

beyond the cloister. In a footnote, she also conjectures that the large body of work she draws from in the *Riccardiana* may have been collected because of its similarity to secular drama, thus explaining the preservation of a form that would have had little value before the recent interest in premodern women's writing. This book is carefully designed to answer the kinds of questions that inevitably arise from the presentation of a wholly new subject to an audience. The final chapter, "Beyond Tuscany," situates the plays examined in the book in a broader context, both temporally and geographically. While this chapter demonstrates that there is much work to be done on tracing this phenomenon in other Catholic countries in Western Europe and linking this tradition with the liturgical drama in women's convents in the Middle Ages, Weaver's book also makes a strong, historically-specific and geographically-situated argument about the particularities of Early Modern convent drama in Tuscany. Perhaps it was precisely the context of the Florentine Renaissance, the locus of such rapid cultural and artistic change, that fostered awareness of enforced seclusion in the cloister, where the nuns cultivated a dramatic form that traversed the line between two starkly different worlds.

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Wheeler, Bonnie, ed. *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth Century Woman*. The New Middle Ages Series. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.
Pp. xxii + 394.

Heloise, as student, *concubinae*, and wife to Peter Abelard, has been the subject of critical study and romantic speculation for over four centuries. As John Marenbon states in his essay "Authenticity revisited," in this collection, once feminist scholars began to look at medieval subjects, "Heloise could not but loom large" (27). Female scholars and feminists alike have paid her particularly close attention due to her position as a powerful, meaningful, *historical* woman¹ in the Middle Ages whose accomplishments and life story can be held up as an example against male-authored fictions (fictions which, it must be said, too often become the basis for most students' first exposure to medieval "women"). Heloise is unique for us in that we can know her, perhaps, more intimately than Hildegard, Margery Kempe, or Christine de Pizan. Our sense of intimacy with Heloise is based upon our experience of her through her letters to Abelard which articulate her desire for him, a desire so powerful that, when prohibited by family and church, it eventually becomes physically painful for her, and, through her, for her readers. Heloise is, of course, too often seen as anomalous because she holds such a unique historical, literary, and spiritual position in the Middle Ages as a woman whose initial claim to fame is a broken heart and who did not seek the cloister for solace or out of devotion but was placed there, "conventualized" (Ward and Chiavaroli, 59), for her own safety and survival. The aim of this collection is not to diminish her presence as a female intellectual in the twelfth century (one who serves, as Brown and Peiffer write, as "the one and only person in Europe Abelard tolerated as an intellectual equal or superior," [143]), but rather to illuminate, as well, her presence as a possible model for a genuine experience of the feminine in the Middle Ages. As Bonnie Wheeler writes in the introduction to the

volume, Heloise's story is "one of closure and possibility," for although by the time of her death the Church had (successfully) sought to enclose and control femininity and feminine spirituality, "when Heloise was young, a woman might hope to be taught by the great masters of philosophy, and she might even dream of being counted in their number" (xvii).

Listening to Heloise is a timely and valuable contribution to scholarship on Heloise, on medieval women, on medieval spirituality, and on sexual identity and "gender trouble," both within and beyond the European Middle Ages. The essays represent an excellent spectrum of commentaries, explorations, and exposures of Heloise's impact both on medieval culture and on contemporary medieval scholarship. While the entire collection serves its subject well, I would like to focus my review on the articles that emphasize or engage feminist literary theory and scholarship. These essays include John Marebon's "Authenticity Revisited," Morgan Powell's "Listening to Heloise at the Paraclete," Juanita Feros Ruys's "The Rhetorical Struggle over the Meaning of Motherhood in the Writings of Heloise and Abelard," and, most significantly, Peggy McCracken's "The Curse of Eve: Female Bodies and Christian Bodies in Heloise's Third Letter" and Jane Chance's "Classical Myth and Gender in the Letters of 'Abelard' and 'Heloise': Gloss, Glossed, and Glossator." In particular, the closing chapter, Deborah Fraioli's translation of Pierre Bayle's article on Heloise in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, will prove very useful to any English-speaking reader/scholar of Heloise, as well as those interested in the development of twentieth century attitudes towards medieval women.

From the perspective of medieval feminist scholarship, readers will be grateful for the inclusion of Peggy McCracken's article on the female and Christian body and Jane Chance's on the reversal of feminine and masculine roles in the letters so that Abelard (or "Abelard") takes a feminized role within the "epistolary construction" and "'Heloise' appropriates the masculinized role of the authority" (164). McCracken applies recent scholarship on the body, particularly the "exemplary Christian" female body (217), to demonstrate that the letters minimize Heloise's gendered identity. While McCracken uses the language of current feminist theory (the body, the abject, the transfer of subjectivity to women through devotion to Christ), she seems to avoid a genuinely feminist approach to both Heloise's use of corporeal images and her participation in twelfth-century tropes of gendered spirituality. McCracken brings together recent critical approaches to the gendered medieval body, but her emphasis – the metaphor of the menstruating body as an "example of the unsuitability of the Benedictine Rule for nuns in a logical appeal for a rule written specifically for women" (222) – derives too much from authors whose approach is not feminist (Linda Georgianna, for example, whose 1987 *Medieval Studies* article is revised and included in the collection) and, ultimately, attempts to de-emphasize Heloise's gendered position and voice into one that is more inclusive but, as such, perhaps less feminine.

The most useful *feminist* essay in the collection is Jane Chance's "Classical Myth and Gender in the Letters of 'Abelard' and 'Heloise': Gloss, Glossed, and Glossator." Chance reviews recent feminist approaches to Heloise and

Abelard's roles within the letters, citing, for example, Claire Nouvet's "The 'Discourse of the Whore,'" (*Modern Language Notes* 1990) and Heloise's wonderful example that "the master is master only to the extent that the 'whore,' through self-humiliation, recognizes him as such" (163). Chance begins with a reminder that Heloise herself provides a "mutual identity crisis" by deconstructing Abelard's identity, referring to both of them in multiple roles (master, husband, brother/handmaid, wife, sister), which leads to a lack of identity and reciprocal lack of manhood in Abelard. Chance then explores Heloise's uses of classical figures such as Mars, Venus, and Minerva to expose Abelard's self-deceit regarding his relationship with Heloise. Chance writes: "The truth, the more profound truth about himself – his pride and lechery – emerges although he apparently refers only to the fact of their sexual union, the literal coupling and the scholastic truth about the Mars, Venus, and Vulcan allegory" (171). Following this analysis Chance moves on to address Heloise as Dame Philosophy to Abelard's Boethius, an exchange which educates Abelard and provides a means for him to understand himself, Heloise, and her sisters more fully and to properly interpret and contextualize for them all both scripture and patristic scholarship.

Heloise remains a difficult figure to know, in spite of all the scholarship that has recently emerged, such as this collection, which has sought to bring her into focus. This collection does provide scholars with the means to regard Heloise again, to listen to what she now has to tell us through recent approaches to her as a woman, a theologian, and a representation of medieval life and culture.

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¹ Several contributors to this collection argue admirably that the Heloise we know and perceive as a "real woman" may be as much a fictional construct as Chaucer's Criseyde or Spenser's Una, although a new perspective on this debate, argued by Jane Chance, is that this constructed "Heloise" may well be one constructed by the historical woman Heloise, and thus, although she may still be a fiction, she is at least a female-authored construction, and as such bears closer scrutiny and attention, particularly by feminist critics and scholars.

Wormald, Jenny. *Mary, Queen of Scots: Politics, Passion and a Kingdom Lost.* London: George Philip, 1988; rpt. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001. Pp. 208.

The first edition of Jenny Wormald's study of Mary, Queen of Scots (London 1988) was hailed as a groundbreaking study of the Scottish queen and as a valuable addition to British historical studies. This revised edition is equally welcome to the field: it is a masterful study of Mary's reign, grounded within the complexities of sixteenth-century Scottish and European politics. In this book, unlike in previous studies of the Queen, Mary is presented as a political figure, "the arguments about her shifted from the bedroom at Holyrood and Dunbar to the world of sixteenth-century politics, which is where she belongs" (8). With this revised focus, Wormald looks beyond the sensational final years of Mary's reign and considers the entirety of her rule, evaluating and discussing the queen as a mid-sixteenth century monarch. Wormald