

Debate over the *Rose*;" III. "The Mythographic Tradition and the Medieval Genealogy of the Gods;" and IV. "The 'Letter of Othea' as a Mythographic Text."

The text itself is followed by a useful interpretative essay, entitled "Christine's Minerva, the Mother Valorized," which examines the "subtle power of [Christine's] feminism and her ability as a thinker and writer" (122), as shown in the "Letter of Othea." The essay demonstrates how Christine "feminizes the mythographic tradition" (123), particularly by reworking the figure of the mother.

The several appendices, "A Medieval Genealogy of the Gods," "A Chronological List of Major Medieval Mythographers," and "A Table of Sources for Mythological Figures in Christine de Pizan's 'Letter of Othea,'" allow one to reconstruct in schematic form much of the information from both Chance's introduction and the mythological portions of Christine's text itself. There are suggestions for further reading at the end of the volume and a detailed index of proper names to facilitate access for those researching a particular topic.

Unfortunately, the translation and background information on Christine are not as carefully done. For example: five of the seven notes to the Preface, which discusses the reception and manuscript history of the "Letter of Othea," are flawed by errors of varying degrees of seriousness. The chronology of Christine's life, times, and works neglects to mention several of her major (verse) texts, and the *Cent Ballades*, one of those omitted, is misidentified later (in Part I of the Introduction, 6) as the *Cent ballades d'amant et de dame*. The Chronology also lists various milestones of Chaucer's career while excluding any reference to the French authors of the day, whose work Christine knew and drew on. Indeed, the link between Chaucer and Christine is much more tenuous and unproven than one might infer from Chance's chronology and introduction, whereas a comparison of Christine's mythography with that of Machaut, Froissart, and Deschamps might have given a useful assessment of Christine's place in the French tradition.

Chance's translation of the "Letter" uses as its source the one existing critical edition of the work, prepared by Halina D. Loukopoulos as a dissertation for Wayne State University in 1977 and based on British Library manuscript Harley 4431. A check of selected passages of the translation against the corresponding text in Harley 4431 (on microfilm) reveals considerable inaccuracy and misreading. In all fairness, I must say that I did not have access to Loukopoulos' dissertation, and cannot determine, therefore, where the problems originate. Scholars of Middle French should be warned, however, that this is not a reliable rendering, as errors of syntax, punctuation, and vocabulary abound.

Nevertheless, this book does an important service by resurrecting and providing a reader's guide for a very rich work, a veritable "thesaurus of mythology, catechism, allegory, and feminism" (viii). As Chance says, the *Letter of Othea* should be profitable reading for students in a wide variety of courses.

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*Thought: A Review of Culture and Idea*. Number 254, September, 1989, "Gender and the Moral Order in Medieval Society." Guest Editor, Thelma S. Fenster.

The papers in this collection were delivered at Fordham University's Medieval Studies Conference in March 1988. They are of considerable interest and deserve a wider audience than is likely to come their way.

The subtitle of this issue of *Thought* makes an important statement. Both operative terms, "gender" and "moral order," are to be emphasized. The guest editor says that the papers seek to treat "gender as an analytic category," and what we have before us is not so much a group of final statements as a collection of case studies that probe and poke at the theme. The papers are perhaps best read as a collection of short and self-limiting forays; in aggregate they show readers (and, by extension, readers' students) how scholars seek to bridge the gap between women's history and gender-oriented history. The "moral order" component *also* stems from the collective effort to turn the traditional "other," medieval women, into the principle; to take unexceptionable slices of medieval culture and society and to turn their water into wine by reordering our emphasis and re-routing our approach to the dichotomy (or bonding agent?) of gender.

For convenience I will put the papers into three groups. Three deal with image and identity: those of Prudence Allen ("Hildegard of Bingen's Philosophy of Sex Identity"), Penelope D. Johnson ("*Mulier et Monialis*: The Medieval Nun's Self-Image"), and Nancy Partner ("'And Most of All for Inordinate Love': Desire and Denial in *The Book of Margery Kemp*").

Clearly, the brief discussions can only hint at complex explications and arguments. Allen treats Hildegard's four-category division of men and women that she bases on the humors and elements: driven or inspired by Platonic and Aristotelian categories, of course, but deviating sharply from the (male-defined) party line. Hildegard concludes with an analysis of types that reaches for "a balance between the two sexes in which neither sex was superior... fundamental equality, with simultaneous philosophic differentiations ... 'sex complementarity'."

Johnson tries to isolate the self-image of nuns, mostly in material from 11th- and 12th-century France. She offers evidence that regular women could have a high self-image, seeing themselves as the female equivalents of male religious. Furthermore, many sources indicate that the laity, both male and female, accepted this assessment and acted from it (in such activities as benefaction, patronage, and witnessing). Partner uses a light Freudian touch to unfold the frames within which Margery Kempe's sexuality, her search for and definition of multiple fathers, and her view of self can be "decoded." Since we know her story only through the psycho-social palimpsest of her book, the problems of unravelling the metaphors of spiritual autobiography compete, in our reading, with those of recreating social and religious history. If the three papers can be plumbed for a single lesson, it is of the considerable importance of ego-identity in a world we sometimes pass off as faceless and corporatist. Nor did women—when we can recover their tale—take a backseat to their male counterparts. Perhaps, their peripheral status made them even more self-conscious, if not more articulate.

Jacques Pluss ("Baldus of Perugia on Female and Male: The Case of Allumella"), Susan Mosher Stuard ("From Women to Woman: New Thinking about Gender, c. 1140"), and Pamela Sheingorn ("The Holy Kinship: The Ascendancy of Matriliney in Sacred Genealogy of the Fifteenth Century") take us into family history in its various aspects. Pluss analyzes a specific dower controversy as treated by Baldus. Ultimately a grandson (via a daughter) was the inheritor, rather than his female first cousin (descended from the common ancestor via a son). Pluss tracks the legal and social logic whereby the winner—the "enviable *agnatus masculus*"—gained the prize, in this instance at the cost of family resources and even family identity. In a world of kinship, some were clearly more kin than others; Baldus should have read Hildegard of Bingen.

Stuard talks of systemic change, a new, and male-imposed definition of law and practice. In the mid-12th century, Genoese practice swung over from the (more egalitarian) Germanic type to the repressive guidelines of Roman law, as reconstructed in Gratian's formulations, examined here in detail. Following Gratian's lead the emphasis was now placed on the "woman's legal incapacity in marriage," with its logical and negative implications for dower, marriage settlements and gifts, and the property of the couple. Sheingorn finds a more auspicious topic, looking at the feminized depictions of the Holy Family in 15th-century art. "The matrilineage of Christ and ...the extended family made up of those related to him through his mother" became important in both iconography and popular religious representation. One picture in particular drives this home; in the Holy Kinship Altarpiece (ca. 1420; p. 275) a semi-circle of seated holy women face us, all but one (who is reading) holding an infant. Their holy male counterparts are depicted as standing, beyond or behind them, relegated to the role of mere onlookers and outsiders. Such depictions both reflected and helped legitimize, if not actually caused, the sanctification of women.

Two papers turn to literature and literary themes: those of Elaine Tuttle Hansen ("The Death of Blanche and the Life of the Moral Order") and Arlyn Diamond ("Engendering Criticism"). Hansen deals with Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*. Briefly, the logic of the tale is spun so the woman had to die in order for the men to rise, to become fully masculinized. The knight and the poet were "Consoled, not for the death of the lady, but by it." Beneath the talk of love and fealty, the game between the sexes was a grim contest, with the seesaw rather than the ever-turning wheel as the model; we know who wound up on the ground. Diamond takes on some major writers who have explored the canvas of courtly love: C. S. Lewis, John Benton, and D. W. Robertson. She finds their views deficient, as each—for different reasons and in a different way—falls back upon "patriarchal authority" and accepts the world-view of sources that "are the product of official feudalism." Women are surely to be marginalized as long as we maintain "an unwarranted faith in the hegemony of orthodox Christian beliefs."



A lively group of papers. When read as a group they also help us understand the distinction between "women's history" and "gender history." The former takes women as it finds them—atop, amidst, or below—and then works to illuminate their situation, their status, and their ideology. The latter springs rather from a desire to question the "moral order" of gender- and sex-relations, a concept we said above to be worthy of equal time, equal emphasis. As such, it represents an attempt to politicize the canon of historical inquiry, or rather to redress the balance of primeval politicization—going back directly to Paul and Augustine, among its ranks of patriarchal heroes—that has defined both the Middle Ages and our agenda of questions, sources, and methods. If none of these papers is meant to represent a final statement, or to pose a major new assault on the fortress, they have inherent virtues and serve as a reminder that historical situations, topics, sources, and questions are never beyond the light of a fresh reading.

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