

Strohm, Paul. *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth Century Texts*.
Appendix by A. J. Prescott. Princeton: University Press, 1992. Pp. xii + 205.
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The complex relationship between literary and other types of discourse—whether legal, historical, or theological—is an important issue for contemporary medievalists. Of major concern recently has been the way that different discourses reveal or construct “truth,” a truth that is not so easily disassociable from fiction and invention. Employing painstaking primary research and a variety of theoretical approaches, Paul Strohm’s new book, *Hochon’s Arrow*, makes an important intervention in this debate.

Strohm’s basic premise is that the “fictionality” of medieval texts is in fact historical and that, by investigating their historicity and understanding the kinds of evidence they supply, we can produce powerful readings both of those texts and of the textual fields in which they participate. As Strohm notes, “[f]abulists and romancers conceive episodes within imaginary structures or value systems their audiences embrace as true, and lies accepted as a basis for actions gain retrospective truthfulness through influence on events” (3). To understand the reciprocity of this relationship Strohm examines texts as participants *in* and producers *of* textual/social matrices. The advantages of such an approach are many, but primarily it avoids falling prey to a problematic and overdetermining text/context paradigm that has strangled medieval studies in the past. And by understanding texts as fully participating in history while producing it in part, he succeeds in developing a new understanding of the relationship between texts and ideology while taking into account the way that textual meanings and uses depend not only on the politics of interpretive communities but also on acts of circulation and (re)appropriation. Strohm effectively grounds his methodology in recent cultural/literary theory and in the powerful writings of feminist historians such as Judith M. Bennett and Martha C. Howell. Although there is a puzzling inattention to Gayatri Spivak’s work on the subaltern in Chapter Two, *Hochon’s Arrow* develops a powerful and useful interpretive model of thinking about medieval textuality and the historicity of texts. Each of the individual essays develops Strohm’s ideas effectively. Following a theoretical discussion introducing the book, Chapter One treats an accusation against the mercer Thomas Austin in which his servant John Banham denounces Hochon of Liverpool (another Austin servant) for threatening to kill one of his master’s political adversaries while the latter urinated against a wall. Among other points, the sensitive analysis of this document illustrates how a narrative’s construction of “reality” or “truth” can be read to produce other types of historical information. Chapter Two, discussing medieval accounts of the 1381 English Uprising, exemplifies how a dominant/hegemonic account of rebellious subordinates can help to reconstruct the latter’s understanding of their own actions. Chapter Three examines Chaucer’s appropriation of the ideology of civil order in “Lak of Stedfastnesse” and delineates the way that ideology is both a presupposition and a product of textual environment(s). Chapter Four uncovers the social exchange and mediatory role that Chaucer’s “Complaint to His Purse” played for the poet’s participation in and use of Lancastrian propaganda and its ensuing discourse. Chapter Five moves to a discussion of gender and shows how late medieval constructions of queenship could simultaneously serve to supplement, confirm, and mark the limits of male (kingly) power. Chapter Six—also involving issues of gender, power, and

masculine social control—explores the discursive relationship in the male social imaginary between treason and a wife's murder of her husband while underscoring the wide-reaching politics of the medieval household. And Chapter Seven, analyzing Thomas Usk's "Appeal," provides a fitting ending to the series, for it traces the complex and sometimes sadly capricious workings of texts, textuality, and their socio-political fields. The book ends with two helpful appendices: the first, "The Accusation Against Thomas Austin"; the second, "The Literature of Livery."

Hochon's Arrow should be on the shelf of every medievalist interested in literary and historical discourse—and in the complex relationships and negotiations between "fiction/fact" and "textuality/reality." The book will encourage many scholars to reshape the way they conceive and undertake their work.

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Wyschogrod, Edith. *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*.
University of Chicago Press, 1990. Pp. xxvii + 298.

Despite occasional discussion of medieval saints such as Catherine of Siena, the most pronounced manifestations of medieval sanctity in *Saints and Postmodernism* are found in the illustrations. But appearances here are not wholly deceptive. While this ambitious work in the Chicago series, *Religion and Postmodernism*, is not specifically addressed to the study of saints in the medieval period, it has much to offer medievalists in a variety of disciplines who are interested in working with postmodern approaches. The central concern of the book is to develop a postmodern ethics which can withstand the critiques of the grounding of theory in modern philosophy.

Wyschogrod's response is to examine narratives of saintly lives as a way of grounding ethical imperatives. Hagiography, as written in the imperative mood—"go and do likewise"—confronts the fundamental ethical question, "how should I act?" Her choice of narratives is largely literary, although she also examines several early Christian saints' lives, and the possibility of political sainthood. The subjects, for the most part, are specifically secular, ranging from the incipient sanctity of Millie in James' *Wings of the Dove*, through Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers*. By her understanding of sanctity as radical altruism—a vulnerability to and compassion for the needs of others—she posits a saintly self which is already fragmented and open through desire, and one peculiarly attuned to the body. Humanness is grounded in the body's susceptibility to pain, and it is the bodily misery of others which is most clearly manifested and responded to.

But in Wyschogrod's analysis, the saint's body as locus of desire operates in a universe temporally and textually decentered, leaving an unmoored subject, whose gendered and speaking self is so ambiguous as to be "neutered," a body on which "the needs and desires of the Other can be inscribed" (123). The questions raised here are taken up again in the closing sections on postmodern problems of ecstasy, individuation and transcendence, in which the author tries to clarify the uses of traditional hagiography, while maintaining the irrevocable difference of postmodern sanctity. Although the issue of gender invites considerable further discussion, the section on Kristeva seemed especially helpful for those interested in applying her insights to medieval women mystics.