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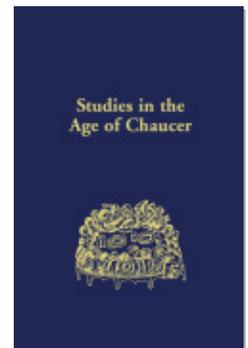
Erotic Dawn Songs of the Middle Ages: Voicing the Lyric Lady
by Gale Sigal (review)

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makes some favorable aesthetic judgments on Dunbar (pp. 185–86), while Seymour castigates regularly Capgrave's writing and scholarly abilities (for example, pp. 218, 221, 225, 233–34, 235).

To borrow a term from Derek Pearsall, whose similarly constructed monograph on John Lydgate appeared in 1997, the present studies are "bio-bibliographies," whose primary purpose is to provide a solid foundation for further study. Essentially, then, these studies concentrate on basic factual material, similar to what one might expect in a well-crafted introduction to a modern EETS edition. Therein lies their utility and value: they collect, synthesize, and print otherwise disparate materials and provide fair and expert guidance to the evaluation of the original sources and later scholarship.

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GALE SIGAL. *Erotic Dawn Songs of the Middle Ages: Voicing the Lyric Lady*.
Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996. Pp. xii, 241. \$49.95.

This careful and sensitive reading of the *alba* in Occitan, Old French, Middle High German, and Middle English is discreetly and convincingly revisionist in both its methods and conclusions. That it succeeds so well is testimony not only to Gale Sigal's scholarship but also, depressingly, to the manner in which received opinion can be perpetuated for so long in the face of contrary evidence. The inability of students of the lyric to offer a proper assessment of the female voice in the *alba* is mainly due, Sigal argues, to their failure to distinguish the genre from the larger body of *canso*, of which it is usually considered a part. It is also refreshing to read a book that celebrates, like the *alba*, the vitality and eloquence of the female voice, rather than condemn the nature and causes of its repression.

The introduction (pp. 1–20) provides a critical review of scholarship (in particular by Hatto, Savile, and Dronke) and briefly raises issues that will be treated in more detail in later chapters. In particular, Sigal notes the paradox of the female voice being articulated by what one must suppose to be male authors; the empathy of male poets with the female subject transcends medieval misogyny and humanizes the courtly *domna*.

In chapter 1, "The Alba Lady: Literary Perspectives" (pp. 23–50), Sigal takes to task earlier scholars such as Savile and Fries for fitting the lady of the *alba* into existing, but inappropriate, categories, usually derived from other genres of the courtly lyric. A brief review of the presentation of women in some narrative genres provides material for comparison, although the courtly romance (where the similarities are surely greater) is given only passing mention. This chapter, like most of the others, also contains some sensitive detailed commentary on individual lyrics. The general humanization of the *alba* lady also implies unabashed intimacy and frank sexuality, resulting in a radically different presentation of women.

Chapter 2, "The *alba* Lady: Sex Roles and Social Roles" (pp. 51–93), opens with the observation that in the *alba*, the lady often initiates the love affair, a fact once more overlooked by earlier scholars. The male-dominated world is excluded from the *alba*, as the love relationships in these poems are defined by mutuality and reciprocity; the lovers, however, are seen as powerless to change the problematic situations in which they find themselves. Despite the frequent presence of the *gelos*, love in the *alba* is not always adulterous; the Middle High German *tageliet* and Chaucer's reworking of the genre in *Troilus and Criseyde* are cases in point.

The relative social positions of the lovers form the subject of chapter 3, "Eros in the Socius" (pp. 94–130). Again, the *alba* forms a clear contrast with other lyric genres, since the relationship between the lovers is presented as horizontal rather than hierarchical. Despite the lover usually being technically the lady's social inferior, the significant social relationship in the *alba* is that between the pair of lovers and the husband, the latter clearly socially superior. Yet as regards the lovers alone, the *alba* is subversive, since it disdains class as well as marriage; if the lovers are alienated from society by the pervasive presence of the *lauzengiers*, they enjoy the approval of God.

Sigal examines the symbolism of night and dawning in chapter 4, "Eros and Dawning Identity" (pp. 133–68). The lovers are alive while the rest of the world sleeps; night obscures the perception of time and stresses the immediacy of the present. Despite, or perhaps because of, Sigal's attempts to demonstrate the development of the *alba* tradition beyond the Middle Ages, there are some rather dizzying chronological leaps in this chapter, particularly as she moves from Donne ("The Sunne Rising") backward through Chaucer, Heinrich von Morungen, and

Giraut de Bornelh. This chapter is nevertheless notable, in my opinion, for an excellent reading of Giraut's "Reis glorios" and its shift in voice from the lady to the lover's male companion, here the *gaita*. The reciprocity of *alba* love also leads through the inseparability of the lovers to an almost androgynous symbiosis.

In chapter 5, "First Light: Mask and Masquerade" (pp. 169–94), Sigal argues that the protagonists of the *alba* reflect a new sense of the self in the second half of the twelfth century, love being the agent of that transformation. This is a much more problematic issue than Sigal seems to admit, content as she is to cite the usual studies on the subject (mainly Morris and Hanning). I am not sure there is an easy way to deal with this subject: it is complex, far from monolithic in nature, and intimately bound up with contemporary developments in philosophy and theology. Nevertheless, the received view that romance heroes are individuals as opposed to the collective and representative heroes of the *chanson de geste* stands in need of revision and refinement. In the last part of the chapter, Sigal shows how dawn is a loaded symbol, the *alba* freezing an untenable situation at the height of its emotional intensity. It symbolizes both union and separation and the transition between them.

In her conclusion, "The Fractured Self" (pp. 195–203), Sigal shows that, despite the symbiosis of the lovers, the *alba* paradoxically separates body from heart, contrasting presence and absence, union and separation. There are notes on pages 205–14, a bibliography on pages 215–29, and an index on pages 321–41.

Since the complete corpus of *albas* is not large, Sigal is able to consider examples from a number of languages and, as I have pointed out, the postmedieval life of the genre. While this comparative approach works well for the most part, there is a sense in which the individual poems by Giraut de Bornelh, Cadenet, Gace Brulé, Heinrich von Morungen, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and others demand to be situated in more depth in their own linguistic and cultural traditions. On the other hand, this would have doubled the length of the book and perhaps detracted from the presentation of the corpus as a coherent tradition. In sum, however, this book provides an excellent reassessment of the *alba* and its originality and is an important contribution to our understanding of the medieval lyric.

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