

help account for the higher proportion of women seeking multiple advisors.³

This is only one study at one university. It is flawed due to difficulties in gathering the data, and it was not primarily meant as a study of mentoring. But it does highlight the intense concern of graduate students with mentoring, some worry over the professional strength of female mentors, and a tendency among the students to invest in more than one mentoring relationship.

1. Interviews were held with both male and female students. The questionnaires were sent to the entire body of students, and the responses were fairly representative of the gender balance in the student population. The sub-committee of 12 students consisted of women.
2. Numerous studies have established that identical accomplishments attributed to a man and to a woman will be viewed as less impressive when they are presented as the achievements of a woman. See Titia J. Top, "Sex Bias in the evaluation of Performance in the Scientific, Artistic and Literary Professions: A Review," *Sex Roles* 24 (1991): 73-106
3. In the survey of female faculty at Georgetown, done in 1991-92, the women reported receiving more mentoring than did the men; it would be interesting to investigate whether this is more generally true.

GENDER AND VIOLENCE: A SPECIAL FORUM



This forum features current work and bibliography on the forms and functions of violence in medieval society as it subtends and is informed by gender roles. Domestic violence, rape, self-violence, violence in religious contexts, and literary representation of aggression are increasingly the focus of feminist and historical scholarship. The subject is an elusive one even in the twentieth-century and is even more so in the Middle Ages. We hope that this exchange of ideas, current projects, and bibliography will be useful to scholars working on these and related questions. Please send your comments or additional bibliography for inclusion in the next issue to Ann Marie Rasmussen, Dept. of German, Duke University, Box 90256, Durham, N.C. 27708-0256 or post to amras@acpub.duke.edu.

COMPREHENDING RAPE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND



I am in the process of completing a book on female consent in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer that began as a study of Chaucer's representations of rape. Along with a number of scholars (Gayle Margherita, Carolyn Dinshaw, Marta Powell Harley, Christopher Cannon, for example), I was initially intrigued by the enigmatic historical document that tells us only that Chaucer was released from the charge of rape by Cecily Chaumpaigne in 1380; and like others I have also been fascinated by the continuing attempts of Chaucer's biographers to transform the possibility that Chaucer might have raped someone into something else (see for example, Derek Pearsall's most recent argument

that Cecily Champaigne, possibly a jilted lover, sought a compensatory settlement for neglect and betrayal of promises.) From there, I became interested in the myriad representations of rape in Chaucer that have been barely talked about—from the attempted rape of Constance in “The Man of Law’s Tale” to the more central rape of the maid in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” to Criseyde’s fear of rape in *Troilus and Criseyde*. I now want to know both what these representations signify and how they do so.

By this, I mean I am interested in exploring further Catherine Mackinnon’s statement about rape; “If sexuality is central to women’s definition and forced sex is central to sexuality, rape is indigenous, not exceptional to women’s social condition. In feminist analysis, a rape is not an isolated event or moral transgression or individual interchange gone wrong but an act of terrorism and torture within a systemic context of group subjection, like lynching.” There are a number of conditions that are troubling to me in this statement (for example, why assume that sexuality is central to women’s definition? And how do we historicize this definition with regards to medieval definitions of women? Surely there is no single definition of women, anyway?) But I am drawn to the idea that rape is not some monster circling the borders of patriarchy, but rather is a quite welcome, indeed familiar, character within it (analogously, it is the apparently benign Edgar Linton who viciously polices female desire, not Heathcliff.) Rape might be described as an event that signals the breakdown of patriarchy, that is, an act that attempts to reassert patriarchy’s power under threat (suggested, for example, by the increased incidence of rape at the end of World War II or the prominence of rape in the Bosnian crisis.) But I wonder if it would help us to consider rape not as aberrant, but rather as fundamental to the smooth operations of patriarchy. Most readers feel uncomfortable with this statement, and I would like to know what MFN readers think of this idea.

In order to explore this concept further, I have taken an historical approach by seeking to understand the meanings and functions of rape in the medieval period in England. By historicizing rape, I believe we can come to a better understanding of its function now in the contemporary West. An initial study reveals that rape in the past is not easily distinguished from other acts of the control of the female body such as abduction (for example, the word “raptus” applies equally to both.) These controls come to the fore not only in rape cases of the late medieval period in England, but also in other legal cases that concern the control of female sexuality from infanticide cases to controversies about marriage and divorce. My study assumes that rape is just one act of the control of female sexuality on a continuum of controls ranging from chastity, seduction, abduction, adultery and marriage. Therefore, my research is focussed not on rape alone, but on how rape figures in a larger ideology that seeks to control women’s bodies and silence women’s voices.

So far, I argue that the smooth functioning of patriarchy depends on the commodification of women in the marriage market and that that commodification depends on the silence of women (see Dinshaw’s excellent discussion of Levi–Strauss and Gayle Rubin on this subject). When women speak, that is, refuse to acquiesce in silence to their commodification—when they say not only no but even yes to marriage, for example, or no or yes to rape or abduction, this system of control becomes exposed and destabilized. From “The Parliament of Fowles,” where a female object of desire resists the marriage market, to Criseyde who refuses to be defined by it, Chaucer explores

the many different ways social structures are disrupted and redefined when women speak, specifically when they say yes and no—or in the case of the formel, maybe.

Another avenue of research that concerns me is perhaps less historical and more aesthetic, although I am attempting to find the link between the two, and that is one raised by Kathryn Gravdal in her ground-breaking book, and queried so provocatively by Gayle Margherita, that is, what role does rape play in the development of Western aesthetics? Why is rape so prevalent particularly in the Western lyric tradition? Why do so many Western poets use Philomel, the voice of the raped and mutilated woman, as their sign of the poetic voice? And why should the laurel, the transformed body of Daphne, a woman who refused to be raped, become the reward for poetic achievement? Just as the representation of rape calls attention to social structures, so the tradition of the nightingale's song, as the song of the raped woman, calls attention to the place of the lyric speaker in non-lyric forms. And that voice—for male and female poet alike—may well be the poet's protest against the violence against women inherent in Western societies.

The bibliography provided by Emma Hawkes here on rape in medieval England is superb, and anyone wishing to tackle this important and surprisingly understudied subject in medieval England should start with it. I would add only the suggestion that we consider this subject not just in isolation but as one part of larger systems of control of the female body. In that regard, I would add Richard Helmholz's fine book on *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), and urge scholars to cast their nets wider than rape over the expanse of female identity-formation as it is exhibited in Judeo-Christian ideology and practice.

In sum, my primary questions are to what degree is rape systemic in patriarchal society and why is rape so fundamental to the development of Western aesthetics? I would greatly appreciate reactions and suggestions in response to this brief note.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY OF LEGAL RECORDS RELATED TO RAPE AND RAVISHMENT IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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This bibliography is designed to help researchers access printed primary and secondary sources dealing with rape and ravishment in medieval England. Although rape (forcible coition) and ravishment (abduction without necessarily implying forcible coition) are seen as two very different offences in the twentieth century, medieval legal records generally blurred the two crimes together.