

of an astonishing text. It is illuminating for students to read Teresa de Jesús' *Life* together with Francisca's trial transcript and learn how inquisitors systematically questioned women's knowledge. This volume allows us to hear a dissenting voice that would have remained unknown without the trial that ultimately silenced a charismatic woman and dispersed the community forming around her.

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**Sara M. Butler. *The Language of Abuse: Marital Violence in Later Medieval England*. (Later Medieval England, v. 2.) Brill, 2007. Pp. 286.**

**S**ara Butler's study offers a wealth of details about marital conflict in late medieval England. Her meticulous archival research shows clearly that medieval marriages could, and did, go horribly wrong, and that church courts, royal courts, and the community at large recognized spousal abuse as a problem, even when they did not necessarily

agree on what constituted abuse or on how best to address it.

Butler bases her work largely on the especially rich ecclesiastical and criminal court records from York and Essex. She begins by tracing discussions of marital violence in major legal texts, confessors' manuals, sermon collections, and literature. She concludes that these discourses justify husbands' use of force in governing their wives, but also recognize the need to limit that force.

Butler next turns to the meat of her study, the archival material. Chapter 2 is titled "Types and Frequency of Abuse," but the nature of the records—which she characterizes as "exceedingly terse"—makes it difficult for her to be very specific about the types and frequency. Instead, Butler focuses on the responses of church, manorial, and royal courts to spousal violence. She argues that these courts saw marital violence as a significant problem and employed strategies ranging from public humiliation, floggings, and fines to involving the community to correct the abusive spouse while preserving the marriage. Butler emphasizes that few abusive marriages reached the point of homicide and that medieval couples faced a wide range of options, both in their communities and the courts, for

resolving marital conflict before it reached such levels.

In Chapter 3, Butler identifies as causes of marital tension adultery, economic deprivation, insanity, wifely disobedience, and, intriguingly, the very regulations of the church court itself. The church's desire to maintain even troubled marriages exacerbated conflicts between spouses by requiring couples who had "simply 'divorced' themselves" by living apart to return to cohabitation (120).

Chapter 4 analyzes six cases to demonstrate under what circumstances marital violence was or was not acceptable to the courts, community, or members of a marriage themselves and to examine the strategies that husbands and wives used to argue their case. This microhistorical chapter effectively responds to the scarcity of marital abuse cases, and Butler astutely explicates each case in the context she has described in previous chapters. While generalizing from six cases is difficult, Butler suggests again that both the courts and communities believed there were limits to the acceptable use of force to chastise women. The question remained to determine where such limits lay.

The fifth chapter examines the role of family, friends, and

community in regulating and prosecuting marital violence. Butler argues that family and community members were willing to step in and try to arbitrate between abusive couples, not necessarily to help the individual victim, but because abuse reflected badly on the community as a whole, and regulating such behavior helped uphold the community's reputation.

Finally, Chapter 6 connects marital violence to broader concerns about disobedience and social control in late medieval England. As Butler points out, "late medieval society was preoccupied with disobedient wives" (228). She identifies a greater concern about women's misbehavior as scolds in the south than in the north and argues that increased social control and intolerance of verbally aggressive women had important implications for marital violence: "If late medieval England was less willing to tolerate scolds, then they may have been willing to eliminate the problem by tolerating higher levels of domestic violence" (257).

The value of Butler's study lies in her comprehensive archival research and subsequent ability to provide answers to crucial questions about abuse: How did medieval courts and communities

define abuse and how did they respond to it? How did the parties involved justify their behavior? When did the medieval community accept marital violence and when was it deemed excessive? While she admits herself that cases of marital violence comprise only a tiny percentage of all marriage- or violence-related legal conflicts, she has done noble service in combing through the medieval records to find and analyze those examples. The cases are few in number, but great in significance.

Butler's most important insight lies in recognizing that the history of marital violence is also a history of expectations about feminine and, especially, masculine behavior. Marital violence stemmed from an unresolved paradox in medieval masculinity: medieval society expected men to regulate and control their wives' behavior, and therefore justified men's use of physical force to do so. But because a crucial element of medieval masculinity was the ability to govern one's household, the use of excessive force might in itself be a sign of failure, of a man's inability to govern his wife properly. Even if some women were so incorrigible as to require significant physical force, an ideal man governed his household without using

excessive force. Thus whether a given use of physical force was justified or excessive was a central issue. Men defending their use of violence stressed their wives' ungovernability; women seeking support against their husbands emphasized their own passivity. Again and again in Butler's cases, the participants struggle to control the portrayals of their own behavior. Also valuable is Butler's attention to regional context. She explains the different expressions of and responses to marital violence in the north and south of England in light of social, economic, and political differences between the two regions and deftly connects these data to scholarship about the increasing concern with social control in late medieval England.

Butler struggles somewhat with the slippery terms abuse and violence. The book's subtitle describes abuse specifically as marital violence. While Butler rightly points out that violence is a subjective term and that what looks like violence to modern eyes may have looked like appropriate discipline to medieval people, it is not clear that all the abuse cases Butler addresses entailed violence—unless by violence she means a transgression of any kind, physical or non-physical, something that the study does not

explicitly state. Butler herself uses the term “abuse” more frequently than “violence,” and it is clear that in the Middle Ages, as today, “abuse” might encompass more than physical force, including verbal attacks and economic deprivation. Medieval records could be frustratingly vague in describing abuse; while witnesses seeking to prove abuse were often graphic in description—in one instance, stating that a husband beat his wife until “blood poured out both by her nostrils and ears” (151)—the courts themselves often seem to have used terms like “maltreat” or “diverse squabbles and discord” (100). Further discussion of the vocabulary used to describe marital abuse would be welcome to clarify this elision of “abuse” and “violence.”

This criticism, however, in no way diminishes the value of having these cases of marital disharmony, whether violent or not, discussed in such systematic fashion. While structurally Butler’s study bears the marks of its origins as a dissertation, it also stands as a valuable contribution to the history of gender in late medieval England.

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**Madeleine de l’Aubespine.**  
*Selected Poems and  
Translations: A Bilingual  
Edition*, ed. and trans. Anna  
Klosowska. (The Other  
Voice in Early Modern  
Europe.) University of  
Chicago Press, 2007. Pp.  
xxx + 132.

Anna Klosowska’s bilingual edition of the poems and translations of Madeleine de l’Aubespine (1546–96) is an exciting addition to early modern, queer, and feminist literary studies. L’Aubespine is virtually unknown, as a search of the Modern Language Association Bibliography demonstrates, and yet her importance in European literary history should not be ignored, as it undeniably has been. She is one of the few female authors afforded praise by Pierre de Ronsard, her contemporary and the French equivalent of Shakespeare in terms of importance to the literary and linguistic heritage of a country.

Klosowska’s edition is part of the University of Chicago Press series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*. This series makes early modern women writers’ works available to a broad audience and seems especially well-suited for the classroom. Other books