

compromise the student who seeks to branch out from this discussion into more in-depth study of feminism or women's history.

Despite the tone often adopted toward women and women's roles, Galloway seems to attempt homage toward women authors and historical characters and does reference a number of significant female figures of the Middle Ages. With prudent use of the index, the student of feminism or women's studies may find brief but relevant discussions of Heloise, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, the *Life of Christina of Markyate*, and the abbesses Hild of Whitby and Katherine Sutton, as well as of topics such as women's religious freedoms, women in Chaucer, wives and household duties, and women's literacy and patronage, among others. In his chapter on Critical Approaches, feminist criticism and gender discourse receive direct, if brief, attention. The information Galloway offers may provide a good starting point for future study, in the context of more generalized introductions to medieval English history and culture.

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Louise M. Sylvester,
*Medieval Romance and
the Construction of
Heterosexuality.* (The New
Middle Ages.) Palgrave
McMillan, 2008. Pp. 202.

Sylvester argues that medieval romance narratives provide scripts for heterosexual relationships, scripts that endure today in contemporary romance fiction. In this script, “for a woman to get the sex that she wants, she must take up a position of refusal, passivity, and lack of responsibility” (p. 144). She applies transitivity analysis (examining the syntactic choices that show the roles fulfilled by the participants in the text, such as the degree of volitionality or the effect on other participants) and discourse analysis (the number of conversational turns allotted to each character, the length of utterances, and the use of hedges and tag questions), to provide careful readings of the first encounter between lovers and the scene where the lovers ultimately consummate their relationship in selected texts.

The first two chapters focus on the construction of femininity in medieval romance. Chapter 1 examines two texts illustrating the “heterosexual contract,” where

the man offers sex to the woman, who is expected initially to refuse. In *Sir Degrevant*, Melidor first declines Degrevant's advances while acknowledging her feelings for him, a refusal that opens the way for them later to marry. Linguistic analysis confirms the heroine's passive role in the dialogues between the lovers. By contrast, in the story of the Fair Maid of Astolat found in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Elaine offers her love to Lancelot, who refuses. While scholars have tended to see the heroine as overly talkative, analysis shows that Lancelot speaks more than she does and has more internal mental processes. Moreover, Lancelot has actually performed behaviors that typically initiate a heterosexual contract: Elaine's mistake is that she has broken the contract by not refusing the offer and by openly expressing her sexual desire.

Chapter 2 examines legal constructions of rape in the medieval and modern periods. Since the heterosexual contract requires a woman's initial refusal and assumes a certain amount of pressure by the man in order to secure her acquiescence, the difficult question in determining whether rape has occurred is at what point there is too much force. Sylvester explains that medieval misogynistic views of

women as sexually insatiable put pressure on women to work against the stereotype. To show themselves as lacking in sexual desire, women felt obligated to refuse sexual offers. A woman's "no," then, might mean "yes" or "maybe," a state of affairs that contemporary studies show persists today. Two Middle English Breton lais are then discussed: *Sir Degaré*, where an unmarried woman is raped, and *Sir Gowther*, where the sexual encounter is more ambiguous since it is not clear whether the heroine knows that she is engaging in sex with a demon rather than her husband. Transitivity analysis does not clear up this ambiguity, and Sylvester concludes that the "difficulty, therefore, or perhaps the thrill for the reader, is that it is impossible to tell where these sexual encounters lie on the twin axes of wish-fulfillment and rape" (p. 61). Sylvester argues that whereas feminists complain that patriarchy does not allow any place for the expression of authentic female desire, the construction of heterosexuality has meant that women "collude in producing female passivity as erotic" (p. 65). While she provides some compelling examples of studies on contemporary women readers of romance, Sylvester does not examine the construction of female reading positions in medieval romance, a subject

treated by a number of scholars, most notably Roberta Krueger.¹

Chapter 3 turns to the formation of masculine identity with a focus on Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. The chapter begins with a succinct analysis of the Church ideal of male celibacy and argues that it provoked guilt and resentment in men about their sexual need. One sees in medieval fiction a corresponding sadomasochistic dynamic whereby the male sadist desires to punish and humiliate the female masochist. While there is a passing mention of Lacan (in a footnote discussing Slavoj Žižek), the chapter could have benefited from greater discussion of medievalist scholarship on desire and subjectivity.² Sylvester then considers critical debate on Troilus's masculinity: is he emasculated or too forceful? Applying transitivity analysis to the first encounter between the lovers, Sylvester shows that Troilus abdicates the role of forceful masculine lover (few of his material processes affect Criseyde, for example) but that Criseyde does not depart significantly from the passive feminine role. Troilus's active role has simply shifted onto Pandarus, who does all of the "leading, nudging, and commanding" (p. 88).

Troilus does show more agency than Criseyde in the

consummation scene in Book 3 of *Troilus and Criseyde*, which counters the view held by some scholars that the relationship emphasizes mutuality. The more interesting conclusion is that Pandarus does not take vicarious pleasure in the consummation of the lovers as has been claimed: he has no behavioral processes, and thus is not affected by the sexual encounter. Ultimately, argues Sylvester, the sadomasochistic relationship between Troilus and Criseyde emphasizes both lovers' lack of agency and responsibility indicative of the "need to overcome guilt in the face of desire for both women and men" (p. 127).

Chapter 5 focuses on the fabliaux, distinguished from romance by greater sexual license and obscenity, to test whether the construction of heterosexuality applied only to romance. Sylvester usefully summarizes debates about the degree to which fabliaux actually endorse greater sexual freedom, although she neglects recent key studies of the genre and does not adequately acknowledge the importance of humor in narrative structure.³ She concludes that fabliaux might debase romance conventions, but the two genres share an emphasis on triangulated desire and on the impossibility for women to articulate their desire. This impossibility is succinctly

stated in her brief discussion of the fabliau “Le Chevalier qui fist sa femme confesse,” where the wife complains: “husbands are so crude and full of hostility that we don’t dare to be open with them or to tell them our needs. Why, if they heard us ask for what we needed they’d think of us as whores” (p. 159). This compelling articulation, in a medieval text, of the problematic issue of feminine desire makes me wonder why Sylvester didn’t give more attention to other explicit medieval statements about female and male roles, particularly in conduct literature which, like literary texts, are important scripts that construct sexuality. Both the “deceived wife” in *Dame Sirith* and the “deceiving wife” in Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale* show that despite the fabliaux’ apparent license, in fact they rely on the woman’s “no” and the man’s forceful masculinity to counter her resistance. Less convincing is the claim that Alison, the heroine of the *Miller’s Tale*, gets to have “sex without responsibility”: the resistance strategy attributed to Alison to delay having sex with Nicholas seems quite different from the passivity exhibited by the heroines described elsewhere in the book. The book concludes with an epilogue on the endurance of medieval romance scripts in contemporary constructions of

heterosexual roles and includes a well-crafted index.

Readers will take away from the book a renewed appreciation for the importance of reading carefully. Although the painstaking linguistic analyses of the book do not always significantly revise previous scholarly interpretations, some of the readings, as well as the twenty tables tabulating the processes performed by the main characters, are quite helpful in suggesting how to take apart carefully our assumptions about character motivation, agency, and behavior. The book neglects some of the most important recent work on gender and subjectivity in medieval studies, but it helpfully touches on recent debates and skillfully brings our attention to the way heterosexual scripts operate in medieval fiction. Teachers of undergraduates will find particularly compelling the many discussions of contemporary romance that demonstrate the continued relevance of medieval literature for the study of gender in today’s classrooms.

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END NOTES

1. Roberta Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge

UP, 1993). Helen Solterer's study of the female respondent figure, highly relevant to the discussion on rape as a response to "female prevarication," is also an indispensable treatment of the construction of female discursive positions in medieval texts: *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (U of California P, 1995), especially pp. 35-47.

2. Sarah Kay and Simon Gaunt's work, for example, although focusing largely on troubadour poetry, has been widely influential and useful.

3. Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge UP, 1995) has a chapter on the fabliaux, and my *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature* (U of Michigan P, 2003) examines the fabliaux as they relate to medieval norms of feminine modesty.



Rebecca Rushforth, *St. Margaret's Gospel Book: The Favorite Book of an Eleventh-Century Queen of Scots*. The Bodleian Library, 2007. Pp. 114.

Rebecca Rushforth effectively situates the Gospel Book of St Margaret of Scotland (ca. 1046-1093) through the use of analogous images. A total of 67 pictures, often more informative (and certainly more illustrative) than lengthy textual analyses, are

included within the concise 114 pages. She also contributes to existing, but sparse, scholarship on this item by viewing it from a distinctly feminist perspective in terms of its possible female authorship, textual orientation, and ownership.

Rushforth begins with a tantalizingly brief introduction explaining the significance of the work being studied. It seems the book, one of which the queen was particularly fond, was accidentally dropped while crossing a stream. It was later recovered and found to have sustained only minimal water damage. This miracle, the only one associated with Margaret during her lifetime, was dutifully recorded in both her *Vita* and a little poem at the beginning of the book itself. This latter inscription allowed the book to be identified by Miss Lucy Hill after the Bodleian Library acquired it in 1887 for the unimposing amount of six pounds. Thus, it was rescued from historical oblivion not once, but twice.

The owner of the book, Margaret, Queen of Scots, was the granddaughter of Edmund Ironside, who had briefly been king of England (1017) before the conquest by Cnut (1016-1035). Following the Norman Conquest in 1066, she and her family fled to