

GALE SIGAL, *Erotic Dawn-Songs of the Middle Ages. Voicing the Lyric Lady*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996. Pp. 241. ISBN: 0-8130-1381-x. \$49.95.

In her recent book *Erotic Dawn-Songs of the Middle Ages. Voicing the Lyric Lady*, Gale Sigal attempts to examine the female presence in the *alba*. After an overview of scholarship that deals mostly with generic theory and origin, Sigal goes further and asserts that while these questions are interesting and necessary in themselves, few scholars have truly appreciated the '*alba* vision of love...[as] a new, vital, and liberating contrast to the subjection and mocking of women in real life as well as in other literary forms' (19). This *alban* vision of love is described by Sigal as 'antimatrimonial, individualising, rebellious and by extension, ennobling' (18). The author, placing the *alba* lady between the *canso domna* and the *pastourelle* shepherdess, explores the *alba* lady's uniqueness in comparison to feminine images found in other medieval genres.

Using examples from *albas* written in Old French, Old Provençal, Middle High German, and Middle English, in well-done translations, Sigal shows that while this passionate and strong *alba* lady comes to us *via* the pen of a male troubadour, the *alba* lady stands out among medieval images of women because of the dignity and respect accorded her by her lover, the watchman and the audience of the *alba*.

In chapter two, Sigal deals deftly with sex-role analysis and shows that 'because both sexes in the *albas* show the same preoccupation with pleasure, love, and loyalty as well as pain, anger and fear of abandonment, *alba* love is portrayed as an equalizing and humanizing experience not dichotomized into male-female polarities' (71).

In chapter three, the author tackles the question of the *alba* lady's social rank in comparison to her lover and concludes that due to the 'side-by-side' position of the lovers so prominent in the genre, the lovers are in fact equal. This adds to the aforementioned theory that the *alba* lady does not suffer the inequality of the *canso domna* or the *pastourelle* shepherdess, and in fact one finds many of the same arguments and ideas repeated in this and the previous chapter, to the extent that one finds the same three quotations used in the same sequence in chapters two and three to prove essentially the same point ('By the noblest who could be...' pp. 41, 55; 'While I lay supine...' pp. 41, 55; 'Then he drew himself to me...' pp. 43, 57).

The second part of the book (chapters four and five) deals with the symbiotic nature of the *alba* lovers' relationship, tracing this idea from Greek and Roman philosophers to those of the Middle Ages and right up to modern psychoanalysis in order to emphasize the difficulty with which lovers separate themselves from each other at the dawn. The last chapter deals with the symbolism of the dawn, and in the conclusion Sigal talks fittingly of the theme of separation.

This book, which includes a bibliography of works cited and an extensive index, would be suited to those wishing a more thorough introduction to this all too often ignored genre.

ANGELA MATTIACCI
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton