

Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law (New Cultural Studies)

- 4(1985), 361-373. [Ed. note: See also Gravdal's *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (University of Pennsylvania, 1991).]
- 9 L. D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. (Houghton, 1987) xxii.
- 10 Lee Patterson, "No Man His Reson Herde: Peasant Consciousness, Chaucer's Miller, and the Structure of the *Canterbury Tales*," in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530* (Berkeley, 1990), 113-155.
- 11 Stephen Knight, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford, 1986), 52.
- 12 The rapist's trial by women in the Wife of Bath's Tale is an especially revolutionary statement when we consider how difficult it was to indict a man on charges of rape during the fourteenth century, and that only a hundred years before, rape had not been considered a felony. For details see Barbara Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities 1300-1348* (Harvard, 1979), 104-110.

FORUM: ON COLLABORATION IN FEMINIST MEDIEVAL SCHOLARSHIP

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HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND MEDIEVAL WOMEN'S MEDICINE

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IN READING the discussions between historians and literary scholars in past issues of the *MFN*, and in participating in an interdisciplinary feminist study group over the past several years, I have been both fascinated and frustrated by the dynamic interactions between medieval historians and literary scholars. I have been fascinated because I feel strongly that medical literature needs to be assessed critically as constructed texts reflecting many of the same constraints and possibilities for manipulation of genre, rhetoric, and language that characterize other kinds of texts; but as of yet, I have gotten little guidance from literary scholars on how to engage in such analysis, since most work has concentrated on belletristic or devotional texts, rather than technical prose (what the Germans neatly call *Fachliteratur* or *Fachprosa*).

The texts I work with beg for a historical analysis that pays attention to the texts *as texts*. I am currently completing an edition, translation, and historical commentary of the three Latin gynecological and cosmetic treatises attributed to or called "Trotula." (These have no direct relation to the authentic *Practica* of the woman healer Trota.) The first of these, the *Trotula major*, has in its preface a claim that the author wrote the treatise because women were too ashamed to bare their ills to a male physician. Although this is not a direct statement of intended audience, it does imply that the author intended that the text be used by women.

The normal historian's response is to say "Whoopie!" (or something to that effect): here we have a text meant for women and we can use it to see how women, reacting against male interference and taking control of their own bodies, conceived of and treated their medical conditions in the Middle Ages. The problem (and it is a sobering one) is that this same theme of women's use is rehearsed again and again in medieval gynecological texts, even when we know that men were the principal readers. This repetition of the theme of shame need not invalidate the sincere intentions of any specific author or translator, but it does force us to acknowledge that the preface to the *Trotula major* and others like it are perhaps as tradition-bound as the rest of the medical descriptions and remedies that make up the body of the text.

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