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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Anneliese Pollock Renck’s Female Authorship, Patronage, and Translation in Late Medieval France: From Christine de Pizan to Louise Labé is a wide-ranging study meticulously parsing key literary and sociopolitical elements that combine to constitute “female savoir” and its resonances throughout late medieval French literary culture. Evaluating the standards and exigencies of the medieval academic tradition; the formation and education of women; and the aims and imperatives of literary commentary and translation, alongside questions of patronage, authorial agency/support, and manuscript production, this monograph brings female authorship and readership to the fore and extends a dynamic, agential role to medieval female readers, interpreters, and meaning-makers. Expertly researched and organized, Female Authorship consists of five chapters, an introduction and conclusion, fifteen black and white images, and eleven color plates. The time and space dedicated to visual analysis and compositional and printerly concerns regarding manuscript production—their ties to questions of authority, textual reinterpretation, and translation frequently dictated by patronage and influence—renders the images Renck studies an integral facet of her larger evaluation of literary culture and textual reception. The care Renck takes with the visual and the textual fully makes the case for the interdisciplinarity of late medieval manuscript production and literary culture.

Renck’s introduction is a captivating entrée en matière providing a lively exploration of a miniature of Medea with a “multivalent message” (2). Marrying various modes of artistic and textual interpretation and thus abetting polyvalent understandings of an exemplary figure commonly judged irredeemable, the miniature—painted by Jean Pichore for Antoine Dufour’s hugely popular Vie des femmes célèbres and offered to Anne de Bretagne—is granted a central position in the folio recounting Medea’s biography. As Renck explains, while the image is spatially tethered to the “positive” story of Erythrea, which precedes it in the text, it is explicitly cast as immoral in Dufour’s surrounding commentary. Additional points of contradiction include how the gory scene illustrating the “atrocity of infanticide and filicide” (2) twines
with religious iconography depicting sacrifice, martyrdom, stigmata, violence, and the writing project. Indeed, while Medea is represented exacting a bloody vengeance upon her son with “her pen plunged into his heart” (2), the literal instrumentalization of her infant serves a writerly end while connoting authorial violence since the letter is composed with the baby’s blood. Presenting Medea as “neither heroine nor enchantress, neither seductress nor abandoned lover” (3), and yet, explicitly as a writer, Pichore’s miniature renegotiates typical representations of Medea.

This early example helps establish the priorities of Renck’s monograph. Not only are the various intertextual resonances circumscribing the Medea story easy to recognize in later analyses of manuscripts’ visual and textual importance, Renck’s approach to Pichore’s illustration and Dufour’s textual elaboration exemplifies her consideration of gender, authorship, and readership throughout *Female Authorship*. The miniature of Medea also helpfully informs Renck’s examination of the canonicity and generic categorization of medieval texts. Additionally, the hermeneutic multivalence of the *Vie des femmes célèbres*’s women evinces many of the tenets of the *querelle des femmes* debates and deliberations related to genre. The “fractured and contradictory construction” of Medea as a writer introduces the larger stakes of “female engagement with the written word” and other visual media (3), which Renck aligns with translation, reception, patronage, and considerations of the authorship, ownership, and readership of late medieval and early modern works.

Renck’s first chapter, “Establishing Authority in Medieval Writing and Translation,” uses Zumthor’s theory of *mouvance* to emphasize how intertextual reinterpretations generate new interpretive frameworks that clarify the didactic, community-building objectives of medieval writers. This chapter attends to the authorial personae of Marie de France and Jean de Meun, who are situated alongside exegetical writers and classical *auctores*, and whose works showcase conceptual negotiations of authorship and translation.

Chapter 2, “Images of the Woman Reader and Writer in Fifteenth-Century France,” adroitly discusses theoretical differences between the original and the copy, particularly as conditioned by the author’s gender and that of the envisioned reader(s). Not only does woman’s status as “derived from man, one step removed from divine creation” (45) point to the tendency for the “copy” to be regarded as inferior, the frequent “coding of translation as feminine” (45) was also
implicated in these attributions of imperfection and deficiency. However, the translators Renck considers challenge these notions of inferiority, while an ampler view of women’s abilities coincided with a rise in representations of women as authors and readers. Drawing especial attention to Marie de France, the *Grandes heures d’Anne de Bretagne*, and Christine de Pizan, Renck persuasively charts phenomena abetting the rise in women authors, readers, patrons, and commissioners. The increase in female patronage reflexively shaped the subjects illuminators chose to represent, fueling the correlation between the makers and consumers of texts, and visual and textual representations of women.

Turning more directly to translation, chapters 3 and 4, “The Translator as Compiler in Antoine Dufour’s *Les Vies des femmes célèbres*” and “Adapting the *Heroïdes*: Text and Image in the *XXI Epistres d’Ovide*,” reprise Renck’s earlier valuation of the proximity of authorship, readership, and translation. In the case of medieval translators, *auctoritas* was first derived from the original source texts, which were then re-managed by translators who were able to take creative liberties with their glosses, renegotiations, and amendments of the originals. In the last chapter, “Literary Afterlives of the *Querelle des femmes*,” Renck focuses on textual and visual representations of women authors and female authorial figures. Considering how Anne de Graville, Marguerite de Navarre, Pernette du Guillet, and Louise Labé recodified the formative literary model established by Christine de Pizan, Renck nuances and amplifies what is commonly thought of as simpler genealogical relationships between women authors. Rather, Renck insists on each author’s critical response and deft negotiation of earlier visual and literary models, and the decisive role female patrons had in “influencing the evolution of representations of female *savoir* during the fifteenth century, and beyond” (217).

Renck’s conclusion makes a firm case for manuscript and translation study, which provide a fertile terrain for investigating the ownership and exchange of books as women increasingly became active creators, translators, critics, and consumers. As Renck argues, although the late medieval period and early centuries of the early modern period are often understood as cultures “dominated by male learning, writing, and *savoir*” (221), the significant increase in visual portrayals and textual representations of women readers, the proliferation of dedications to women, and direct interpellations of female readerly communities demonstrate the “function of literature in modelling reading practices for women” (221). Reading has its own dynamic, participatory aim
since the upsurgence of female patrons provided a special impetus encouraging women readers to engage with texts—not merely reading, but interpreting, translating, and “creat[ing] meanings in the literary works for themselves” (222). 

Alone, any one of Renck’s chapters presents enlightening and compelling case studies of late medieval French discussions of authorship, translation, patronage, and manuscript production; together, they trace an expansive, colorful trajectory across a number of centuries, languages, and literary traditions that is remarkable in scope and detail. Particularly for readers of MFF, Renck’s title might seem slightly misleading given the impressive attention granted to male authors of the classical through late medieval periods. In no way is this true criticism, but rather a wish that even more time and space were dedicated to Renck’s analysis of early female textual networks—a subject more fully addressed in the final chapter. A laudable, engrossing, interdisciplinary text, Female Authorship offers a vital contribution to investigations of late medieval authorship and female readerly practices.

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Sara Ritchey’s Acts of Care: Recovering Women in Late Medieval Health reminds us that while the burden of healthcare has long fallen disproportionally on women, their labor—during the Middle Ages and today—was not recognized as part of the professional, male-dominated field of medicine but was encoded as sanctifying and penitential, in other words, in a way that obscures women’s knowledge, expertise, and authority as caregivers. Following scholars like Monica Green, whose influential work on medieval medicine exposed how gender shapes not only the documentary record on medieval medicine, but the kinds of sources historians of medicine tend to privilege, Ritchey calls on scholars to think more expansively about what constituted caregiving on the