

BOOK REVIEW

Courting Failure: Women and the Law in Twentieth-Century Literature. Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson. Akron: University of Akron Press, 2007; x + 294 pages; ISBN 978-1-931968-48-5; \$24.95US (paper).

Feminist law and literature incorporates feminist jurisprudence and feminist literary theories to question legislated patriarchy. Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson uses a postegalitarian feminist lens to analyse texts ranging from canonical literature to popular film and television along a number of themes: "voice versus silence, the performance and punishment of femininity, the right to anger, ...the consequences of stepping outside of prescribed gender roles" (12). Her project makes room for voices that still struggle to be heard, and suggests where we might go from here. "[F]rom liberal-humanist calls for equality under the law, to recognition that equality may not, in fact, be the solution at all," (12) there have been divergent calls for law reform. Macpherson offers her suggestion that the solution lies not with The Law at all, as it currently manifests in a hierarchical, patriarchal institution, but rather with different systems, as in her example of restorative justice, that could give women context, voice, and space where anger and "intimate stories" could be heard. To her credit, she also presents the problems that such an approach could entail.

One of the book's great strengths is Macpherson's nuanced questioning of whether justice is "gender blind or gender neutral" (152), and whether concepts of gender blindness or neutrality are at all useful. She examines the ways in which law is gendered according to monolithic conceptions of "women," "femininity," "good," "bad," and "mother" with which women are inscribed and which circumscribe our freedoms. Legal language, different lived experience(s), and the unsayable effects of patriarchy are all addressed in detail in this book. Further, Macpherson successfully makes connections between women's gendered experiences without erasing the differences that lead to our different treatment under the law.

The postegalitarian framework is pertinent; however, postegalitarian arguments that reclaim women's agency (as offered in Macpherson's chapter on the panopticon) can erase the ways in which agency may ultimately be restricted. That "the mind is free," or can free itself, while the body remains constrained, regulated, or as in the case of the neoslave narratives she analyses, tortured, raped and dehumanized, is a fact that should not be dismissed easily. For the most part, Macpherson does not shy away from tough a analysis about the effects of property law on the body, or the effects that historical laws continue to have, but her treatment of the panopticon at times strays toward this particular postegalitarian pitfall. Further, the breadth of sources detracts from the argument's conclusions. At times, the book reads like a feminist survey of law and literature, and depth of analysis is lost in favour of multiple sources. Macpherson's contribution to the growing

field of feminist law and literature, is, however, very welcome. Her extensive research and close readings will offer insights to seasoned scholars and enough details to (hopefully) pique newcomers' interests.

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