

indeed (the author's denial notwithstanding) to be "malevolent." Further evidence of licentious behaviour is provided by documentation of a widespread outcry on the part of both statesmen and philosophers against the all-too-common practice of abortion.

Cantarella concludes her discussion of the status of women in ancient Rome on a provocative note: she suggests the occurrence of a reversal from emancipation to subordination under the influence of two powerful religious cults, first, the worship of Isis, and second the growth of Christianity. She sees woman in classical times as enjoying greater freedom than woman under Christianity, and concludes her book with the thought-provoking suggestion that the process of emancipation may be reversible.

An index and voluminous notes complete the book. Although the translator mentions that the notes have been especially adapted to English readers, they still contain a large percentage of references in other languages, especially Italian and French. Nevertheless, the notes constitute a most valuable bibliography to any reader, and a source of delight to the multilingual scholar or comparatist.

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Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (+203) to Marguerite Porete (+1310). Peter Dronke. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, Pp. 338/xi.*

This is a good book. It is also an important one, for in it Dronke gives us sensitive critical readings of women's writings that have been overlooked, misread, or explained away in earlier criticism: overlooked because they did not fit into the predominant (and predominantly masculine) traditions of thought and literature of their era, misread when they were interpreted by the wrong conventions, explained away as really written by a man after all. There is no argument being made here for a tradition of women's writing. None of the writers Dronke examines at length draws upon any of the others, for the circulation of their works was limited, and, indeed, they are strikingly different in the kinds of writing they do and in their styles. In fact, if there is a single text that recurs as an influence on several of these writers, it is one written by a man, Ovid's *Heriodes*—the one well-known classical text which shows us women writing and depicting their own lot. (Constance of Le Ronceray, Queen Radegunde, perhaps the

Countess of Dia, and certainly Heloise all show the influence of the *Heriodes* as a model). While some of these women display knowledge of classical and patristic works, like the above-named and Hrotsvitha with her use of Terence's comedies, other women who are altogether illiterate are represented by transcriptions of their testimony before ecclesiastical courts inquiring into the activities of the Cathar sect in Provence. Dronke has

focused on texts that have, in diverse ways, a notable autobiographic or literary or intellectual interest—texts in which women tell how they understand themselves and their world, or construct imaginative models of their own. (p. vii)

These texts are best characterized as diverse. They are all interesting in that the writers have not fallen into the Wife of Bath's error: recognizing that the hunter's depiction of a lion may differ from the lion's depiction of himself, but then painting herself as lion through the hunter's eyes anyway. Yet, there is no single "view of women" being presented here. For example, Perpetua's description of her imprisonment and her visions is remarkable for its individuality: "Perpetua concentrated unswervingly on what was unique in her experience; she did not try to make her experience exemplary" (p. 17). Here are the thoughts of a twenty-two year old Christian catechumen approaching martyrdom, and burdened with a good daughter's concern for an aged father who is furious and incomprehending of her stubbornness and with a mother's feelings for her infant still at the breast. Only slightly less remarkable than Perpetua's own record of herself is Dronke's analysis of her visions, an analysis that is subtle and convincing, and avoids the trap of conventional Christian allegorizing. Equally admirably, his account of Dhuoda's manual of advice for her sixteen year old son makes us see the poignancy of the situation in which she was writing: her warlike husband, Bernard, had sent her to live in Uzès; the boy for whom she wrote the manual had been sent by his father as a political hostage to guarantee peace with Charles the Bald; an infant son had just been taken out of her custody by his father. The knowledge of her situation illuminates the personal strengths and political weaknesses out of which she writes, and charges with extra meaning her injunctions to her son to be loyal both to his emperor and his father. Dronke also writes of Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, Heloise, Hildegard of Bingen, and Marguerite Porete, as well as a number of women whose works or records are treated in less detail—remarkable women all, and as dissimilar one from the other as Aquinas is from Francis of Assisi, or Chaucer from Langland. Most problematic of these figures is Hildegard, who comes across despite Dronke's obvious admiration as neurotic

and self-willed; most admirable perhaps, Heloise, who is given full credit for being as Aberlard called her “supreme in the abundance of her literary knowledge” (p. 111).

Dronke’s method is to give generous stretches of translations of the works in question (most works were in Latin, some in Provençal), and to supplement the translations with reference to the original language from time to time. The translated works are illuminated by his surrounding analyses. The book is actually a combination of edition (appendices at the back contain critical editions based on multiple manuscripts of several of the works referred to, and Dronke has a long excursus demonstrating Heloise’s third letter to have been of her own composition, not Abelard’s), translation, and literary analysis. It is an odd combination, but clearly an intelligent approach to make to these neglected works, works that have been ignored by all but a few because they have been inaccessible, available only in poor editions or available only to those who read medieval Latin. Dronke’s great triumph is to present us with these works at the same time as showing us why we should be glad to have them.

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Dzelarhons: Myths of the Northwest Coast. Anne Cameron. *Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1986, Pp. 160.*

Women all over the world are waiting for any new book from Anne Cameron so there can be general rejoicing in the news that she has published several in the last year. Harbour Publishing published *The Annie Poems* in 1986. A San Francisco feminist press, spinsters/aunt lute, has reprinted her earlier novel *The Journey* and is planning to publish a sequel to it in the near future. Finally, five years after the publication of the best-selling *Daughters of Copper Woman*, Anne Cameron continues her woman-centered revisioning of Vancouver Island native myths and legends in a new collection entitled *Dzelarhons*.

As in *Cooper Woman*, the name of a primordial mother, Dzelarhons the Frog Woman, serves as title for the volume. *Dzelarhons* does not have the narrative unity of the earlier work; instead Cameron has gathered together a group of eight unrelated tales chosen, it appears, to show the diverse ways in which the “world is full of magic.” This includes three animals legends, two quasi-historical narratives, one myth of transformation, and two legends about humans interacting, usually disastrously, with animals and nature.

The most engaging of all the tales—worth the purchase price in itself—is the lyrical “Orca’s Child” which tells of the origin and meaning of Orca’s black and white colouring. No one could call this the killer whale again after reading the story. Here the love between two females, Orca and Eagles Flies High, issues in the birth of a child that combines features of both parents. While the mating of two creatures of different species is a common motif in North Pacific native legend, the emphasis on the superiority of the love between women is a characteristic Cameron theme. So is her insistence that “because these wonderful creatures are the result of love between creatures of different worlds, they are capable of love for all things.” Such love can create harmony throughout the world: when Orca dances above the waves to the music of human women, Osprey adds her song to the chorus and,

three realities would be joined in speech. And when this happened, the very rocks of the earth would begin to vibrate, and hum, until all of creation, for a brief moment, was united.

The tale of Orca’s child and the two Raven stories in *Dzelarhons* would make excellent children’s reading. “Raven and Snipe” and “Raven Goes Berry-picking” are full of details of mischief, deceit and justice that children relish. Raven appears ubiquitously in North Pacific Coast lore; Cameron’s version of Snipe’s revenge, for example, is nearly identical to one recorded from the Nootka by Edward Sapir except that her animals are female and her narrative has an exuberance not found in the ethnographic material:

[Raven] munched and she crunched and she chewed and she swallowed and she gorged and she stuffed herself until even she thought she was going to split right down the middle.

Contrast this to the sober description in Sapir: “Every time he ate it all up in a hurry. Raven had much to eat. He had nothing left over.” Anthropologists have complained about Cameron’s habit of revising native stories, yet the flatness in texture of many ethnographic records leaves Cameron’s reader feeling that her versions must come much closer in spirit to the power and fascination of the prehistoric stories.

In “Orca’s Child” and “Lazy Boy,” a story of how the world is held in place, Cameron is content to leave unexplained the magic of mythic occurrence. In “Muddle-head” and the sixty-page title story, “Dzelarhons,” she tends to supply realistic, even novelistic, details that domesticate the stories and perhaps shows how foreign,