

Leeds Studies in English

New Series XLV

2014

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Leeds Studies in English

<www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

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2014

trial by ordeal (Laws of Ine) or that did not ban private vengeance but rather sought to mitigate it (by sublimating it into *wergeld*), or that clarified how vengeance could be pursued (Edmund II's blood-feud laws). However, in the short afterword (pp. 140–42), Baker lets his readers in on the original intention of his study, which was to propose a semiotics of conflict in *Beowulf*. He observes that violence is structured like a language, and any exchange of blows or a feud functions like a dialogue. This would have been a fascinating read and also a highly-needed study. Despite the author's modest demur about his ability to write it, I think it would be only fitting for Peter Baker to complete his ambitious plan. Judging by the complex approaches, the innovative solutions, and the overall high quality of his scholarship in this monograph, he has all the resources to accomplish it.

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Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages, ed. by Larissa Tracy. *Medieval Cultures* 32. Cambridge: Brewer, 2013. xiii + 351 pp. ISBN 978-1-84384-351-1.

This collection of essays brings together a range of researchers interested in the theme of castration from the late Roman to the Early Modern period. This volume is notable among similar compilations for the effectiveness with which the articles create a coherent whole, starting with the brilliant introduction by Larissa Tracy. Over the past twenty years, medieval sexuality and medieval masculinity have received much attention, but 'very little has been done specifically on *medieval* castration' (p. 3) and this excellent collection of essays provides a detailed and stimulating analysis on the subject. Students and scholars will find Tracy's introduction and footnotes a helpful overview on historical, interpretative and bibliographical matters. Moreover, the introduction lays out the primary theoretical arguments that link this collection of essays.

The volume is divided into fourteen chapters, each containing an article treating a facet of the question, and is organized in chronological order, beginning with Reusch's article on the archaeology of castration, and proceeding, through various medieval texts and sources, to bodily mutilation in Shakespeare's works. It appears quite evident that the book could be divided into three sections, the first containing the eight chapters that deal with late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the second (chapters 9–13) more focused on the high and later Middle Ages, then concluding with chapter 14 on the early modern period. This incisive collection is mostly successful in achieving its aim and the only flaw is that the first chapter seems disconnected from the whole. Although the theme is obviously the same, Reusch's article ('Raised Voices: The Archaeology of Castration', pp. 29–47) is the only text that does not analyse a written source and, unfortunately, as the author openly states, her work is limited by the scarcity of historical sources describing how and where castrated people were buried. Nonetheless, Reusch provides useful information to better understand the living condition of some more successful eunuchs.

Shaun Tougher's essay ('The Aesthetics of Castration: The Beauty of Roman Eunuchs', pp. 48–72) brilliantly explores some major works written by Roman and Byzantine historians in which the question of the aesthetics of castration is raised. After highlighting the difference between the Galli, the self-castrated religious devotees of a Mother Goddess, and the beautiful and desirable castrated slave boys who lived in the Roman Empire, Tougher provides an excellent analysis of the role of eunuchs during the Roman Empire and their relationship with

the emperors. He demonstrates convincingly how these attractive, youthful eunuchs became the archetypical ‘pretty boys’ and how they were perceived by contemporaries.

Jack Collins, through his interest in Jewish tradition and Christian religion, stresses the points of divergence between the two cultures (‘Appropriation and Development of Castration as Symbol and Practice in Early Christianity’, pp. 73–86). The starting point of Collins’ analysis is Matthew 19:11–12 and how these words, pronounced by Jesus, reversed the Jewish perspective on eunuchs and influenced the idea of celibacy, sexual (in)continence and castration in the early Christian communities. Collins’ brilliant analysis also includes excerpts of texts written by the first Christian theologians, such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Eusebius, among others. I appreciated the fact that Collins included in his article all the original texts (in Hebrew and Greek) with their translation.

Larissa Tracy’s article (‘“Al defouleden is holie bodi”’: Castration, the Sexualization of Torture, and Anxieties of Identity in the *South English Legendary*’, pp. 87–107) provides an interesting and detailed analysis of the absence of castration as a form of torture in the thirteenth-century *South English Legendary*. She explains not only why castration is not a component of martyrdom but also how this contributes to reinforce an English notion of national identity. Her analysis also highlights the question of gendered identity, paying special attention to the construction and deconstruction of gender identity in hagiography. The only weakness of this article is the absence of a translation into modern English of the selected Middle English excerpts. Moreover, its placement between Collins’ and Bremmer’s articles is somewhat odd: as I mentioned, the order of the articles is chronological, so placing Tracy’s study between two papers on early medieval subjects breaks the logical sequence of the papers.

In the next article (‘The Children He Never Had; The Husband She Never Served: Castration and Genital Mutilation in Medieval Frisian Law’, pp. 108–30), Rolf H. Bremmer Jr. provides an in-depth overview on genital mutilation in early medieval laws. Although the title refers to Frisian law, the paper deals with a wider range of examples drawn from different legal texts and compares them to Frisian material, focusing on castration as a punitive measure, along with the compensation specified in the Frisian registers for genital mutilation. It must be said that this essay is one of the most engaging reads I have had on the subject, as the descriptions offer a vivid picture of the subject.

Jay Paul Gates (‘The *Fulmannod* Society: Social Valuing of the (Male) Legal Subject’, pp. 131–48) states that his study of Anglo-Saxon laws ‘attempts to fill [the] gap by drawing the lay, male, sexed body and work in Anglo-Saxon England into dialogue in order to consider how Anglo-Saxons understood the function and value of the sexed male body’ (p. 135). Although Gates provides a thorough analysis of the law codes of Æthelberht and Alfred concerning injury tariffs, his attempt to define the man’s value through Anglo-Saxon riddles is far from persuasive. Nevertheless, I found that Gates’ article offers a clear and comprehensive comparison between Æthelberht’s and Alfred’s law codes and how they reflect the social function of the individual.

The next article (Charlene M. Eska’s ‘“Imbrued un their owne bloud”’: Castration in Early Welsh and Irish Sources’, pp. 149–73) can be read as a logical continuation of Gates’ paper, as Eska reviews the medieval Welsh and Irish laws that, like their Anglo-Saxon equivalents, are based on a system of compensation. By examining the Welsh and Irish law codes and annals, Eska explains that the influence of the Norman Conquest could have increased the practice of castration in these territories, although many annalistic sources possibly recorded this procedure as ‘blinding’ or ‘mutilating’, due to the sensitive nature of the matter.

Mary A. Valante's essay ('Castrating Monks: Vikings, Slave Trade, and the Value of Eunuchs', pp. 174–87) could be seen as an extension of Tougher's article, since Valante analyses the role of Vikings in the European and North-African slave trade of eunuchs. Given the increasing demand for eunuchs in Byzantine and Arab territories, Vikings raids played a key role in the economics of the slave trade and Valante effectively shows one of the functions of the traffic of monastic slaves.

The following five chapters focus on text analysis, with Anthony Adams' essay ('"He took a stone away": Castration and Cruelty in the Old Norse *Sturlunga Saga*', pp. 188–209) acting as a transition between the two sections. Adams explores excerpts of *Sturlunga saga* that mention castration and compares them to other sagas as well as to Norwegian and Swedish laws. His result is a persuasive study of Norse masculinity and Old Norse society in general, highlighting how masculinity was the feature through which people (men *and* women) and their honour were judged.

The four subsequent essays deal with French vernacular texts ('The Castrating of the Shrew: The Performance of Masculinity and Masculine Identity in *La dame escolliee*' by Mary E. Leech, pp. 210–28; 'Eunuchs of the Grail' by Jed Chandler, pp. 229–54; 'Insinuating Indeterminate Gender: A Castration Motif in Guillaume de Lorris's *Romans de la Rose*' by Ellen Lorraine Friedrich, pp. 255–79; 'Culture Loves a Void: Eunuchry in *De Vetula* and Jean le Fèvres's *La Vieille*', pp. 280–94). Leech provides a fascinating discussion of *La dame escolliee*, in which the dominating figure of the mother-in-law is punished by the symbolic transformation of her female body into a male one, subverting not only gender conventions but also the concept of masculinity. In this fabliau, a woman is symbolically castrated because she was emulating the behaviour of a man (and her husband is a failure in his role as a male) and Leech offers a particularly interesting analysis of the diegetic role of this female castration.

In 'Eunuchs of the Grail', Jed Chandler brilliantly discusses the role of Perceval and his symbolic castration in the Arthurian romances linked to the Grail (Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval le Conte du Graal*, *Perlesvaus*, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and the *Vulgate Lancelot*). The author's consistent close reading of the mentioned texts not only provides an in-depth analysis of the character of Perceval and of his metaphorical castration, but also examines in detail the figure of the Grail virgin/Grail beast and its sexual ambiguity, which transcends gender and associates auto-castration with virginal purity. The following chapter is dedicated to Friedrich's essay on the castration motif in Guillaume de Lorris' *Le Roman de la Rose*. The starting point of Friedrich's analysis is an unusual piece of marginalia (a self-castrating beaver) at the bottom of the opening page of Guillaume de Lorris' text in British Library MS Stowe 947. This original study asserts that this image, which recalls castration, placed below the miniature of Oiseuse, an ambiguous figure, suggests non-normative, masculine same-sex sexual desire.

The last article dealing with French vernacular literature, perfectly linked with the previous chapter, is by Robert L. A. Clark and analyses the passages on eunuchry found in the Pseudo-Ovidian Latin poem *De Vetula* and in Jean Le Fèvre's *La Vieille*. Although it would have been interesting to examine both texts equally, this study is not a comparison, even if sometimes the two texts are juxtaposed, but rather a full analysis of eunuchry in *De Vetula*. Finally, the last essay, written by Karin Selberg and Lena Wänggren ('The Dismemberment of Will: Early Modern Fear of Castration', pp. 295–313) is an interesting and somehow different study on physical mutilation in Shakespeare's plays, which follows the Freudian concept of castration applied to literature.

The select bibliography at the end of the volume is satisfactory, especially when combined with footnotes (rich and detailed in almost all papers). While the contents of this book are naturally uneven, the volume nonetheless offers several outstanding essays of significant interest and importance, and specialists will profit from reading it.

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Traditions and Innovations in the Study of Medieval English Literature: The Influence of Derek Brewer, ed. by Charlotte Brewer and Barry Windeatt. Cambridge: Brewer, 2013. ix + 317 pp. ISBN 9781843843542.

Today's diverse and intricate approaches to Middle English literature can seem overwhelming, especially to those first reading a text or genre. Although introductory works exist, they rarely explore particular methodologies and their influence in full. *Traditions and Innovations* indirectly fills this gap by engaging with the studies of one of the field's most prominent scholars over the past sixty years or so.

Despite its appearance, this volume is not a *Festschrift*. It instead seeks 'to illustrate the importance of Brewer's ideas and influence for Medieval English scholarship both of his time and subsequently' (p. 17). Although Brewer's key role in publishing many works on medieval studies is discussed occasionally (such as by the introduction, pp. 6–7, and Barry Windeatt, pp. 262–78 at 277), the volume focuses on his works and how they affected (and affect) later scholarship. His methodology is explained as reading in the proper context of medieval culture and society, and without modern presuppositions. This approach is followed by the contributors throughout their chapters.

The contributors, who knew Brewer well, provide many anecdotes from his life while discussing his influence on their work and the field as a whole. The writing paints an intimate portrait and is sometimes tinged with colour and candour, such as Pearsall's repeated quotations from Brewer's creative writing and comparison of his life with Chaucer's (pp. 18–33). Interestingly, Brewer's experiences are presented as context for better understanding his own works and ideologies. This is in a fashion similar to Brewer's own reading of medieval literature. Pearsall's survey of the development of Brewer's theoretical approaches during his career is particularly interesting, as it suggests how some events might have inspired intellectual stances and professional growth.

The topics covered are closely related to Brewer's interests. Many of the chapters touch on Chaucer (Derek Pearsall and Alastair Minnis), and others discuss various aspects of *Troilus and Criseyde* in particular (Mary Carruthers, A. C. Spearing, and Jacqueline Tasioulas). There are also particularly interesting chapters on Malory and the Arthurian cycles (Elizabeth Archibald), class and the French of England (Christopher Cannon), and friendship in romance (Corinne Saunders). Other chapters on varied aspects of Middle English narratives (by Helen Cooper, Jill Mann, James Simpson, Windeatt, and R. F. Yeager) and the nuances of language and manuscripts (Charlotte Brewer and A. S. G. Edwards) round out the collection.

Brewer's influence is not explicitly argued or explored, but is instead shown through the chapters that engage with his work. They reiterate his arguments in old debates, reapply his methods in new studies, or continue earlier collaborations, in 'a sequence of conversations with, and developments from, aspects of Brewer's work' (p. 16). They are predominantly literary in their approach, as the title of the volume might suggest, with little consideration