

Unfortunately, the particularly sensitive handling of this material only highlights the book's weakness. As Karras freely admits, this vision of the formations of medieval masculinity does not take into account the vast majority of society, that is, the agricultural workers (peasants or wage laborers) of the late medieval period. Although such a project would be infinitely more difficult because of the paucity of documentation, Karras' fine work makes the matter seem even more pressing. Nevertheless, scholars and students alike will delight in this intuitive and provocative journey into the history of masculinity formation.

—Sara M. Butler, Saint Mary's University (Halifax)

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (eds), *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1997); D.M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1999); Jacqueline Murray (ed.), *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West* (New York, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, "Sharing Wine, Women, and Song: Masculine Identity Formation in the Medieval European Universities," in Cohen and Wheeler, pp. 187-202; Karras, "Separating the Men from the Goats: Masculinity, Civilization, and Identity Formation in the Medieval University," in Murray, pp. 189-213; Karras, "Young Knights Under the Feminine Gaze," in Konrad Eisenbichler (ed.), *The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society, 1150-1650* (Toronto, 2002).

---

**Patricia Ranft, *Women in Western Intellectual Culture, 600-1500*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Pp. xi + 279.**

---

Patricia Ranft has taken on an ambitious project in *Women in Western Intellectual Culture: 600-1500*, and she is to be commended for addressing this long-neglected aspect of women's history. Her stated objective is to redress the once prevalent attitude that only exceptional women participated in the intellectual culture of the Middle Ages. While the impressive scholarship on medieval women and their achievements in recent decades has eroded that assumption, there is as yet no overview of women's activity in this particular area. Because of the relative newness of this field of inquiry, Ranft admits that her task is "elementary," breaking it down into three distinct parts: to make the general public aware of the range and quality of women's contributions; to contextualize their contributions rather than isolate them; and to examine each piece for its distinctive contribution.

The range of Ranft's coverage is astounding, both chronologically and thematically. She begins with the high points of cultural production in the early Middle Ages, and then moves systematically along an axis defined by the increase in literacy, especially vernacular literacy, to arrive finally, in Chapters Six and Seven, at women theologians and humanists. After establishing the intellectual context of each period, she highlights its major female writers and thinkers and demonstrates how they connect with and respond to the intellectual challenges posed within their cultural milieu. In providing the broader context, Ranft draws largely on Marcia Colish's *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition: 400-1400*, Brian Stock's *Listening for the Text and Implications of Literacy*, and other texts relating to the development of intellectual culture and the history of science.

Chapter one demonstrates that “Women were not as absent from the field of early medieval intellectual endeavor as [M.L.W.] Laistner led us to believe” (1), as she alternately contextualizes and then enumerates the achievements of women writing in the periods of high cultural production in Anglo-Saxon England, Carolingian Francia, and Ottonian Saxony. Chapter Two, “The Creation of a Literate Society,” owes much to Brian Stock and provides a much needed consideration of how the development of literacy from the twelfth century onwards affected women and how they themselves participated actively in that development. Chapter Three, “The Coming of the Vernacular,” surveys literary developments of twelfth-century women, based on the premises of rational thought and new hermeneutics laid out in the previous chapter. Chapter Four, “The Vernacular Mothers,” moves to spiritual literature and highlights five major writers (Clemence of Barking, Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete) to demonstrate how women religious provided accessible contemporary literature of spirituality for the masses.

The remaining chapters further the premise established in the first part to demonstrate women’s relationship to scholasticism and humanism. Chapter Five, “Scholastics, Mystics, and Secondary Intellectuals,” argues for the importance of women’s contributions in these areas. The title is perhaps misleading, since Ranft is not arguing for female scholasticism, but rather argues that the mystics discussed in the previous chapter are not so very different from the scholastics, and that the role of “secondary intellectuals,” while different, is based on the scholastic tradition and deserves equal attention. Although few women were able to position themselves among the intellectual elite, they could nevertheless function as “secondary intellectuals,” Ranft explains, who “bridged the gap between the masses and the intellectual elite” (127). Here Ranft progresses nicely from her previous explorations of women’s uses of the vernacular and women’s mysticism, and looks forward as well to her discussion of the humanists, pivoting, as it were, on her treatment of Bonaventure and the scholastics. Ranft traces philosophical ideas presented by Bonaventure and others among the scholastics to show how those ideas find expression as well in the writings of the mystics and the so-called “secondary intellectuals,” a group that includes, among others, Clare of Assisi, Angela of Foligno, and Herrad of Hohenburg. Chapter Six, “The Great Theologians,” explores the various contributions of Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, and Birgitta of Sweden, underscoring their importance as theologians and also their foregrounding of the humanist movement. Chapter Seven, “The Woman Humanists,” concludes the book with a survey of three women within the humanist tradition: Christine de Pizan, Isotta Nogarola, and Laura Cereta. Here Ranft highlights their commitment to education, engagement in the political arena, and especially their tendency to place women firmly within intellectual history as perceived in their time.

Perhaps because she has taken on so much, Ranft relies heavily on student anthologies and editions rather than scholarly ones. More frustrating is her reluctance to present her evidence in the original language, though she does occasionally provide the citation for the scholarly edition of the primary source. It may be that neither Ranft nor her publisher anticipated a scholarly audience in the writing of this text.

The structure of chapters is at times puzzling, and typos abound, particularly through the first chapter. While most of these will cause little more than annoyance for most readers, some of the typos may actually mislead. The famed Anglo-Saxon scholar Aldhelm, for example, is consistently called "Aldheim" throughout the first chapter. Only one citation in the notes names him correctly. A general reader interested in learning more about "Aldheim," however, may give up in frustration when no hits appear in a library or internet search. Other typos are obvious and innocuous, but too frequent.

Ranft's arguments, often overstated and sweeping without sufficient explanation and justification, pose a more serious concern for scholarly and general readers alike. These generalizations, inaccuracies, or specious arguments are obvious to specialists; however, the general reader may be swayed all too easily by Ranft's air of authority. Argumentation is compromised when sweeping generalizations are made occasionally through oversimplification. Presenting the religious and political frictions prevalent in the time of Catherine of Siena, for example, Ranft states that Dante, Marsilio of Padua, and William of Ockham challenged "the validity of the concept of Western Christendom" (163). This surprising observation seems to be based on Colish's characterization of the late Middle Ages as a time "when the concept of the pan-European Christian commonwealth, with spiritual and secular governance guided by single rulers in church and state...was growing daily more untenable" (Colish, *Medieval Foundations*, 340). The complexity of Colish's argument is lost and, I think, misconstrued.

Ranft also overreaches at times. Her connection of Julian of Norwich to the humanists, for example, relating to their respective readings of the *imago Dei* tradition, remains unconvincing. Ranft's discussion of Julian's thought on the whole is plausible and suits her argument well, but she would have been better advised to conclude her discussion with Julian's revision of the *imago Dei* tradition rather than pursue a link between Julian and the humanists.

Despite its weaknesses, the book succeeds in its ostensible purpose, which is simply "to gather in one place the many ways women did participate in the intellectual community" (xi). One wonders, however, if this book serves any one audience particularly well. Nevertheless, Ranft's book prompts further scholarly inquiry into this area of women's intellectual history that she has so painstakingly mapped out.

—Helene Scheck, *The University at Albany*

---

**Julia Bolton Holloway (ed. and trans.),** *Julian of Norwich: A Showing of Love.* London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2003.

---

Julia Bolton Holloway's new translation of Julian of Norwich's *A Showing of Love* is an aesthetically pleasing and carefully produced volume by an experienced scholar who has been working on the extant manuscripts of Julian's writing for many years. Neatly compiled and including two evocative photographs taken by Holloway herself, the volume promises much. It is self-