Abbey and the literate nuns living there from its inception in 1415. This chapter makes the flexibility of Krug's central point fully apparent as she moves from the biological family of the Pastons to progressively more spiritual families, culminating in Syon. In this discussion, Krug considers the convent's religious family to be the most influential factor shaping the reading practices of the nuns. These women read as an expression of their obedience to God, and in imitation of Saint Bridget, the patron saint of the convent. More specifically, Krug thinks that the social constituency of the abbey, formed by members with aristocratic backgrounds, encouraged the accumulation of reading material for these women to help them adjust to a monastic life increasingly characterized by isolation. She beautifully illuminates the role books played in the convent as a means for living exemplary lives sanctioned by the dominant Catholic institution.

The broad range of examples in Reading Families testifies to the validity of its call for scholarship to rethink the current characterization of women's literacy as radical and transgressive. Even though highlighting transgressiveness often proves useful and meaningful in scholarship, this book helps readers find other values in female experiences with literate culture. Krug's strict adherence to the realities of these women's historical situations contributes to our understanding of medieval women's literate practices on their own terms, and not on terms conforming to today's standards for female textual practices.

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In his expansive study of medieval and early modern texts, ranging from courtly romances to women's mystical writings to cookbooks, Albrecht Classen
challenges existing critical perceptions (upheld by traditional as well as some feminist scholarship) of medieval European society as rampantly misogynistic and largely unfavorable to the development and expression of women’s voices in writing. While Classen is careful to acknowledge that “the Middle Ages were not a time of freedom and equality for women” (42), he offers extensive documentary evidence to support his thesis that “medieval women (writers) had space available for themselves; that they were able to fill this space with their own words; and that they knew very well how to utilize a wide variety of genres as literary tools in their effort at self-realization,” (28).

Classen dedicates a significant portion of his study to an analysis of women’s writing, which he defines broadly enough to account for the often highly social enterprise of medieval and early modern textual production (and to consider, for instance, the illiterate Margery Kempe as a writer). Classen’s survey also encompasses extensive discussions of female self-assertion depicted in courtly and urban literature authored by men. In chapter 2, Classen argues that readings of fictional texts, such as Hartmann von Aue’s Erec and Gottfried von Strassburg’s Tristan, prove useful for understanding medieval constructions of gender, because “most of these [texts] are characterized by intensive debates, dialogues, and other types of mutually relevant speech acts, often involving a man and a woman, which provides strong support for the theoretical approach that gender is decisively determined by discourse” (80). However, by privileging the interactions between men and women within constructions of gender, Classen seems to be reifying certain aspects of those constructions (by consistently interpreting them within a heterosexual matrix, for instance), even as he attempts to understand them.

To revisit as well as revise existing assumptions about the status of women and their voices within medieval and early modern culture, Classen addresses, in chapters 1 and 2, representations of violence (verbal as well as physical) against women in the Latin plays of the tenth-century Abbess, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, the twelfth-century romances Erec and Tristan, and the prose narratives of Jörg Wickram. Through these examples, Classen introduces domestic violence as a major subject of concern and provides an overview of the social and discursive contexts in which writers (male and female) defended female self-assertion as well as the idea of the couple as
a unit upon whose mutual respect the health and stability of the social and political order depend. Classen returns to this topic in chapter 6 with a more explicitly presentist approach that draws on twentieth- and twenty-first-century conceptualizations of domestic violence. By approaching medieval literary depictions of violence against spouses (typically wives) in this way, Classen shows that while “wife-beating” may have been a common and legally permissible practice throughout medieval Europe, criticism of this practice (whereby the use of violence is viewed not only as a threat to the marital unit, but also to the society at large) may have been just as pervasive.

In chapter 3, Classen assesses the kinds of power and authority that women writers claimed for themselves by comparing Hildegard von Bingen’s self-representation in her mystical writings with that of Marie de France in her lais (thereby bridging the divide between secular and sacred literature). Classen expands on his treatment of Hildegard in chapter 4, arguing that the communication of visionary accounts in speech and in writing offered convent women opportunities to participate in public life and to exert powerful influence by shaping apophatic discourse. Classen’s treatment of Hildegard’s mystical writings (which have already received much scholarly attention) works to foreground his discussion in chapter 7 of lesser-known (especially among scholars of English literary traditions) medieval German convent literature, specifically “sisterbooks,” in which women experimented with a wide range of generic and discursive forms comprising “chronicle, mystical discourse, collection of biographies, and meditative medium, not to forget the memorial and religious tribute to nuns who had been graced with visions,” (268).

The last three chapters provide a reassessment of received notions of the “literary” through analyses of the fifteenth-century proto-autobiographies of Margery Kempe and Helene Kottanner and of the sixteenth-century cookbooks of Anna Weckerin and Sabina Welser. Chapters 8 and 9 seek to identify and evaluate the literary characteristics of the texts of Kempe and Kottanner, with specific attention to their manipulation of generic and discursive forms in developing their own strategies of “self-realization and self-empowerment by means of the written and spoken word,” (281). Likewise, in chapter 10, Classen shows that women such as Anna Weckerin demonstrated a sophisticated and arguably literary use of rhetorical formulae in their cookbooks, which, as Classen argues, belong to
the canon of *artes* literature (or learned writings).

Classen’s study constitutes an important contribution to the feminist study of medieval literature and culture as well as to the larger field of gender studies. While frequent spelling mistakes and other typos make for a distracting reading experience, these ultimately do not diminish the overall value of Classen’s extensive, interdisciplinary study of medieval and early modern women’s voices.

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This collection of fifteen essays in honor of James Tracy re-evaluates the validity of the term “early modern” to describe the period between the middle ages and modernity. Agreeing on the term’s value, the contributors nevertheless offer two main challenges to traditional portrayals of the era. First, they contest the representation of the early modern period as a time of linear progression towards rationalism, capitalism and, most importantly, modern individualism as opposed to medieval communalism. Contributors instead depict the period as one of continuous, multi-faceted negotiation in which individual and community re-created one another. The second challenge is to the idea that the early modern was distinctly and solely a European phenomenon. Instead, we are encouraged to think of it as global, a comprehensive way to understand world history writ large.

The essays are organized into three sections, together highlighting these two themes. In “Structures,” contributors contextualize individual action, stressing the centrality of corporate structures in early modern quotidian life. Carla Rahn Phillips, for example, reveals how networks of kinship and affinity central in early modern Spain became even more crucial for Spaniards in the Americas, offering a cultural cohesion without which the Spanish world could not be stabilized. The instability created