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## Review Essay: Chance, Jane, ed. *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*

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against Clamadeu" (222); does "lineal" (*passim*) exist? Finally, I fail to see how Tintageuil (= Tintagel, Cornwall) can be said to be in "extreme south Wales" (55) or how the fictitious "Escavalon" is located in "extreme north Wales" (*ibid.*).

Overall, this is an interesting book marred by some untidiness of thought and expression and some less-than-thorough scholarship. Nevertheless, Brigitte Cazelles has done readers of Chrétien a service by proposing a plausible and mostly convincing interpretation of the *Conte du Graal*.

Keith Busby  
University of Oklahoma

Chance, Jane, ed. *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*. University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1996. xv + 342 pp. \$59.95.

Jane Chance doubly prefaces her provocative collection *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, first with an epigraph from Helene Cixous, raising an initial question about the (im)possibility of theorizing a "feminine writing" beyond phallogentric discourse, and then with a list of "Selected Women Authors, 8th–15th Centuries," positing gynocritical recovery of a history of women's textual production. Her introduction similarly unites what may at first seem a conflict of theoretical paradigms. Its discussion of gendered writing and reading practices grounds the collection in an underlying assumption that the corpus—not quite a tradition—of later medieval "feminine" or "female" writing ("female" signifying a cultural position rather than a universal category) disrupts and subverts patriarchal discourse models. It thus places the later medieval texts dealt with in the subsequent essays within the dialogic complexity of women writing from and reading in the margins of tradition. In this way the essays—arranged in three sections of four essays each—are defined as explorations and speculations toward *a*—not *the*—"medieval feminine aesthetic."

Not all the contributions are unique to this collection. Sarah Beckwith's "A Very Material Mysticism" is fairly well known from its appearance in *Medieval Literature*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992). Kate Greenspan's "Autohagiography and Women's Spiritual Autobiography" may also be found (under a different title) in *A/b: Auto/Biography* (1991). Maria Lichtman's "'God fulfilled

my bodye': Body, Self, and God in Julian of Norwich" appears as two shorter articles in *Studia Mystica* (1990) and *Mystics Quarterly* (1991). And Cristina Mazzone's "On the (Un)Representability of Women's Pleasure" has since become part of her recent *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

As these titles suggest, mystics make up a great proportion of this volume's topics. Besides Margery Kempe—subject of three essays—Julian of Norwich, Angela of Foligno, Hadewijch, Birgitta of Sweden, and two late medieval Spanish nuns, Madre Juana de la Cruz and Sor Maria of Santo Domingo, each receive an essay. Christine de Pizan is featured in three essays, with an essay each on Heloise and Marie de France completing the collection of twelve. While such a collection of authors includes few surprises—they represent, perhaps, the usual suspects of discussions of medieval women and writing—the resulting book is valuable not only for the high quality of its individual essays but also for the theoretical depth of the composite whole and for the provocation of its readers to further speculation. It would, therefore, be a significant addition to the reading lists of senior or graduate courses in medieval women and literature.

The first section, "M/F: Authority, Domination, Misogyny," brings together essays on Heloise, Hadewijch, Birgitta of Sweden, and Christine de Pizan collectively to interrogate the complex interactions of gender and authority. Of the four essays, Catherine Brown's "*Muliebriter: Doing Gender in the Letters of Heloise*" is perhaps the most provocative in its consideration of how the sequence of letters to Abelard—which culminate in her request of a specifically female monastic Rule—stages, as it were, a transgressive performance of a shifting—but strategically essential—femininity as an intertextual construct. Particularly in its sensitive and subtle use of theories of gender performance, this essay seems to suggest new directions for discussion of subjectivity, especially in epistolary texts. Saskia Murk-Jansen's discussion of "The Use of Gender and Gender-Related Imagery in Hadewijch" reads the tropes of gender reversal available in the continuum of a one-sex/gender system as enabling an appropriation and reversal of the lover-knight/beloved object paradigm. Claire Sahlin and Earl Jeffrey Richards remain in more familiar and less speculative territory. In "Gender and Prophetic Authority in Birgitta of Sweden's *Revelations*," Sahlin investigates the social construction of authority in the passage of the female mystic's text through its translation and editing by male scribes. In "Rejecting Essentialism and Gendered

Writing: The Case of Christine de Pizan," Richards takes up the use and reinterpretation of Ovid in defense of women's fitness for reading and writing.

The second section, "Autohagiography and Self-Mimesis: The Construction of Female Subjectivity," poses two essays on courtly writers against two on mystics, an opposition which is fruitful in suggesting the varieties of subjectivities (plural) these variant genres may involve. Rupert Pickens on "Marie de France and the Body Poetic" offers an especially interesting reading of Marie's narrators as androgynous bodies producing and produced by—and gendered by—discursive violence. In "Rewriting Romance: Courtly Discourse and Auto-Citation in Christine de Pizan," Kevin Brownlee takes on Christine's rewriting and response to the *Roman de la Rose* and her use of auto-citation to construct her own textual authority. Both authority and subjectivity are also at issue in Beckwith's exploration of a woman-associated genre of mysticism and in Greenspan's critique of modern assumptions about the goals and purposes of autobiographical narrative as applied to medieval texts.

The four essays in the third section, "Speaking the Body: Transhumanization and Subversion," all foreground the textual involvement of the (female) body as disruptive and subversive. Mazzone's essay on Angela of Foligno—and, to a large extent, the Lacanian formulation of feminine *jouissance*—defines mystic experience (and discourse) as abject and transgressive, beyond expressivity. Somewhat similarly Lichtman views Julian's theology of the body as exceeding and overcoming the Neoplatonic-Augustinian body/soul and matter/spirit dualities. Mary E. Giles also deals with experience and discourse beyond articulation in "The Discourse of Ecstasy: Late Medieval Spanish Women and Their Texts." Her consideration of a late medieval Spanish female religious tradition delineates a sanctification of the ecstatic female body in a communal, oral "text"—a kind of "holy theater"—only imperfectly able to be rendered into a written text. Placed among these three essays, Claire Nouvet's essay on Christine de Pizan, "Writing (in) Fear," may at first seem a little out of place: the body here is that of the text rather than of its author, though it, too, is about a subversion, in this instance a subversion of courtly discourse defaming women which gives rise to a collective subjectivity, a feminine "we." Nouvet reads Christine's anagram/signature CREINTIS in the *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*, a pun of sorts which establishes fear as the privileged sign of feminine gender, as an instance of Christine's critique of patriarchal language as a discursive veil over female experience.

Bringing together essays on courtly and mystical discourses, *Gender and Text in the the Later Middle Ages* tacitly reminds its readers of the varieties of female experiences—and the multiple feminine aesthetics—to which medieval texts give evidence. In assembling the three sections, Jane Chance channels her readers' involvement with the issues raised in her introduction: the negotiation of authority, the construction and performance of a gendered subjectivity, and the possibilities (and impossibilities) of articulating the transgressive. The result is not just a collection of essays on a theme but a genuinely corporate investigation, merging and contrasting critical paradigms and paradoxically offering conclusions while yet remaining open to further speculation by its readers.

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Cranston, Maurice. *The Solitary Self: Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Exile and Adversity*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1997. 247 pp. \$29.95.

Maurice Cranston's biography of Rousseau began with a first volume devoted to the early picaresque years (*Jean-Jacques*, University of Chicago Press, 1982) followed by a second volume on the prolific period from 1754–1762 (*The Noble Savage*, University of Chicago Press, 1991). The book published posthumously this year thanks to the efforts of Sanford Lakoff comprises a significant part of what would have become the final volume had the biographer been able to bring his work to completion. The projected scope of the book is implied by the interruption in the temporal flow. Whereas chapters one through seven span three and a half years (June 1762 to January 1766), chapter eight, composed from the author's notes, goes from 1766 to Rousseau's death in 1778.

Beginning with Rousseau's arrival in Switzerland on the heels of the condemnation of *Émile* in Paris, the dominant theme that emerges from these pages pertains to the philosopher's persecution—real and imagined. In the preface to *The Noble Savage*, Cranston responded to earlier criticism of his portrait in which the philosopher appeared “almost normal” by promising a more paranoid Rousseau in this third volume (ix). Following his method of “impartial pursuit of the facts,” the biographer succeeds in showing both Rousseau's famed paranoia and the real hostility directed towards him. Within days of his friendly welcome in Yverdon,