
Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter, eds., *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997. Pp. viii, 330.

Barbara Gold, Paul Miller, and Charles Platter, the editors of *Sex and Gender in the Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, assert that their twofold goal through this collection of essays is “to reclaim some long-neglected texts from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and to examine the representations of the feminine and the female body in these texts” (1). The anthology consists of eleven essays: four addressing the medieval era, two on Petrarch as a liminal figure between the medieval and the Renaissance, and five on the Renaissance. Examining constructions of masculinity and femininity in over 1000 years of Latin writings, *Sex and Gender* scope is mammoth yet impressively minute in detail.

The collection begins with Nancy Jones’s “By Woman’s Tears Redeemed: Female Lament in St. Augustine’s *Confessions* and the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise,” which argues convincingly that women’s tears provide an arena for female authority in ritual lamentation and supplication, though they nevertheless “help to perpetuate a cultural system that represents conversion as a primarily male experience and, while apparently glorifying women’s spiritual experience, subordinates it to men’s” (17). The essay offers nuanced readings of the two works and details how Monica’s and Heloise’s tears are both deprecated yet appropriated by Augustine and Abelard in their spiritual experiences.

Barbara Gold’s “Hrotswitha Writes Herself: *Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis*” offers a feminist reassessment of the tenth-century canoness and her dramas. Arguing that critics “have ignored the fact of [Hrotswitha’s] gender and any ramifications that it might have for her writings” (43), Gold demonstrates the ways that the canoness exploits the classical Latin literary heritage in her self-representations both in her Prefaces and her plays. Gold’s essay contrasts with and complements Phyllis Culham’s “Gender and Negotiating Discourse: Mediated Autobiography and Female Mystics of Medieval Italy,” in that the former analyzes direct female self-representation while the latter considers self-representation as negotiated between female mystic and male scribe. Analyzing the vitae of Margherita of Faenza and Margherita of Cortona, the Sermones of Umiltà, and the *Liber* of Angela of Foligno, Culham investigates the intersection of female spiritual experience and male priestly authority and concludes that the women’s texts worked to create “new models of piety that, in time, legitimated a broader range of female behavior” (82). Both essays highlight the negotiations inherent in feminine self-representation for medieval women, whether or not the author is her own scribe.

St. John Flynn’s “The Saint of the Womanly Body: Raimon de Cornet’s Fourteenth-Century Male Poetics” argues that a lyric ostensibly praising the

Virgin Mary actually showcases the poet's desire "to extol the greatness of St. Bernard on the occasion of the two-hundredth anniversary of his death, by recreating, through the figure of the Virgin, Bernard's own texts" (95). Flynn's reading of the lyric is measured and subtle, though I hesitate to agree with his conclusion that the many allusions to Bernard's works erase the Virgin. In his Cistercian world, Raimon's knowledge of Bernard's writings would be extensive and, thus, I am not convinced that such an allusion-rich poetics constitutes an erasure of the Virgin. Flynn's observations about the non-corporeality of the Marian body, however, provides more compelling evidence to support his reading. The reading of the second lyric is thus more cogent, delineating how "the figure of the Virgin is a male poetic construct used as a means of defining [Bernard] and of expressing Raimon's admiration for him" (101).

Donald Gilman's "Petrarch's Sophonisba: Seduction, Sacrifice, and Patriarchal Politics" and Paul Miller's "Laurel as the Sign of Sin: Laura's Textual Body in Petrarch's *Secretum*" highlight Petrarch as a transitional figure between the medieval and early modern periods. Gilman reads Sophonisba in the tradition of Eve, Dido, and Lucretia, as a female who "submits to a suffering and sacrifice required in the rebirth of temporal and divine patriarchal order" (129). Miller likewise contends that "Laura comes to function, not as that which transcends the material, but as the substance that potentially makes the re-presentation of the transcendental possible" (140). For Petrarch, "[Laura's] body, the mortal signifier of the immortal soul, has been but the necessary vehicle for leading him to the transcendental signified, the divine logos" (147). Both Gilman and Miller see Petrarch's use of the feminine in accordance with how it privileges the masculine; similar to Jones's reading of Monica's and Heloise's tears, these authors see the female body as the very site of male primacy and achievement.

The remaining five essays address Renaissance women. Diana Robin, in "Women, Space, and Renaissance Discourse," reads the fifteenth-century letter-books of Cassandra Fedele and Laura Cereta, as well as Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*, to analyze how representations of architectural and natural space reflect the authors' rejection of patriarchal codes equating space with masculine power and autonomy. An interesting companion to this essay is Diane Wood's "In Praise of Women's Superiority: Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *De nobilitate* (1529)." Agrippa's work passionately argues a defense of women from a male perspective, and, in addition to her reading of Agrippa, Wood provides an analysis of how female writers of the time employed his work to their own purposes. As a largely explanatory essay, it is an excellent introduction to Agrippa for those unacquainted with him.

In a manner similar to Flynn's essay on Raimon de Cornet, Charles Platter's "The Artificial Whore: George Buchanan's *Apologia pro Lena*" explicates how Buchanan

employs the figure of the prostitute which “approaches the feminine only by creating a procuress with no personal desires or attributes of her own and who is controlled and altogether obscured by the associations of the poetic tradition that Buchanan uses to construct her” (207). Thus, the masculine poetic tradition inhibits the employment of the female body to speak for herself. Elizabeth Richmond-Garza’s “‘She Never Recovered Her Senses’: *Roxana* and Dramatic Representations of Women at Oxbridge in the Elizabethan Age” likewise examines how women are made a discursive object, in this case for playwright William Alabaster to comment on the legitimacy of Elizabeth’s queenship and the issue of divorce itself through an Orientalist construction both of the female body and of the East.

Sex and Gender concludes with Holt Parker’s “Latin and Greek Poetry by Five Renaissance Italian Woman Humanists,” an exciting introduction to female literary figures eclipsed by a masculinist heritage, including Angela Nogarola, Isotta Nogarola, Costanza Varano, Alessandra Scala, and Fulvia Olympia Morata. With brief introductions to the women and their works, Parker brings a wide array of forgotten and obscured poets into critical focus. Indeed, any graduate student interested in the Latin Renaissance and in need of a dissertation topic should immediately consult Parker’s “Directions for Future Research” for fertile suggestions of necessary scholarship. The essay is a fitting conclusion to a collection which is at its best when it faithfully adheres to its declared mission: to reclaim lesser-known texts obscured by a sexist scholarly tradition and to explore how these texts participate in or resist anti-feminist patriarchal codes.

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Joan Young Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. x + 275 pp.

This book pursues a double agenda. On the one hand, it presents modernized English texts of eighty-three exempla whose central subject is devils, women, or Jews. On the other hand, in an opening chapter and in extensive discussions introducing the three groupings of texts (one each on devils, women, and Jews), Gregg argues that “the popular homiletic exemplum [is] irreplaceable as a cultural artifact” because it “allows us to witness the interchange between popular and scholarly theology and, in doing so, permits us to discover those