contrast between pre- and post-Conquest conditions has perhaps led her to present a more optimistic picture of some aspects of Anglo-Saxon society than can be fully justified. This bias might also explain why Fell merely alludes to, rather than explores fully, the conditions and treatment of slave women in the period.

If *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* is intended for a wide rather than scholarly audience, as the absence of footnotes, its handsome appearance and copious illustrations would seem to indicate, it would have been helpful if Fell had concluded with a summary of her findings and a general overview of the period. She does provide a list at the end of each chapter of learned books and articles that would be useful to the non-specialist, but the bibliography is not extensive considering the scope of the book. It ignores, for example, *The Women of England from Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present*, edited by Barbara Kanner (London, 1980), which contains two essays central to the study at hand.

What the book does superbly is succeed in making the reader wish to discover more about Anglo-Saxon women, who – at least in the upper classes – emerge from the documents as relatively independent, capable of wielding power, whether it be over a household, an abbey, or a kingdom, and of working with their male counterparts in an atmosphere of harmony and mutual respect. As one reads the final chapters on the largely male-dominated post-Conquest era, it is tempting to imagine how different life might have been for someone like the Wife of Bath, with her skill in cloth-making, her aptitude for marriage negotiations, her war-like nature, her longing for sovereignty, her intelligence and wide-reading, had she been an Anglo-Saxon. She, like AEdelflæd, might also have been celebrated by the chroniclers for her exploits. The mere passage of time does not necessarily entail an improvement in the status of women!

WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE

Mary Beth Rose. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986.

Madelyn B. Dick

The collection of essays contained in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* grew out of a conference sponsored by the Center for Renaissance Studies at The Newberry Library in 1983. This conference and these papers have taken an interdisciplinary approach to the topic of women's history, including literary as well as historical perspectives in their works.

There are eleven studies addressing various problems in the understanding of women's place in history and attempting – with some success – to take innovative approaches to the subject. As a broad theme, the papers have taken the idea that, by the Renaissance period, women's position and participation in public life had so deteriorated under the onslaught of male theories and censures as to be non-existent, so that the women's spheres of influence were restricted to the private sector, which more or less effectively silenced their voices. Women were not unaware of their plight, nor necessarily resigned to it, but the prevailing "tide of history" swept away much of their protest.

The papers included in this book address themselves precisely to that plight and to women's protest against it. So Mary E. Wiesner, in her 'Women's Defense of Their Public Role," brings many examples of women "protesting," as for instance, the widows of men who were master craftsmen and who were prohibited from taking over their husbands' shops. J. T. Schulenburg, in her *"The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation,"* examines the problems of nuns faced with male brutality while coping at the time with the prevailing opinion – derived from patristic teaching – that even an innocent "bride of Christ" was responsible in the final analysis for her own rape. The idea that women were childish, wanton and irresponsible, could occasionally be in their favour (if that is the right word), as William Monter shows in his "Women and the Italian Inquisition:" women were punished less severely for various crimes, as they were deemed to be easily led astray and their opinions did not matter anyway.

Two further essays explore the literary evidence of these opinions, Madelon Sprengnether's "Annihilating Intimacy in *Coriolanus*" and Leah S. Marcus' "Elizabeth I and the Political Uses of Androgyny." Carole Levin, in "John Foxe and the Responsibilities of Queenship," explains that even an admirer of Queen Elizabeth I had a real problem reconciling his evident pride in her accomplishments with his sincere opinion that a public woman was necessarily a "bad" woman.

The remaining essays, Janel M. Muller's "Autobiography of a New 'Creatur,'" Elissa Weaver's "Spiritual Fun," Mary Ellen Lamb's "The Countess of Pembroke and the Art of Dying," Tilde Sankovitch's "Inventing Authority of Origin," and Mary Beth Rose's "Gender, Genre, and History," all discuss women who took to the pen – often with considerable verve – and did so to explain to themselves, to their fellows, and to society at large that they had opinions, that these mattered and indeed, should matter. If they were prevented from taking their proper place in society – 'proper,' that is, according to their abilities and how they perceived them, then at least they could die well – so the judgment of the Countess of Pembroke.

In their great variety and in their method of inquiry these eleven essays add much to our vision of women and their lives in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Yet there are two points that need to be made in conclusion.

The first derives from the very useful "Introduction" by Mary Beth Rose, in which she writes: "Why do we know so little about women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance? Until relatively recently, we had never really asked," and further: ". . . medieval and Renaissance women seemed vague, shadowy presences existing only on the periphery of history . . . " Yes, I would agree with Rose that we haven't always "asked," but I think that we have always "known . . . " No one can immerse themselves in the study of the Middle Ages – or the Renaissance – without encountering any number of women bent on doing things. (But then, there is an equally large number of men doing the same and we often pay little attention to them). If, for example, one would explore, as I have, the historical sources of the period roughly between 950 and 1050, the wealth of "known" material about politically and socially active women is enormous, and I might add, not ignored by the modern scholars in that area (as, for instance, Pauline Stafford's *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: the King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages*, 1983).