

representational painting. Given the current identification of abstraction with patriarchal modernism, this claim alone is likely to make her work controversial. And, with an adventurousness that one might expect from a stylish performer such as Isaak, Betterton demonstrates how women artists find ways of articulating critical themes - for example, the maternal body as representational subject in 1906 Germany - before any discursive framework for such representations emerges in the culture at large. In a climate of naturalized sexual difference, wherein "women have babies and men make art," it is indeed radical of Käthe Kollwitz to infer that maternal subjectivity might be "the precondition of artistic production rather than, as contemporary discourse insisted, its very antithesis"(45).

The respective authors' choices of art and artists rarely overlap, except in the case of art-world celebrities such as Mary Kelly and Cindy Sherman. Betterton's analyses usefully sort out visual strategies (appropriation, inversion, deconstruction, seriality, pastiche) while assessing the contextual validity of each and its position within a given practice (painting, installation, photo-text). Isaak appears to take for granted the reader's familiarity with critical visual practice. This is regrettable, since the pleasure of understanding the intellectual choices available to artists at various points in history would compensate for the disappointment of having to view their art in black and white.

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Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories. Joan Young Gregg. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies. Paul E. Szarmach, ed. New York: State University of New York Press, 1997; 275 pages; ISBN 0-7914-3418-4; \$20.95 US.

To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts. Joan M. Ferrante. Women of letters series. Sandra M.

Gilbert and Susan Gubar, editors. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997. 295 pages; ISBN 0-253-33254-0

The medieval period abounds in representations of women both idealized and demonized. On one hand, Joan Young Gregg gives us stories such as the one about a priest who sees a vision of his dead mother: "from whose head a dark flame arose; on her lips and tongue a horrible toad was gnawing, and from her breasts two serpents hung, sucking fiercely at her paps" - all of which are seen as punishments for her luxurious dress, her wicked speech, and her lecherousness during her lifetime. On the other hand, Joan Ferrante provides examples of how, at around the same time, someone like Bishop Hildebert of Lavardin could write to a woman named Muriel in response to her poetry: "Whatever you breathe out is immortal and the world/ adores your work as divine/ You put down by your wit celebrated poets and bards,/ and both sexes are stunned by your eloquence." As medievalists have pointed out before, such an image of divine perfection is the obverse of the preceding picture of uncontrollable female carnality that was repeatedly painted and denounced in the pulpit. These two facets of the medieval Christian view of women are illustrated separately by Gregg and Ferrante, who also provide, in the course of their studies, new materials for feminist historians and critics to think through - and not just those working in medieval studies.

In *Devils, Women, and Jews*, Gregg examines the more commonplace assumption that medieval Christianity suppressed and stereotyped women, and she does so by collecting homiletic exempla, short instructional narratives used in sermons, particularly from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. The section on women is embedded in discussions and examples of stories about devils and Jews - an "unholy trio" as Gregg points out, which was perceived to be connected "by pride, disobedience, and carnality." For those interested in representations of women, this broader context allows a more complete look at how late medieval Christian writers conflated images of demonized others, but the book would serve equally as well as

a starting point for readers interested in Judaic studies, or Christian theology and popular narrative in the Middle Ages. The notes and bibliography will point specialists to the various original sources of the stories, while the non-specialist will appreciate the accessible modern translations of the exempla, the general introduction on the development of preaching and the nature of the exemplum genre, and the full introductions to each group of stories. Gregg organizes her collection like an anthology of folktales, commenting on typical clusters of motifs and themes as she reproduces the stories. Shorn of the commentaries or allegorical interpretations that preachers would have added to them, the exempla stand here as bare narratives, but this presentation highlights their popular, folkloristic quality. And, although medievalists would generally be wary of totalizing concepts such as "the Medieval Mentality," Gregg provides persuasive evidence that the exempla, copied in preaching handbooks and passed down through generations of preachers, do indeed illustrate a pervasive medieval mindset.

The preponderance of misogynist Christian writings throughout the Middle Ages is well-known in sources other than sermon exempla, and it is this view of medieval women that has led to the assumption that women were effectively silenced in this period, that they could exert little authority in their lives. Virginia Woolf's powerful myth of Judith Shakespeare, illustrating the impossibility of the early woman writer, still dominates many contemporary accounts of women's literary history. Ferrante's book is one effort made among feminist medievalists recently to dispel these misconceptions.

Ferrante discusses an impressive array of women writers, primarily from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Her first chapter provides an overview of women's letters - Ferrante found more than 1200 in printed sources alone - a subject which she promises to take up in greater detail in a forthcoming publication. These letters show, according to Ferrante, that women participated actively in political, religious, and cultural life, often in friendly collaboration with men, a thesis that informs the rest of the book as well. In her discussion of religious texts, histories, courtly

literature, mystical writings, and narrative saints' lives, Ferrante includes the usual medieval writers found in anthologies, such as Hildegard of Bingen, Marie de France, and Christine de Pizan, but she also includes people such as Elfred of Whitby, Proba, Marcella, Queen Maud, Clemence of Barking, and many others. *To the Glory of Her Sex* is not the first history of medieval women's writing to be published, but it is noteworthy for the range of material discussed and especially for the way it extends our notions of women's participation in literary production by discussing women's collaborations with male writers in serving as patrons or instigators of literary and scholarly works.

Before providing this positive view of women's activities, however, Ferrante warns that misogyny "is a fact of medieval life" and must not be denied. And yet, in spite of her statements in the Introduction about understanding misogyny both in her personal experience as well as in her view of medieval life generally, Ferrante does seem to forget, somehow, about medieval misogyny. Her readings tend to take texts as straightforward reflections of reality - if a man tells a high-born woman that he admires her, then that is what he must really be thinking. There is little room in Ferrante's discussion for artifice, convention, class differences, the idealization of chastity, or even for feminist readings which differ in emphasis from her positive spins on stories by Marie de France and Christine de Pizan. Part of the problem, I believe, lies in Ferrante's claim that "Theory and doctrine are one thing, practice and experience another ... I am concerned in this study with examples of positive practice, rather than of negative theory." It would probably be far more interesting to attempt to account for medieval doctrine in looking at what appear to be contradictory facts from medieval women's lives, and to admit that one theory of reading texts cannot be cast aside without picking up another one, even if that new theory only claims to rest on experience. Of course, all theories should be tested and revised in the light of what Ferrante shows us.

Both of these books provide materials that will clarify and extend our understanding of medieval women's lives. The challenge that

Ferrante's book poses especially is to find ways in which to comprehend how those exempla images presented by Gregg of toads gnawing at the loose and lecherous tongues of women coexisted with texts praising the wit, wisdom, and eloquence of women's abundant words in the Middle Ages.

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Un métier et une vocation. Le travail des religieuses au Québec de 1901 à 1971. Danielle Juteau et Nicole Laurin. Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Montréal; 1997. xii + 194 pages; ISBN 0-7606-1687-8 .

Résistance et transgression. Études en histoire des femmes au Québec. Andrée Lévesque. Éditions du Remue-ménage, Montréal, 1995; 157 pages; ISBN 2-89091-141-1; 18,95\$.

Depuis maintenant vingt ans, les études socio-historiques sur les femmes ont acquis une place considérable et incontournable dans les différents domaines de la connaissance. Nul ne peut nier l'effet bénéfique de cette recherche sur la reformulation des problématiques sociales et des idées. C'est dans cette perspective qu'il importe de replacer les ouvrages de D. Juteau et N. Laurin et de A. Lévesque. Tous deux offrent une meilleure compréhension de la société québécoise et du rôle que certaines femmes y ont joué; de leur travail et de leurs discours, voire du discours sur elles.

L'ouvrage de D. Juteau et N. Laurin propose de porter un regard nouveau sur le travail des religieuses au Québec entre 1901 et 1970. Pour les auteures, la nature des activités des religieuses ne devient compréhensible qu'en regard de celles des mères-épouses (non salariées) et des salariées. En effet, le mode de vie et le travail des membres des communautés religieuses féminines se trouvent à la confluence des activités des femmes laïques tout en étant fort différent. Si les religieuses se

consacrent, comme les mères-épouses, à un travail gratuit d'entretien des corps du point de vue matériel et affectif, elles accomplissent cette fonction à l'extérieur du cadre familial comme les salariées tout en ne recevant pas de rémunération. Elles se retrouvent donc, comme le soulignent les auteures, «hors foyer et hors salariat» quoique dans une institution, celle de l'Église. De cette confluence émergent un ensemble de contrastes. À l'instar des mères de famille, les religieuses offrent leur temps et leurs énergies à soulager les problèmes d'autrui, mais là s'arrête la ressemblance car le travail des religieuses demeure nettement plus spécialisé. Elles occupent des fonctions nettement plus diversifiées que les salariées de la même époque. Elles ne connaissent ni l'usine ni le travail de bureau qui offrent de larges débouchés aux laïques mais plutôt l'hôpital, l'école, les institutions d'accueil. En outre, les religieuses ont un accès à des postes administratifs au sein des institutions qu'elles dirigent auxquels ne peuvent rêver les laïques de l'époque. Malgré ces «avantages», on ne saurait nier que le mode de vie des religieuses ne leur offre aucune indépendance - vivant dans des maisons collectives ou sur leur lieux de travail -, ni de possibilité de retourner à la maison.

L'ouvrage d'Andrée Lévesque offre une version remaniée de textes publiés précédemment touchant des aspects divers de la vie des femmes au Québec pendant le XXe siècle. Il met en contraste le discours et la représentation des femmes qu'ont eu certaines élites définitrices de rôles tels l'Église, des intellectuels, journalistes et moédecins et l'expérience vécue par des femmes qui ont résisté et transgressé ces rôles soit des féministes, une journaliste et des prostituées.

Voulant montrer comment des femmes se sont constituées en actrices sociales, l'auteure consacre les trois premiers textes à celles qui dénoncent les limites posées à leurs droits et, par là même, définissent une nouvelle image de la citoyenne. Si l'évocation du droit de vote pour les femmes apparaît au premier chef important, il ne saurait face oublier l'importance du rôle de certaines féministes dans la réforme du code civil visant à éliminer l'incapacité juridique des femmes mariées. Ces revendications et les oppositions auxquelles elles font face renvoient à un ensemble