "early modern" periods. But questions about what constitutes "evidence" and what we make it mean continued to be raised in, and by, many of the other papers on more closely focused topics such as female scribes, patrons, readers. When I left the conference I was much more aware of the limitations of my generalized views on the subject of "medieval women" and of the need to analyze the implications of the frames which shape the very subjects of my work. In retrospect, another session which focused on the political implications of the various approaches to the subject of "medieval women" would have been useful: such a session would have helped to clarify the differences it would make if we had been gathered around tables marked "Medieval Feminists," or "Feminist Medievalists," rather than "Medieval Women."

Further information about when and where the papers are to appear in a published form will be sent in to MFN as soon as it is available.

Lesley Johnson, University of Leeds

Barbara Hanawalt (University of Minnesota): "Remarriage as an Option for Rural and Urban Widows in Late Medieval England" (Read by Judith Bennett; Barbara Hanawalt could not attend in person)

Andrew Finch (University of York): "Women and Violence in the Late Middle Ages"

Jeremy Goldberg (University of York): "Recreating the Lives of Working Women"

Judith Bennett (University of North Carolina): "Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide"

Guy Halsall (University of Newcastle): "Female Power and Status in Merovingian Central Australia"

Patricia Morrison (All Souls, Oxford): "Women in Miracle Books Before 1200"

David D'Avray (University College, London): "Women Saints"

Patricia Cullum (Newcastle Polytechnic): "Vowesses and Veiled Widows"

Joanna Cannon (Courtauld Institute): "Beata Margherita of Cortona: Art and Images of a Candidate for Canonization"

Jillian Bennett (Courtauld Institute): "Fifteenth-Century Tuscan Women and the Marriage of the Virgin"

Sheila Delany (Simon Fraser University): "Difference and the Difference it Makes: History, Politics and the Gender-Conscious Medievalist"

Catherine King (Open University): "Women as Artistic Patrons in Fifteenth-Century Italy: Nuns, Widows and Princesses"

Carol Meale (University of Bristol): "Women as Patrons, Owners, and Readers of Manuscripts in Late Medieval England"

Ann Hutchinson (York University, Toronto): "Heloise and her Sisters: the Education of Medieval Nuns"

Veronica O'Mara (University of Leeds): "Female Scribal Ability and Scribal Activity in Late Medieval England: the Evidence?"

Kay Lacey (University of East Anglia): "Women Speaking? Language and Gender in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England"

Karma Lochrie (Loyola University, Chicago): "Body Politics in Late Medieval Spirituality in Medieval England"

Arlyn Diamond (University of Massachusetts): "Men's Tales? Women's Tales? Narratives of Love"

GENDER AND MEDIEVAL STUDIES CONFERENCE

(University of Warwick, Coventry, England, September 25-26, 1989)

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THE conference was a sequel to the one-day symposium held at King's College, Cambridge in December 1988, both designed to bring together medievalists from a variety of disciplines and organized on a workshop basis to encourage maximum participation from all present. The two-day Warwick conference provided participants with a fuller opportunity to meet and talk outside the framework of the sessions, of which there were five. The first concerned land transactions and the relationship of women to land, and was led by Dr. Pauline Stafford, an historian from Huddersfield Polytechnic, and Dr. Simon Gaunt, an historian from St. Catherine's College, Cambridge. In the second session, on iconography, Dr. Lucy-Anne Hunt from the Department of Continuing Education at Birmingham University gave an illustrated talk on "Images of women for women?: the case of Latin Syria", which provoked extensive discussion. Dr. Kate Westoby of Cardiff University introduced the third session, on teaching. The fourth was devoted to "Women as patrons". Dr. Meg Shepherd from the University of Leeds French Department spoke on "Women and libraries" and Mrs. Loveday Gee addressed the subject of "Artistic patronage by women in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries". In the final session, on "Women as subjects", Dr. Sarah Kay of Cambridge University spoke on "The subjectivity of female authorship", and Ms. Ann Kettle of the History Department of St. Andrews, on "Christine de Pizan as a defender of women". Discussion in all of the sessions was lively, participants taking full advantage of the opportunities for the exchange of ideas offered by a two-day conference and expressing their appreciation of the possibilities for meeting and talking with medieval colleagues across a range of disciplines.

Dr. Linda Paterson, University of Warwick