

scholarship focusing on environmental literature, particularly in respect to issues of race and ethnicity. In “‘Back to the World’: Reading Ecocriticism in a Postcolonial Context,” Susie O’Brien argues that ecocriticism would benefit from learning from postcolonial studies the importance of progressing “from simply analysing texts to looking at the institutional structures that frame such practices” seeking to understand “how they work within, on, and through the categories of culture and environment” (196). By considering a number of environmental issues in light of the colonial and neo-colonial practices that precipitated them, the contributors to *Five Emus* have helped to move the study of environmental literature towards such an analysis, as they critique the imperial policies and institutions that shaped and continue to shape our planet.

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D.H. Green. *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. Pp. xi, 299. \$95.00 Hardcover.

The questions of who has access to intellectual property, namely textuality, and how far, are questions which implicate authority: who reads, who produces for the reader(s), and who is in power? In *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*, D.H. Green takes on this panoramic subject by studying various reading practices between AD 700 and AD 1500, and how these reading practices were conducted. His case studies are drawn from England, France and Germany, focusing on the various categories of women for whom reading is attested, including laywomen, nuns, recluses, semi-religious women and heretics. D.H. Green thus testifies that the popularity of reading practices amongst medieval women was much more common than assumed. His study subsequently suggests that religious women were the vessels of written culture other than clerics and monks, and that laywomen in turn became responsible for the gradual expansion of literacy, especially in the vernacular, by bringing it from religious settings into homes and the court.

The book is divided into two respective parts, with two chapters each — Part I dealing with literal and figurative modes of reading, and Part II dealing with medieval women’s involvement with reading. Chapter I is foundational, where Green therefore defines the varieties of reading as “reading to oneself” as opposed to “reading to others,” with the first mode of reading to oneself being sub-divided into silent reading and reading aloud. Such distinctions are notably fine shading into one another, where private reading might involve

reading aloud. For example, Agly in *Wilhelm von Österreich* desired to read a letter for herself without revealing its contents to others, but dismissed others from her room, therefore suggesting that she must have been reading aloud to herself inside her room. Reading to others might also involve aural listening: “the one who listens” (Green 16) is also categorically a reader even if he or she does not look at the text *per se*. Such famous examples like Criseyde reading a romance of Thebes aloud to an audience of courtly women in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the *Cloud of Unknowing*’s suggestion that “the learned read books, but that the uneducated ‘read’ the learned when they listen to them preaching” (Green 19), establish listening’s simultaneity with vocalized reading in the Middle Ages.

Another important categorical division within this first chapter includes the varying degrees of literacy invoked in the act of reading. Is literacy in the Middle Ages definable as solely Latin, the monopoly of clerics, monks, and some members of the aristocracy, or does it also involve an ability to read the vernacular(s)? Taking as a starting point Grundmann’s thesis that *littera(tura)* referred to Latin writing, with vernacular literacy thus being out of the question, Green suggests that Grundmann’s thesis is reductive in limiting the varieties of literature produced in the Middle Ages, such as the explosion of vernacular theological writings produced by female mystics like Mechthild of Magdeburg and Julian of Norwich.

Chapter 2 expands upon Chapter 1’s definitions of reading to suggest that reading also occurs via visual apprehension of letters in tangible, written form and with the mind’s eye. Taking the cue from the popular Latin formula of “*legere et intelligere*” (read and understand), Green thus points to a greater variety of modes of reading beyond the literal level. This figurative level of reading can thus occur as an internalization of words and images, such as the mode of *meditatio* in late medieval devotional literature, which imagines Christ’s crucified body as a text to be read. Alternatively, it could occur as a tendency to read phenomenal signs in the natural world as pointing to truths or innate human feelings, like Chaucer’s Troilus who attempts to read Criseyde’s facial expression in order to sustain his faith in their relationship. This expanded definition also thus suggests the conjunction of image and text, conjured in Gregory the Great’s dictum, that the Latin-literate cleric reads the letters, while those who do not know Latin “read” the pictures, versus the more demotic claim of Paulinus of Nola that *tituli* (embedded titles next to a picture) clarify the meaning of pictures. The role of memory (*memoria*) is also crucial in privileging the productivity of not only memorizing already-inscribed texts and images, but also re-reading (interpreting) them. For example, Wolfram’s *Parzival* partakes in this memorial reading

by changing the narrative conventions of time found in his predecessor, the twelfth-century French author Chrétien de Troyes, to produce his own time-schemes in Arthurian romance.

Appropriately, Chapter 3 covers the variety of women's reading experiences in the Middle Ages, straddling the varieties of religious and secular women and their levels of educational literacy. The assertion that owning a book does not equate being able to read it is an honest recognition of the possibility of "indirect reading," such as where Lollard women frequently had someone else in their community to read the book(s) aloud to them. Green's use of iconographical evidence, such as the fifteenth-century *Book of Hours* (illustrated vernacular prayer books) of Mary of Burgundy, however puts forth an interesting counterpoint to this argument, suggesting that direct reading of a highly meditational quality could be practiced at home by laywomen too. On the other hand, Green's study of religious women's reading here attests to a high level of sophistication in theological thought, given the evidence for the popularity of translations and original-authored vernacular texts of devotion among these. An example is where Green points to the English translations of continental authors, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Mechthild of Hackeborn, David von Augsburg, and also the original works of Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and even Julian of Norwich, in the Brigittine-affiliated Syon Abbey.

Chapter 4 is a remarkable shift from the former chapters by studying women not only as recipients of literature (Latin and vernacular), but also producers, in the categories of scribes, dedicatees, sponsors, and authors. Therefore, reading is no longer just a 'passive' activity practised among women, but also one which aggressively promotes their interests in the contexts where it is practised, whether the nunnery, court or the home. This argument for medieval women's active promotion of literary interests is borne out by the increasing move towards vernacularization of literature which occurs in the late Middle Ages, such as where Christine de Pizan asks a question raised by Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* in her *Epistre*, namely as to how history would have been different if women were the predominant authors-in-charge.

Admittedly, Green's study is not conclusive because of its main emphasis on written literature, but calls for further study in related disciplines like codicology, palaeography, and art history. Green also alludes sporadically in the book's second half to an upcoming companion volume on "the depiction of marriage in court literature" (Green 148), another subject related to the question of intellectual property and who produces it authoritatively. As a study of medieval reading practices and also women's roles in perpetuating them, Green's book, however, is important in its implications that women

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were more involved in literary production than formerly imagined, not only as mere recipients but producers too indirectly or directly. Medieval women might indeed enjoy an active bid in this battle for control over intellectual property alongside men.

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