

his jocular interventions tend to undercut the work's more probing observations. He concludes his chapter on "The Creators" by noting Elizabeth's place in England's literary history:

The Queen was the catalyst [for England's development as a literary force], besides being a performer in her own right. Her address given to a potentially hostile parliamentary delegation . . . represented a *tour de force* which any modern actress would have been proud to deliver: 'Though God hath raised me high, yet this I count the glory of my crown: that I have reigned with your loves.' This poses the intriguing question—did Elizabeth also write her own material? (184)

Although Brimacombe probably intends his tag line humorously, his readers would have been better served by a more serious interrogation of Elizabeth's authorial skill, particularly given her facility as a poet. Indeed, her language in this very passage reveals her in the act of scripting the illusion that she rules by the acquiescence of her courtiers. Elizabeth acknowledges God as the author of her greatness, but her words imply that it was her ability to script the details of her reign—including identifying the men who would serve as her supporting cast—that permitted her to wield authority as queen. Elizabeth Tudor, like Elizabeth Jocelin, achieved authority through a type of authorship, and when the editors and biographers of these two women allow their words and works to speak for themselves, that substantial authority is evident.

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¹ G. Thomas Tanselle argues that when the editorial goal is to reproduce an original text, a facsimile is generally preferable to a diplomatic transcription. "Textual Scholarship," *Introduction to Scholarship* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1981) 36.

² Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 2 ed. (New York: Longman Publishing, 1998), 17.

Cheyette, Frederic L. *Ermengard of Narbonne and the World of the Troubadours*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Ermengard of Narbonne (c. 1130-1196) was about four when she inherited the title of viscountess of the rich and cosmopolitan city of Narbonne and lord of the surrounding region. Although twice married while still young, Ermengard lived her life as a single woman in the society the book's title characterizes as the "world of the troubadours." Ermengard of Narbonne narrates the complicated train of events that led from Ermengard's alliance with the counts of Barcelona, intended to maintain Narbonne's independence, to a forced alliance with the predatory Count Raymond V of Toulouse around 1167.

Scholars will be attracted to this book because of Frederic L. Cheyette's reputation as a scholar and interpreter of the history of the region known as Occitania before it became Languedoc under the Capetians. The title proclaiming Ermengard of Narbonne as its heroine and the rarity of substantial biographies of medieval women who were not queens will attract women's historians. They will be both frustratingly disappointed and

spectacularly edified. In all, little can be known about Ermengard. Only 64 extant documents bear her name, and all records of her benefactions, a major source of information about elite medieval women, have been lost (5). Says Cheyette, “Ermengard will resolutely not stand before us” (6). He grapples with the modern expectation that a biographer reveal the private life of a subject by asking “whether a woman of Ermengard’s time and place and status had a private life, an inner life distinct from her public life” (12). Similarly he acknowledges the expectation that we wonder about Ermengard’s self-identity as a woman—did her gender matter? Surely it did, but not in ways we might anticipate. When one of Ermengard’s rivals for collecting tolls cited Roman law’s prohibition on women sitting in justice, Louis VII dismissed the assertion in the face of northern French custom which “is much kinder” when “the better sex is lacking.” Cheyette asks, “Did she think about the difference between herself and the ‘better sex’ when she laced on her helmet and hauberk or sat in judgement surrounded by her [mostly male] friends?” (217). At the same time, Cheyette suggests, Ermengard was sensitive to women’s special vulnerabilities as she “was the arbiter of choice. . . . especially when the rights of women were in question” (206).

Following Caroline Bynum’s lead, Cheyette approaches Ermengard’s selfhood as one shaped by community (12). When Ermengard appears in some way in the troubadours’ songs, Cheyette interrogates this presence not as fact or fiction, but as a way to understand what the words in the songs meant to their listeners—Ermengard’s community—especially regarding concepts such as love, anger, and deception, and the terms “my lord” and “my lady.” The city and surrounding countryside she ruled, the armies she led, the artists she patronized, and the great lords, secular and ecclesiastical, with whom she interacted reveal more about her world than any documents that bear her name or events that evidence her participation.

Cheyette’s exploration of Ermengard’s community is incredibly thorough, theoretically informed (yet free of jargon), and “at home” in the documents and historiography of the period. There is a lesson here for a certain kind of women’s history: that the demands of women’s history seem to require, when the documents do not suffice, what can only be termed mastery of the historical context. Cheyette uses the cultural context of Occitania to explain Ermengard. Clearly a key figure in the political maneuverings that led to the end of Occitanian independence, Ermengard is definitely worth explaining, but the real goal of this study, it may seem, is to explain the world of the troubadours, a world noted for its language of love and war and for its long association with heresy.

Cheyette argues compellingly that the real question about heresies in Occitania must be why were they so long (and so well) tolerated. He finds the answer in the unique and fragile network of political relations between various lords, both secular and religious. He points to the unusual cooperation between Ermengard and the Archbishop of Narbonne and the relatively low incidence of heresy in the region to substantiate the argument

that competition and contention among bishops and counts, for example, created spaces in which heresy might flourish. Similarly, Cheyette's exposition of the historiography of feudalism that negates the existence of authentic female lords allows us to understand better the role of women like Ermengard in a feudal "system."

Cheyette's luxurious prose is dense and demanding, but also exciting and entertaining. His confidence as a scholar and experience as a teacher are apparent in his readiness to explore how modern sensibilities (and thus historiography) have difficulties making sense of the medieval world. He draws contemporary examples to help bridge the gap referring, for example, to Irving Berlin and Cole Porter (8) or Ritalin and Prozac (202). Some readers may find this jarring, and this tendency may become problematic for those unfamiliar with contemporary American culture, and it will place special demands on translators.

The book has a number of illustrations, the most poignant being Cheyette's photograph of the ruins of the Knights Templar house of Mas-Deu, in Roussillon, where Ermengard spent her last days in exile and asked to be buried. Cheyette writes, "As a final, ironic postmortem humiliation, the rich cartulary of Mas-Deu, which includes a list of important persons buried in its cemetery, contains not the slightest mention of Ermengard. . . . Abandoned in the grinding world of dynastic politics by those who should have loved her (most significantly her heir, the Castilian nobleman Pedro de Lara), she is transformed in death into the lady of the courts of love" (342). Well known in her own time, Ermengard of Narbonne has been a mystery in the modern world, known mainly through oblique references in the troubadours' often inaccessible love songs. Cheyette's work has restored her to the historical map, to the "grinding political world" of twelfth-century Occitania—a world of love and betrayal.

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***Cultural Contexts/Female Voices*, ed. Louise M. Haywood. Papers of the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar, 27. London: Dept. of Hispanic Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 2000. 78p.**

The title of this volume suggests that the contents should be of vital interest to medieval feminists, exploring hot topics with the latest critical and theoretical tools. Unfortunately the collection fails to fulfill these expectations. Although the modest contributions it makes to the field are certainly valuable, the articles are uneven, ranging from too-preliminary studies to well-researched and persuasively argued essays. These five studies by Spanish, British, and American hispanists focus on female voices in late medieval and early modern male-authored texts. They were originally presented at conferences and still bear marks of oral delivery. I wish that the contributors had revised their essays in light of the other articles in this collection. While Haywood ordered the essays according to thematic and methodological similarities,