

UP, 1993). Helen Solterer's study of the female respondent figure, highly relevant to the discussion on rape as a response to "female prevarication," is also an indispensable treatment of the construction of female discursive positions in medieval texts: *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (U of California P, 1995), especially pp. 35-47.

2. Sarah Kay and Simon Gaunt's work, for example, although focusing largely on troubadour poetry, has been widely influential and useful.

3. Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge UP, 1995) has a chapter on the fabliaux, and my *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature* (U of Michigan P, 2003) examines the fabliaux as they relate to medieval norms of feminine modesty.



Rebecca Rushforth, *St. Margaret's Gospel Book: The Favorite Book of an Eleventh-Century Queen of Scots*. The Bodleian Library, 2007. Pp. 114.

Rebecca Rushforth effectively situates the Gospel Book of St Margaret of Scotland (ca. 1046-1093) through the use of analogous images. A total of 67 pictures, often more informative (and certainly more illustrative) than lengthy textual analyses, are

included within the concise 114 pages. She also contributes to existing, but sparse, scholarship on this item by viewing it from a distinctly feminist perspective in terms of its possible female authorship, textual orientation, and ownership.

Rushforth begins with a tantalizingly brief introduction explaining the significance of the work being studied. It seems the book, one of which the queen was particularly fond, was accidentally dropped while crossing a stream. It was later recovered and found to have sustained only minimal water damage. This miracle, the only one associated with Margaret during her lifetime, was dutifully recorded in both her *Vita* and a little poem at the beginning of the book itself. This latter inscription allowed the book to be identified by Miss Lucy Hill after the Bodleian Library acquired it in 1887 for the unimposing amount of six pounds. Thus, it was rescued from historical oblivion not once, but twice.

The owner of the book, Margaret, Queen of Scots, was the granddaughter of Edmund Ironside, who had briefly been king of England (1017) before the conquest by Cnut (1016-1035). Following the Norman Conquest in 1066, she and her family fled to

Scotland, where she married King Malcolm (1057-1093). They had eight surviving children, three of whom became kings of Scotland in succession, and one of whom became queen of England through her marriage to Henry I. Margaret became noted for her personal piety and charitable works, evolving through the centuries, as Rushforth contends, into “a historical figure of reconciliation” (p. 105), between the Celtic and Roman traditions, between the Scots and the English, and between Catholic and Protestant monarchies. The difficulty with this sketchy biography is that it is drawn almost entirely from hagiographic treatments of Margaret’s life, which are not necessarily congruent with historical fact. For example, the claim that Margaret desired to become a nun and was only reluctantly persuaded to marry (p. 29) is not included in any existing *Vitae* and can only be inferred from an account given in the “D” version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which is probably a later (ca. 1100) interpolation derived from an early *Vita*.¹ Nor does this later hagiographic account reflect any recognition of Margaret’s sanctity during her lifetime (p. 59). However, these historical inaccuracies are understandable given current scholarship and the fact that this

study focuses on the Gospel Book, not its owner.

Interspersed within this brief historical context, Rushforth includes an informative discussion of the technical processes by which such a manuscript was constructed: preparation of the parchment, the design, the ink and type of script used, the style of illumination, and nature of the binding. Throughout this analysis, Rushforth compares Margaret’s book with other contemporary works and styles to further educate the reader. Thus we learn that the book was relatively modest and intended for personal use, the particular ink and script used were typical of mid eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon England, and the particular selection of texts within the Gospel Book might reflect Margaret’s spiritual interests and pious beliefs.

In addition to copies of entire pages of the Gospel Book itself—a total of eleven color photos—Rushforth includes many glorious images to help the reader situate the work. For example, Margaret’s genealogy is elucidated by the inclusion of later genealogy charts and a page from a psalter that records the death of Margaret’s father. Examples of comparable and contrasting scripts and

illustrations, such as those from the Hereford Gospels, the Pembroke 301 Gospels, and the 'Missal' of Robert of Jumièges, further edify the reader. A stunning picture of the treasure binding of the Judith Gospels (fig. 33) gives an indication of how Margaret's book might have once looked.

Rushforth also makes three highly intriguing and insightful observations in her analysis that reveal a distinctly feminist perspective. First, she hypothesizes that the book is equally likely to have been compiled by a woman as by a man. She states that it would obviously have been written by a literate person, who most probably taught at a monastic school, possibly a nunnery. So she chooses to "refer to the scribe as 'she', though it is possible that the book was made by a man" (p. 27). She even makes the hesitant suggestion that perhaps Margaret herself copied it while she was at Wilton Abbey (p. 55).

Second, Rushforth observes that the unique selection of the texts suggests a female audience, which might indicate Margaret's interests if this book was indeed written for her (pp. 67-73). The passages tend to focus on readings devoted to the Holy Cross, which would correspond with Margaret's personal devotion to the relic of

the Black Cross, or Holy Rood. They also highlight women in the Gospels, such as the Virgin Mary and Mary of Bethany, which I would suggest might be evidence of a particular devotion that inspired Margaret to name her youngest daughter Mary, a personal name that was somewhat unusual at the time and unheard of in Scotland.

Third, Rushforth asserts that the owner was more likely to have been literate than not. She accepts Margaret's hagiographer's assessment of her intellectual acuity and education (pp. 63-4), meaning in its most elemental sense, literacy. This claim should be contrasted with Richard Gameson's more cautious conclusion that although Margaret owned books and could read, "we have little way of knowing how proficient she was at reading, how much time she devoted to it, nor how important a role literacy played in her life as a whole."² Each of Rushforth's propositions—female authorship, ownership, and literacy—is intriguing and, at least in my view, entirely plausible.

Interestingly, Rushforth carries such feminist insights forward by observing that later female owners and researchers of the Gospel Book took an active interest in writing about women: Catherine Fane, the seventeenth-century

owner of the book had a great-grandmother, Grace Mildmay who “wrote one of the earliest surviving English autobiographies by a woman” (p. 105), and Lucy Hill, who identified the Gospel Book as Margaret’s, “wrote several books in later life including a translation of the memoirs [of] Charlotte Arbaleste de Mornay, an important Huguenot woman” (p. 105).

The author’s admiration for both Margaret and her Gospel Book illuminates each page. Perhaps through her own work, Rushforth has managed to rescue Margaret’s Gospel Book yet again.

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END NOTES

1. See *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Dorothy Whitelock, with David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1961) pp. xvi, 146.
2. Richard Gameson, “The Gospels of St Margaret of Scotland: The Literacy of an Eleventh-Century Queen,” in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (London: British Library, 1996), p. 161. Stephanie Hollis reaches the same conclusion as Rushforth in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin’s Legend of Edith and Liber confortatorius* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2004), pp. 333-334.



Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image, ed. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills. (The New Middle Ages.) Palgrave, 2004. Pp. viii + 243.

The essays in *Troubled Vision* examine the intersections of gender, sexuality, and vision in medieval culture from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. Bringing together a range of theoretical approaches that address the troubling effects of vision on medieval texts and images, the book mediates between medieval and modern constructions of gender and sexuality. *Troubled Vision* focuses on four central themes: desire, looking, representation, and reading. Topics include the gender of the gaze, the visibility of queer desires, troubled representations of gender and sexuality, spectacle and reader response, and the visual troubling of modern critical categories. Campbell and Mills’s introduction to the volume provides a framework of “queer optics” through which a lack of clarity in vision, when dealing with the distinction between subject and object, creates slippages in normative views of sexuality and gender.