

the white male students who feel they are under enough attack as it is. This thinking was reinforced for me by a white male student who told me that when he first stepped into my class he thought he had “walked into P.C. hell.” But then, he said, after I had taken time to explain the reasoning behind my desire to avoid things like gender-exclusive language, he agreed with me. It is equally important to students that I meet debate over issues like gender-exclusive language head-on. Several of my students took great joy in pointing out to me that the textbook I had assigned contained an etymological defense of gender-exclusive language. It happened to be easily refutable since the authors imprudently chose to slip the argument in with a discussion of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*. I was able to ask my students why, if the authors were right about “man” including everyone, Olympe de Gouges thought it necessary to contemporaneously publish the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen*? But the fact that I had included that reading in their assignment, although I disagreed with it, apparently enhanced my credibility.

Some of these strategies may seem overly obvious or unnecessary to those of us who have fully embraced feminism in our lives and our work. The most difficult part of teaching for me is to convey the importance and cogency of an idea that I have so deeply integrated into my thinking as to sometimes render it inseparable from the way that I view history. Of course, as medievalists we also face the issue of whether the application of feminist terminology and critique to the Middle Ages is even acceptable. But hopefully, as feminist scholarship rewrites history, we will all be better able to integrate women and history so that our students will find feminism to be unquestionably part of the learning material.

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## BOOK REVIEWS



Goldberg, P.J.P. *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. Pp. xii, 406.

Much recent work by historians of medieval women has concentrated either on religious women or on representations of women. Here, by contrast, is a work on real women living their everyday working lives in the secular world. Goldberg discusses in detail the kinds of work women did and how this affected their choices about where to live and when or whether to marry. This is not a book for the undergraduate or general reader: even for a graduate course I would assign a few of Goldberg’s many articles on these topics, rather than the entire tome. For the specialist, however, Goldberg has made available an abundance of data and a thought-provoking interpretation.

In chapters dense with both anecdotal and aggregate data, Goldberg discusses the various types of work women performed, the role of service employment as a life-cycle phenomenon, patterns of marriage and marriage formation, and migration. He argues

that during the period after the Black Death work opportunities for women were relatively very good and that this led to a lower rate of nuptiality and to a later age of marriage for women. When they had relatively favorable work opportunities, women could afford to be more choosy in selecting a husband. Goldberg makes no claims for the general applicability of his model to medieval Europe: his findings contrast with those of David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber for Tuscany in the same period, and especially in the last chapter he discusses why this might be so. Throughout the work his detailed knowledge of the York records and Poll Tax returns for York and elsewhere are combined with thorough familiarity with published sources for other parts of England and the work of other scholars.

The most refreshing aspect of Goldberg's work is his firm emphasis on women's agency. He does not only attempt to determine what is particular about women's patterns of work and migration, as opposed to other studies which do not purport to be about men exclusively but in fact derive their data from sources that refer largely to men. He also discusses women's employment and marriage not in terms of impersonal forces like economic change and nuptiality rates but in terms of individual women making choices. This focus on women, the importance of their work in the medieval economy and their decision making in the structure of the medieval household, is too often absent in the work of demographers and social historians other than self-identified feminists. It is a pleasure to find Goldberg adopting it. There is, however, a danger of going too far in viewing late medieval women as independent decision makers. Goldberg places perhaps too little weight on the cultural context in which these women made their decisions. Marriage did remain the norm in medieval society, and that women were less likely to be forced into unpleasant marriages than at other times does not make them modern career-minded yuppies. The period of these enhanced opportunities was relatively short, and as it ended women may have been increasingly pressured to marry just at the time that it became more difficult for them to find partners. The elusive Golden Age for medieval women will not be found here.

Goldberg's writing tends toward the cautious and wordy. He discusses in detail potential problems in the use of each type of source, which is extremely useful to the scholar wishing to evaluate the conclusions he draws but which makes the book somewhat dry. His adoption of social-science language tends to obscure the fact that many conclusions turn out to be drawn from good old anecdotal evidence. All medieval social historians use anecdotal evidence; it is often all that is available, and it brings life to dry concepts. However, it is important to distinguish it from other evidence with a stronger claim to representativeness. Goldberg provides more background than necessary, both a review of the historiography on women and work and a summary of the economy of York and Yorkshire in the period. His comments on previous scholarship are at times a trifle ungracious.

Despite these elements which make the book less than a joy to read, this is an impressive piece of research that will greatly influence the terms of debate. Goldberg's detailed attempt to identify and account for variation in the situation of women over time and over space contributes greatly to the historicizing of the feminine experience.

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