

imagery of pollution of holy spaces as propaganda tools during the Crusades. In this chapter, Cuffel provides an excellent comparison of the difference between Christian-Jewish polemics, which attempted to feminize the other religion, and thus, negate the other's connection to the divine, and Christian-Muslim polemics, which Cuffel sees as creating "a rhetoric of hypermasculinity and violence" (p. 118). In chapter 5, Cuffel examines how medieval polemicists explained the locus for various illnesses in the impure bodies of their religious rivals. She argues that the combination of spiritual impurity with biological illness was important as it worked "doubly to 'damn' the targeted group" (p. 157). Finally, in chapter 6, she highlights how these discussions were also often connected to different animals, which worked to heighten their charges of irrationality and filthiness.

Overall, Cuffel has produced a seminal work in the use of gendered metaphors of the body in medieval religious polemics. While her work does consider Christian, Jewish, and Muslim polemics in rich detail, the focus of her discussion emphasizes Christian-Jewish polemics with less attention provided to Christian-Muslim polemics. This makes it difficult for the reader to connect

the discussion of polemics in part one, which considers mainly pagan, Christian, and Jewish beliefs, to part two, which also considers Muslim polemics. Nonetheless, the breath of her analysis is truly impressive. This work will certainly be important to scholars interested in the construction of the medieval body and in the development and defense of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theology. Moreover, I believe that it can also be a useful resource for introducing these topics to graduate, and even undergraduate students, and I intend to use it as such in the future.

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Sarah Higley, *Hildegard of Bingen's Unknown Language: An Edition, Translation and Discussion.* (The New Middle Ages series.) Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Pp. xvi + 246.

That some subset of humanity is compulsively driven to fabricate artificial languages is perhaps not news to us today. However, it was a great surprise to J. R. R. Tolkien in the

first World War to hear a fellow-soldier mutter to himself, “I think I shall express the accusative case by a prefix” (p. 84), enabling Tolkien to realize that he was not alone in this anomalous creative activity—about which he had been, up to then, bashful or even ashamed. It is thus particularly felicitous that Sarah Higley’s edition and analysis of Hildegard von Bingen’s constructed language (“conlang,” to use the current term) was assembled and written by Sarah Higley, herself a glossopoeist, namely, a language fabricator.¹

Higley accordingly spends six introductory chapters contextualizing Hildegard’s invention of the Unknown Language (“*Ignota Lingua per simplicem hominem Hildegardem prolata*,” as one manuscript has it; “an unknown language brought forth by the simple human being Hildegard” [p. 4]) not only in twelfth-century central-European Christian mystical and monastic traditions, as scholars before her have done; but additionally in the traditions of glossopoeists through time, with some emphasis on women glossopoeists.

Higley visits dozens of examples, including John Dee’s Enochian language (16th century); Mary Baker’s (Princess Caraboo’s)

Javasu, and H el ene Smith’s channeled Martian language (19th century); Ursula LeGuin’s devised Kesh language for her novel *Always Coming Home* (1985); and less-well-known science fiction author Suzette Hayden Elgin’s “women’s language,” L adan (1985).

Hildegard, Higley points out, was luckier than most of these, because she was not handicapped by the modernist or postmodernist prejudices, certainly felt by Tolkien, which have often associated glossopoeia with developmental immaturity and/or psychological pathology. (She cites Gilles Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense* [1990], among others, for a typical articulation of this idea [p. 10]). By contrast, Hildegard’s linguistic creativity was empowered by such positively-viewed glossopoeic and academic prototypes as Adam’s naming of the animals; the apostles at Pentecost; Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, the organization of which she copies in the *Lingua Ignota* glosses (p. 11, 21); and the logic of her own original thinking, present throughout her writing, which privileged the concept of “viriditas” (greenness), construed as the blossoming creativity found not only in the botanical world, but also in the intellect of each virgin monastic (pp. 19-21). It was thus natural and logical for

Hildegard's contemporaries to acknowledge her—an attested revelatory vessel—as the receiver, by revelation, of a divine (perhaps Edenic, pre-Babelian) language, and the authorized user of it. As Volmar, Hildegard's scribe and confessor, wrote in 1173 in praise of the *Lingua Ignota*, anticipating Hildegard's death: "Where then will the voice of your unheard language be?" (p. 21)

For readers such as this reviewer, on the other hand, Higley's greatest and most useful innovation is that she has consulted all manuscripts and previous editions, crosschecking spelling (and indicating variations where apparent) to bring all of Hildegard's *Lingua Ignota* vocabulary together in one place for the first time in an academic setting. Since the original *Lingua Ignota* glosses were in both German and Latin (sometimes one, sometimes the other), earlier investigations—having been more interested in the glosses than the *Lingua* itself—have arbitrarily split the vocabulary lists. Higley, by contrast, presents the entire vocabulary, *Lingua Ignota* in English, first in Hildegard's own Isidorian order (Spiritual Realm, Human Realm, Natural Realm) and then, most handily for modern readers, in alphabetical order. She not only combines

both the German and the Latin glosses, but also gives all variants, presumably the products of lazy scribes. She even notes Hildegard's own "bloopers"—the point where invention (or revelation) fails, and a duplicate occurs, as in the case of *scolmiz*, which is glossed both as "vestment, liturgical garb" and "plow handle" (p. 23).

And here, in these complete lists, is where the weaknesses of Hildegard's *Lingua*, well-known before Higley set her hand to the language, are most obviously exposed. For this is a vocabulary set composed of just over a thousand nouns, plus a handful of adjectives (*orzchis* [immense], *crizanta* [decorated, or possibly anointed], *chorzta* [glittering]). No verbs, no pronouns. How can one create sentences? Moreover, how did Hildegard (and, presumably, her community) use the *Lingua Ignota*? She did compose one macaronic antiphon, "O *orzchis* Ecclesia," in which Latin and *Lingua Ignota* vocabulary alternate—entirely as they do in many of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin-plus-vernacular songs of the *Carmina burana*. In that antiphon, Latin provides what the *Lingua* vocabulary-lists lack, and all is well. Alternatively, if the *Lingua* had a second use as a secret language (possibly in the presence

of outsiders) for Hildegard and her nuns, as some have suggested, this reviewer submits that verbs are not always needed for the achievement of communication: “Enpholanz warinz nascutil” (bishop / wart / nose) provides, if not exactly a sentence, an entirely understandable lexical string. There remains the possibility, of course, that Hildegard made glosses for the other parts of speech, and the manuscripts have been lost; or that such vocabulary existed only in contexts we do not retain. (The three adjectives above, for instance, are derived entirely from the macaronic antiphon, and do not appear in the glosses.)

The book has a few small errors (“weavil” for “weevil,” p. 188; two odd uses of “Church,” minus the usual article, p. 3), and one larger one. Higley cites Wilhelm Grimm’s dismissal (1848) of the *Lingua Ignota* as an “arbitrary, groundless invention” (p. 5), not realizing that Grimm was referring to Hildegard’s associated alphabet alone. In point of fact Grimm seems to have been fascinated by the *Lingua* itself. He pointed out some possible Latin influences, simultaneously regretting that inquiries among his “Slavic and Oriental” linguist colleagues had unearthed no cognates. Most charmingly, Grimm remarked that since the language contains vocabulary words for “southern

plants” (fig, laurel, plane tree, pepper) and “foreign birds” (pelican, ostrich, parrot, peacock), one could conclude that it would have to be spoken by people living in a warmer climate than Hildegard’s Rhineland.² But this oversight of Higley’s is not particularly significant.

Since Sarah Higley inhabits that rarefied country where glossopoeists dwell, she is more ideally suited to write about the *Lingua Ignota* than those to whom glossopoeia remains of inscrutable appeal. Having taught Hildegard since 2001, always including the *Lingua Ignota* in the course material, this reviewer has found that the *Lingua* is either compelling reading for the students or bafflingly boring—nothing in between. One fascinated student, as it turned out, was a glossopoeist herself. What a gift Higley’s book is for students like her, and for all of the rest of us as well.

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END NOTES

1. “Sally Caves” (Sarah Higley), “Teonaht.” 3 June 2008 <<http://www.frontiernet.net/~scaves/teonaht.html>>.
2. Wilhelm Grimm, “Wiesbader Glossen,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum* 6 (1848), p. 339.