

perhaps more accurately *bellatrices*" (135) with Gawain's projection of his own weakness (lack) onto Morgan le Fay, who, as Margherita argues, represents "the maternal origin which patriarchal narratives, particularly epics, consistently reject" (141).

The Afterword returns explicitly to the observations on current historicist practices which introduce the book and which pepper the text's previous chapters. And here I think that *The Romance of Origins* makes most obvious its greatest strengths and problems. My major quarrel with this work is that its depiction of the current historicism sets up what appear to me to be straw targets. Many recent new historicist explorations in medieval studies draw on anti-foundationalist assumptions deriving from Nietzsche, Foucault, Bakhtin, Deleuze, Bourdieu, and others. My take on this book is that it seeks to intervene in debates that are largely already settled. (I may be wrong about this, though.) On the other hand, the psychoanalytic readings Margherita constructs are deft, imaginative, and inspiring. Once the book moved on from its observations about current historicism, it was a riveting read. Perhaps what saves *The Romance of Origins* from becoming preachy is its wit. After all, Margherita admits, at the end of her discussion of *Gawain*, "I too have an axe grind" (151).

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McCash, June Hall, ed. *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

In response to Rita Lejeune's 1976 appeal for a single book on the topic of women's patronage, this volume, billed as "the first to deal exclusively with the question" (ix), represents an important contribution to the growing corpus of studies of female self-empowerment in the Middle Ages. Twelve wide-ranging essays examine various forms of patronage from the early Byzantine empire to late medieval Burgundy, with emphasis placed both on individual figures, such as Empress Theodora, Matilda of Scotland, Elizabeth de Burgh, and Isabel of Portugal, and on particular groups or families of patrons. While most benefactors studied here are associated with the aristocracy (cf. the articles by McClanan, Caviness, Huneycutt, Parsons, Shadis, Jambeck, Underhill, and Willard), the participation of religious, intellectual, and illiterate women in the artistic process likewise receives attention (cf. Ferrante, Caviness, Hanna). The conventional definition of patronage as the support, through a variety of means,

of artists, artifacts, and institutions is examined in many of the essays in this volume. Together, they provide exhaustive and valuable bibliographical information on medieval women who subsidized literature, the arts, and public works and architectural projects that often encompassed the foundation of nunneries, monasteries, and, in one case, a college. Stephen Nichols' *Foreword*, which suggestively compares dedicatory scenes of the fourteenth-century French queen, Jeanne of Burgundy, and the thirteenth-century king, Louis IX, opens a volume that scrutinizes women's promotion of the vernacular over Latin, and contemporary iconography of allegorical figures, books and their images for the important information they provide about medieval female patronage.

Linking the roles of benefactor and politician inextricably, Miriam Shadis traces early thirteenth-century matrilineal models of patronage in her study, "Piety, Politics, and Power: The Patronage of Leonor of England and Her Daughters Berenguela of Leon and Blanche of Castile." She suggests that Leonor's establishment of the female Cistercian abbey of Las Huelgas in Castile, co-governed by its abbess and a royal female authority, and Blanche of Castile's establishment of the two female Cistercian abbeys of Maubuisson and Lys in France were, in their functions as retreats for royal women and family burial sites, modeled after the abbey at Fontevrault, earlier associated with their forebear (mother and grandmother), Eleanor of Aquitaine. In "Patterns of Women's Literary Patronage: England, 1200 -ca. 1475," Karen Jambeck likewise studies associations among medieval women patrons, focusing on their support of devotional and didactic vernacular literature, and profiling four late medieval English women (Elizabeth Berkeley, Blanche of Lancaster, Joan Fitzalan, Joan Beaufort). Frances Underhill presents the case of Elizabeth de Burgh, lady of Clare during the reign of Edward III, whose promotion of artistic and intellectual achievements during her forty-year widowhood culminated in the establishment of Clare College, Cambridge, a pioneering form of sponsorship that had previously been the domain of royalty or clerics ("Elizabeth de Burgh: Connoisseur and Patron"). In her detailed description of the many facets of "The Patronage of Isabel of Portugal," third wife of the fifteenth-century Burgundian duke Philip the Good, Charity Cannon Willard discusses Isabel's family-inspired bibliophilic interests, her commission of several tombs, her support of a number of convents, and her financial backing of the famous Robert Gaguin's studies in Paris.

Expanding upon traditional definitions of patronage, which frequently overlook the silent or hidden role played by women, several scholars have adopted rather original perspectives in their explorations of this conventionally male-dominated arena. Joan Ferrante, for example, argues convincingly that the many women who requested and received information from Latin male authors, such as the early Church fathers, those who engaged in verse exchanges, and those who inspired historians to include women rulers and saints in their works should be

seen as collaborators in the composition of many significant medieval Latin writings (“Women’s Role in Latin Letters from the Fourth to the Early Twelfth Century”). Ralph Hanna’s provocative examination of the safe-keeping and dissemination of Lollard books and ideas by the illiterate peasant women Margery Baxter of Martham and Avis Mone of Loddon likewise challenges traditional definitions of patronage, as do his suggestive insights about Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich (“Some Norfolk Women and Their Books, ca. 1390-1440”).

In a rich and carefully researched article on religious and royal women from the early 11th to the early 14th centuries (“Anchoress, Abbess, and Queen: Donors and Patrons or Intercessors and Matrons?”), Madeleine Caviness also questions long-standing interpretations of patronage by suggesting that women’s acquisition of books through male-sponsored gifts often had a negative impact on them. Anne McClanan rewrites important aspects of Empress Theodora’s history as patron of building projects in sixth-century Constantinople and Antioch by relating her actions to earlier Byzantine imperial women’s patterns of patronage and by balancing the often biased records of the court historian Procopius with other, more favorable contemporary accounts (“The Empress Theodora and the Tradition of Women’s Patronage in the Early Byzantine Empire”). Lois Huneycutt offers a finely argued revisionist study of Queen Matilda of England, underscoring the flaws in the contemporary evaluation of William of Malmesbury and carefully analyzing Matilda’s active participation in patronage activities (“‘Proclaiming Her Dignity Abroad’: The Literary and Artistic Network of Matilda of Scotland, Queen of England 1100-1118”). In his enlightening discussion of 13th-century Plantagenet queens, John Carmi Parsons thoughtfully calls for more carefully documented investigations by those studying books owned by women, cautioning against the assumption that the ideas in these volumes were necessarily familiar to their owners (“Of Queens, Courts and Books: Reflections on Literary Patronage of 13th-Century Plantagenet Queens”).

These various methodologies and interdisciplinary perspectives are woven together in “The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women: An Overview,” a rich, wide-ranging article by the volume’s editor, June McCash. By recognizing different patterns for married, independent or widowed women, and for religious female patrons, explaining a range of motivations for female patronage (personal, religious, dynastic, social, familial), and providing extensive bibliographic notes, McCash establishes useful parameters for the continuing study of medieval female patronage.

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