

This collection illustrates the range of disciplines that must be engaged to reach any kind of understanding of medieval secular and sacred culture across time and space as well as the results of twenty years of scholarship on women, gender, and sexuality. That this is a critical venture at a time when medieval studies programs are being threatened from without and from within because of “irrelevance” to the larger community of scholarship is an understatement. Copious notes and an exhaustive collection of references pertinent to the study of medieval gender construction further enhance the excellence of the individual chapters.

—Julie Chappell, Tarleton State University

Tova Rosen. *Unveiling Eve. Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003. 264 pp. ISBN: 0-8122-3710-2

Unveiling Eve offers a feminist analysis of medieval (10th-14th-century) Golden Age Hebrew literature, i.e. the literature either produced by Jews of the Iberian Peninsula or by Provençal and Italian Jews inspired by this tradition. The book also offers scholars working in European literatures access to a series of medieval Hebrew texts—poetry, rhymed prose narrative, philosophical works—that would otherwise be inaccessible since they have not been translated from the original Hebrew. Rosen is successful not only in illustrating the importance of such works in the larger European context, but also in offering an original and incisive feminist analysis of this corpus of largely misogynist works. In her own words, the study is an attempt to “map the positions and positioning of female figures and female voices within the patterns of male discourse and its procedures of signification” (189). Rosen has a mastery not only of contemporary theory and medieval Hebrew and Arabic, but also of various European literary traditions such as French and German. Her scholarship reveals a breadth and profundity hard to find among medievalists specializing in the European Middle Ages, and this study should be considered fundamental for understanding not only medieval Hebrew and Spanish literature, but also the medieval literature of the West.

Six of Rosen’s chapter titles underscore her thesis that a feminist approach to medieval Judeo-Spanish literature yields subversive subtexts that heretofore have been ignored by contemporary critics of Hebrew Golden Age literature, who like many of the authors they focus upon, also exclude women from their discourse. Chapter One, “No Woman’s Land,” focuses upon the exclusion of Jewish women as active subjects from medieval Hebrew literature and from the modern scholarship of that literature. Because it was only men who voiced their opinions of women in written texts, “[t]he path left for the Hebrew medievalist feminist is thus approaching the issues of women and gender via male-authored texts” (3). Rosen then presents an historical overview of male attitudes toward women as found in a series of Jewish texts, including the Geniza documents and the poetry of the courtier-rabbis of Spain.

In Chapter Two, “Gazing at the Gazelle: Woman in Male Love Lyric,” Rosen further narrows her focus on the most widely recognized genre of Judeo-

Spanish poetry—the love lyric. In their portrayal of the ideal lady lover, the Judeo-Spanish poets ultimately portray themselves and the ideal of courtly manhood as a feminized lover. The poems cited by Rosen, by poets such as Samuel ha-Nagid, Judah ha-Levi, Todros Abulafia, and Isaac Ibn Khalfun, bear close thematic and stylistic parallels to the Provençal lyric and this chapter should be used by anyone working with the courtly love tradition and/or the troubadour tradition. Poetry is also the subject of Chapter Three, “Veils and Wiles: Poetry and Woman,” which focuses on the “metaphor of woman” in medieval Judeo-Spanish poetics. Rosen underscores the irony of Judeo-Spanish poetics which conceived of Poetry—the personification of male aesthetic values and ultimate expression of male identity in the culture—as female. Maimonides, in fact, following the Arab tradition attacked poetry as being, like women’s speech, deceptive. In Chapter Four, “Poor Soul, Pure Soul: The Soul as Woman,” Rosen explores the Neo-Platonic basis of medieval Judeo-Spanish authors’ allegorical representation of the soul as feminine.

In the subsequent chapters, Rosen turns to the rhymed prose narrative genre of Arab origin that was adapted to Hebrew and popularized in medieval Spain, the *maqamat*. Chapter Five, “Domesticating the Enemy: Misogamy in a Jewish Marriage Debate,” illustrates how the Judeo-Spanish author Ibn Shabbetai weaves the philosophical and poetic misogyny prevalent in the Jewish intellectual life of Spain in *The Offering of Yehuda the Misogynist* (1208).

In Chapter Six Rosen looks at the *maqamat* as homotextual works, i.e. texts that represent, allude to, and engage male discourse and in which women are represented as objects of male desire. While in the thirteenth-century author Immanuel of Rome’s four *maqamat* the woman is described and circumscribed by the male protagonists, in al-Harizi’s forty-first *maqama*, the “Debate Between the Man and the Woman,” we have a fictional speaking woman who, like her literary counterparts, Chaucer’s wife of Bath and the real Christine de Pizan, is acquainted with and responds to the patriarchal literature of her time and tradition (139).

Chapter Seven addresses the theme of transvestism in four Hebrew *maqamat*. Rosen asserts that the theme of cross-dressing in Hebrew literature is adapted from Arabic literature, and that it corresponds to the fundamental ambiguity of order and anarchy that pervades the deep structure of the *maqama* genre itself. In Chapter Eight Rosen explores ways in which a single fourteenth-century text, *Evan Bohan* (1322) by Qalonymoos ben Qalonymoos, explodes the construction of Jewish male identity. This text, in which the protagonist prays to God to make him a woman, is unique among Jewish, European, and Islamic literature in its expression of transsexual desire.

The Jews of Spain and their rich literary tradition are both insiders and outsiders to the larger European tradition. Jews living in Spain, Italy, and Provence produced a large corpus of literature that has traditionally been excluded from “European” or “Western” literature, yet that very corpus provides insightful critiques and elaborations of themes and works traditionally accepted by critics as classics of European literature. Rosen’s study illustrates

how several subversive themes—transvestism, feminism, sexual identity—are present in this body of work, despite the fact they have been long ignored by critics of medieval Hebrew literature.

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Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose, eds., *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*. (The New Middle Ages, 20.) New York: Houndmills, Eng.: Palgrave, 2001. Pp. 453.

In this substantial and significant volume, *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, editors Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Rose have assembled thirteen sophisticated essays bracketed by an Introduction and an Afterward. Four of the thirteen essays are adaptations of previously published work, and the volume is divided into four thematic sections. According to Robertson and Rose, the book has two purposes: first, to investigate the repercussions that representations of rape create in, especially, female readers, and, second, to consider how this violence shapes social formations and female subjectivity. As the collection ultimately argues, the problem of representation is itself an expression of the violated female body and “its various functions within Western society” (4, *emph.* Robertson and Rose).

The brilliant opening chapter of Part I, Christine Rose’s “Reading Chaucer Reading Rape,” is not only a rigorous reading of Chaucer’s simultaneous use and erasure of rape, particularly in the *Canterbury Tales*, but also a careful reading of Chaucerian critical history that refuses to aestheticize the sexual violence so prominent in Chaucerian texts. Rose calls for a kind of double reading that both recognizes Chaucer’s use of rape as a trope to talk about something else (usually moments of conflict between men) and that recognizes the violated female body at the heart of that trope. Mark Amsler’s “Rape and Silence: Ovid’s Mythography and Medieval Readers” demonstrates how medieval mythographers consistently allegorized Ovid’s rape narratives, thus eliminating the sexual violence embodied in these tales. Monica Brzezinski Potkay’s “The Violence of Courtly Exegesis in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” asks the provocative question, “Must romances create the threat of rape?” (97), and finds that “*Gawain* uses the theme of rape as a trope for its own poetics” (98) in order to critique that courtly hermeneutic through Lady Bertilak and Morgan Le Fey, who themselves subject Gawain to a rape-like experience that shatters his social and psychological integrity.

In “Part II: The Philomel Legacy,” the mute Philomel, unable to declare her violation, is seen to be a foundational narrative in Western aesthetics. Excerpted from *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993), E. Jane Burns’ “Raping Men: What’s Motherhood Got to Do with It?,” concentrates on the Old French retelling of the brutal tale of Philomel and Procne demonstrating how, on one hand, the conventional social roles of supporting wife and nurturing mother enable sexual violence while, on the other, women’s work and women working can unite to redefine socially and narratively the discourses that facilitate a culture of rape. “The Daughter’s Text