

Acceptance in the academy came to us just as the movements that had fueled our thinking were breaking up, losing steam, or changing direction. So our respectability — precarious and vital, of course — coincides with our greater distance from the vital popular movements; cynics might say the latter explains the former.

It is perhaps over-obvious to say that Graff's and Ohmann's overviews have particular resonance for those of us in women's studies. Boringly and predictably, the immediacy of the "Us-and-Them" struggle within the male supremacist academy, and the isolation of academic professionals from other social groups, continues to keep women apart.

To juxtapose a sampling of the volume's subsequent essays which elucidate the shape of feminist literary criticism is to expose, willy-nilly, some of feminism's internal conflicts and intentions. While Catharine R. Stimpson ("What Am I Doing When I Do Women's Studies in 1990?") exuberantly canvasses the hard-won accomplishments of American women's studies, Nelly Y. McKay ("Literature and Politics: Black Feminist Scholars Reshaping Literary Education in the White University") hones in on exclusionary practices amongst feminist literary critics. Kate Ellis ("What Is the Matter With Mary Jane? Feminist Criticism in a Time of Diminished Expectations") takes time to rehearse the reception of French feminist theory by suspicious American feminists, whereas Lillian S. Robinson ("Some Historical Refractions") pauses to reflect sardonically on her twenty-year career as an independent/dispossessed/unemployed yet active feminist scholar. The contradictions between these reviews, arguments, and narratives are instructive and evocative. It all suggests the necessity for more exchange, more academic roles, more theory-making, to attain productive differences.

By the end of *LPLP*, we get the picture: politics has not been "left" behind in American English departments (any more than it has in Canadian ones). Progressive theory and practice has flourished enough to develop the possibility of theoretical and critical pluralism which exceeds reified positions. There is hope that divisions between

social groups, mirrored in factionalized university politics, can be overcome. Despite pernicious state interference — especially with regard to revised systems of funding — and notwithstanding dreary reactionary bodies within universities, newly introduced theoretical positions over the last twenty years have gained, at the cost of some ruined careers and a great deal of institutional backpedalling, significant public space in the academy. However, *LPLP* incites us to more than any "bloody but unbowed" posturing. Its clear yet complex analyses of our quintessentially middle-class profession galvanizes us to go on considering strategies, both reactive and visionary, for furthering emancipatory politics.

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**The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World.** Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (eds.). Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1991, Pp. 311.

The first question arising from the ambitious subtitle of these essays on medieval literature will regard the character of the collection: Is this a true thematic study, responsibly embracing the whole of its subject; or is it another bundle of related material, a non-book, such as one comes to expect of anthologies? Although the individual contributions are first-rate — all of them — the finest feature of the work is its editors' commitment to relative comprehensiveness. The cover labels the project honestly.

The introduction by Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector is indispensable. The question their writers study is "whether companionate and reciprocal love, love as requisite to marriage, emerged in any significant way before the later seventeenth century." In the end, a hypothesis of revisionist cultural history is convincingly borne out, "that sanctioned erotic attachments [James Thomson's 'esteem enlivened by desire'] not only preceded any modern ideal of marriage but also made it historically intelligible." Yet, what the essayists discover

in the *olde daunce* of love is not a fixed ideal but "an essentially contested term." As the editors lay out their plan — three studies on the historical context of marriage, four on representations of love and marriage in continental vernacular literature, and six on Chaucer's treatment of love — they provide a background of literary history for each unit by summarizing a century's scholarship.

The historical contributions begin with Elizabeth A. Clark's tracing of the early Christian debate on marriage, especially the development of Augustine's views. Though Augustine's marital ideal emphasized consensual and affective elements (a marriage, he thought, was made by the pledge of affection of the soul), his polemics against extremists led him to accentuate the sexual and reproductive domains, in an effort to defend their goodness; and this accent governed Catholic thinking into the mid-twentieth century. A severe limitation in Augustine is his inability to transcend his era's attitude toward women.

Michael M. Sheehan follows with "*Maritalis Affectio* Revisited," an examination of the Scriptural and legal sources of the ideology of marriage. This ecclesiastical ideology, he asserts, preceded social change, though it was only haltingly embodied. Sheehan believes that the evidence which shows medieval marriage to have been a merely judicial state, not deeply engaging the personality, has been gathered from "a rather specialized set of documents and that they relate to a small part of medieval society." Not limiting the theological tradition to ecclesiastical pronouncements, he proposes studying other more representative sources. When Pope Alexander III (1159–81) stressed that marital affection ought to thrive in marriage, remarks Sheehan, "a static notion was replaced by one implying the desirability of growth."

Erik Kooper continues the study of marital affection with a survey of medieval theology. Were spouses seen as equals? Noting Jean de Meun's insistence that a man should speak of his wife, not as his lady, but as *sa pareille et sa compaigne* (*Roman de la Rose*, 9391–9400), Kooper traces two historical streams in the development of the equality con-

cept: a monastic Augustinian and a philosophical Aristotelian one. The Augustinian stream, which gives us the "rib topos," is the older. Hugh of St. Victor hands down the explanation that Eve enjoys equality of association with Adam, having been taken from the centre of his body, though her being made from man's body betrays a kind of inferiority. Other commentators, including Aquinas, linked equality to Aristotelian notions of friendship.

*The Olde Daunce's* historical survey includes no study of monasticism, an institution which is neither properly nor usefully identified with the Church, though it arrogated to itself all Christian symbols and themes and exercised an immeasurable influence upon the entire culture. A discriminating look at the manner in which monastic norms filled the vacuum of lay spirituality would have contributed substantially to understanding problems exhibited in writers of genius at the end of the era.

The study of such writers, from the continent first, begins with A.C. Spearing's "The Medieval Poet as Voyeur," a brief reading of Beroul's *Tristan*, Guillaume de Lorris's portion of the *Roman de la Rose*, and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The author indicates what medieval poets felt to be a moral compromise inherent in love poetry, the voyeurism shared by poet and reader. Spearing adds examples from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and William Dunbar's *The Golden Targe* (where, even as in the *Roman*, "the poet perceives female sexuality as a form of aggression").

R.W. Hanning's exploration of love and power portrays an age discovering how to substitute the aggression of almost continuous war with "an exploration of the potential for personal and social empowerment inherent in the most private sphere of human feelings, emotions, and intellectual capacities." He finds this idea in Chretien de Troyes's *Yvain* and in the *lais* of Marie de France (*Guigemar* and *Yonec*). Another polarity is considered by Giovanni Sincropi's "Chastity and Love in the *Decameron*." In Boccaccio's story of Nastagio degli Onesti, the author points to a thematic opposition which runs "from the affirmation that the reasons of chastity must prevail over the reasons of love ... to

the affirmation that the reasons of love and those of chastity may coexist." Jerome Mazzaro completes the unit with a discussion of Dante's transition "From *Fin Amour* to Friendship." In a rich context of Aristotle's *Ethics*, Cicero's *De Amicitia*, the Bible, the Mass, Augustine's *Confessions*, and Aquinas, the poet traced a tradition of friendship, enabling him (in the summation of the editors) "to go beyond disparate states [monastic, clerical, lay] to imagine a spiritual community infused with both virtue and affect."

The largest part of *The Olde Daunce* is given to Chaucerian scholarship. It is difficult to imagine a more effective liberation from simplistic notions of medieval consciousness regarding sex and love than exposure to the mind of Chaucer. Those who will not delight in him as artist must read him as witness to an age. Robert R. Edwards discerns in "The Legend of Good Women" an underlying critique of the amorous conventions of the day: "As Chaucer translates the authors who preserve a culture's memory, he also uncovers what the culture would suppress." John M. Fyler, ranging widely, examines Chaucerian language (e.g., a double meaning in *man*) as a form of sexual politics: Chaucer "subjects all the conventional literary treatments of women by men, critical or adulatory, to a debunking examination of motive." He shows that antifeminism and "an unworldly standard of female virtue" are opposite sides of the same coin. Finally, an assessment which our generation must consider a large claim indeed: "Chaucer shows himself to be well aware of the confining effect of gender" and of the ways in which his own voice speaks from drives that cannot be separated from gender.

Whether such a confining effect is exhibited in "The Franklin's Tale" is the subject of the next two essays. Alan T. Gaylord believes Kittredge's reading of the story as a solution to the pilgrims' mar-

riage discussion is a mere "reading forward," or a succumbing to the Franklin's narrative technique. A "reading backward," a process of scrutinizing motives and the mechanisms of fiction, would uncover a spousal accord that was never won but only wished into being by the male narrator. Dorigen, the good wife, embodies a passivity that is "the feminine version of strong deeds." James I. Wimsatt, on the other hand, focuses on the Franklin's thesis that spouses should be friends, and finds in the poet's awareness of the tradition that supports this assertion a marshalling of great authority. The argument that the married should not attempt to assert mastery over one another is, he thinks, too significant in this context to be anything but the poet's message.

A similar duo of views follows on "The Prioress's Tale." Stephen Spector deconstructs the contradictions of the Prioress's love, the intersection of love and hate, and "the restless Chaucerian marriage of contraries." In this child's world of the Prioress, anti-Jewishness is hatred of an evil which the Christian devotee perceives and fears within herself. The nun's love for the child-victim, with whom in her childlikeness she identifies, is a self-love. In Marie Borroff's article, however, while negative values in the Prioress are not ignored, the impetus of her song is acknowledged. She sees no further than a fantasy world, "the simplest and most reductive oppositions of adversary Christianity," and she is "a sentimental, self-indulgent lady"; nevertheless, she celebrates a celestial love of which she is confidently hopeful of being a recipient.

*The Olde Daunce*, at its most accessible, would be an excellent text for gifted undergraduates in advanced courses. It has an index and ample documentation. To read it is to long for the spread of its beautifully integrated scholarship, especially in multidisciplinary programs.

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