



The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages

Ann W. Astell

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The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages is a wide-ranging and insightful book that is carefully researched and gracefully written. It is of importance alike to those interested in mysticism, Middle English, the twelfth century, the fourteenth century, and feminist approaches to literature. *Studia Mystica*"This deceptively slender volume is valuable in a number of ways. Astell further substantiates even as she extends and deepens the insights of historical scholars such as Beryl Smalley by distinguishing more precisely the various forms taken by the twelfth-century reemphasis on the letter of the Biblical text and by specifying the psychohistorical circumstances that conditioned that response. She contributes original and insightful readings of important texts, including St. Bernard's Sermones, the mystical writings of Hugh of St. Victor and Richard Rolle, the Middle English religious lyrics, and Pearl. And her bold claim that the 'powerful fusion of letter and allegory in readers' experience of the Song from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries provided the key definitional model for Christian poetics and rhetoric during that time' encourages a new look at other works. Astell's book is both stimulating and convincing." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*"[Astell] proves herself to be a very good close reader. [Her] sensitive attention to shifts of gender and their rhetorical motivation yields subtle and compelling results." *Speculum*

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