

Treharne and Walker characterize this volume as representing and reflecting the many and varied ways that “gender” has come to be used as an analytical tool in the study of medieval literature. Noting that medievalists were “perhaps rather later onto the field” (1) of gender criticism than scholars in other disciplines, Treharne and Walker cite what they see as a fairly recent proliferation of articles, journals, and conferences devoted to the topic of gender and Medieval Studies as the impetus for the creation of this collection: “the essays gathered in this volume provide both a summary sample of the current state of play—an indication of the range and scope of the ways in which an interest in or awareness of gender can transform conventional approaches to literary texts and genres—and an opportunity for a moment’s reflection in the variety of possible roads ahead” (2). Their assertion of the significance of this particular essay collection in terms of the relationship of gender criticism to Medieval Studies seems a bit over-stated—the theoretical approaches deployed in this volume will hardly seem innovative to most critically literate medievalists—but there is still much in this collection that will be of interest and use to scholars interested in the inter-relationship of genre and gender in medieval literature.

The collection begins with two essays on Anglo-Saxon topics. Hugh Magennis’s “Gender and Heroism in the Old English *Judith*” explores the unique representation of the title character within the tradition of Old English heroic poetry, tracing the way in which the poet adapts his source material so that Judith may be characterized as a “female hero” without becoming an “honorary man.” Mary Swan’s “Remembering Veronica in Anglo-Saxon England” gathers trace evidence from a variety of sources to argue that the legend of St. Veronica was known in England much earlier than first thought, and then uses the example of the “lost” Veronica story to discuss how medievalists “fill in gaps in our knowledge, and...how...we can extrapolate from a hint into a theory about devotional practices now mostly lost from sight” (21).

We move away from the Anglo-Saxon period with David Salter’s “‘Born to Thralldom and Penance’: Wives and Mothers in Middle English Romance,” in which Salter contrasts two romances—*Octavian* and *Kyng Alisaunder*—to argue for the “ambivalence and emotional uncertainty of medieval romance in its representation of women in general, and of their roles as wives and mothers in particular” (59), no matter how clearly positive or negative romance depictions of women might at first seem to be. The last three articles focus on various aspects of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. In an essay that makes use of psychoanalysis, gender theory, and the conventions of medieval drama and romance, Greg Walker reads the figure of Absolon as troubling—in terms of both gender and genre—in “Rough Girls and Squeamish Boys: The Trouble with Absolon in *The Miller’s Tale*.” Elaine Treharne’s “The Stereotype Confirmed? Chaucer’s Wife of Bath” uses a socio-linguistic approach to explore how Chaucer adopts and uses “women’s speech,” arguing that

critics who have seen this tactic as a “liberating” move on Chaucer’s part have misread the Wife, who *should* be understood as representing a negative stereotype. The collection is rounded out by Anne Marie D’Arcy’s “‘Cursed folk of Herodes al new’: Supersessionist Typology and Chaucer’s Prioress.” Starting with a discussion of how earlier critics have treated the anti-semitism in the *Prioress’s Tale*, D’Arcy “evaluates the positioning of the narrator, and [the] Prioress’s own understanding of the Marian legend” to “challenge conventional wisdom on the *raison d’être* of this work” (4).

The essays gathered here engage texts from a variety of genres—heroic poetry, hagiography, romance, and fabliaux—while remaining “united by a commitment to a variety of traditional scholarly methodologies” (2). *Writing Gender and Genre* only partially succeeds in achieving its stated goal. Although the decision to include essays on topics from both sides of the Old/Middle English divide is to be commended, the promise of breadth is never fulfilled. In a collection of only six essays, three focus on Chaucer, and one cannot help but feel the absence of articles that might engage other writers and genres beyond those represented here.

Still, most of the essays do a fine job of situating their arguments in relationship to past criticism, and if their methodologies are themselves not particularly innovative in terms of Medieval Studies and gender, the insights and interpretations gleaned thereof often are. Walker’s essay on the *Miller’s Tale* is impressive for the range of critical theories and contemporary material it uses to read the character of Absolon. Although such an approach dilutes the main focus of his argument somewhat, he offers some compelling and original interpretations of Absolon’s relationship to both gender and genre. Treharne’s article nicely articulates the problem of Chaucer’s Wife of Bath that has interested critics for so long—where (and even how) can we locate Chaucer’s / Geoffrey’s voice within the Wife’s, and what conclusions can we draw from such an exercise? D’Arcy’s article carefully delineates the attitude of Chaucer’s England toward Jews and then examines how the Prioress “exults in the cautionary aspect of her *Tale*, which not only bears witness to the paradoxical strength of the transfixed Virgin to pierce the heart of all but the hard-hearted Jews, but also serves as a divinely inspired commination to the blasphemous heretics and doubting Thomases...” (136). Although his conclusion that medieval romances tend to treat wives and mothers with “ambivalence” is not an earth-shattering revelation, Salter’s reading of two seemingly “polar opposite” romance wives and mothers to reach this conclusion is lively and engaging. By far the best articles of the collection are Magennis’s and Swan’s, both of which display an impressive command of the particular genre or literary tradition in which they are working. Through textual analysis at once careful, thorough, and original, both authors arrive at provocative and persuasive conclusions.

Despite its limitations, *Writing Gender and Genre* provides a variety of engaging approaches to the issue of the gender / genre relationship, and will be of interest to all medievalists concerned with exploring this question.

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