EQUALLY IN GOD'S IMAGE
WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

St Birgitta, Revelationes, 1500, Nuremburg, Anthony Koberger

Edited, Julia Bolton Holloway, Joan Bechtold, Constance S. Wright

Dedication

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Note to the Reader

This interdisciplinary book, based on papers given at Kalamazoo's International Medieval Studies Congress in 1985, and from elsewhere, was originally published in 1990 by Peter Lang, and soon sold out. Having purchased back its copyright from Peter Lang, I now offer it on the Web. Students can cite its materials by book and by URL, preferably both, in their papers. One essay is suppressed for copyright reasons and the information, instead, given as to how to purchase it from the University of Chicago Press.
The argument presented here, that women's status originally had been high due to Christ's Gospels, then was lowered through the adoption of the pagan Greco-Arabic model of the university for the official teaching of theology, was accepted, used and footnoted by Hans Küng, in his volume, *Christianity*.

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Introduction: The Body and the Book
or women to write books has been, through time, as if taking, eating and offering forbidden knowledge. "Take, eat, this is my Body which is given for you."\1 This book, written by women and men, will argue that for women to attain equality it has been necessary historically to resist hierarchy, to quest liminality, to exercise holy disobedience. In this book we see that women in earlier Christianity, especially in the Romanesque period, exercised that disobedience.\2 But that, tragically, in the paradigm shift to the Gothic, coinciding with the coming of the universities from which we were excluded for eight centuries, we came to internalize, negate and deny our equal powers, only permitting that disobedience a textual memory in theory, which we even to ourselves forbade in praxis.

Heloise, attempting to dissuade professorial Abelard, who had made her pregnant, from marrying her, bitterly stated, "Quae enim conventio scholarium ad pedissequas, scriptorium ad cunabula, librorum sive tabularum ad colos, stilorum sive calamorum ad fusos?" [What have scholars' conferences to do with nurse maids, desks with cradles, books or tablets with distaves, styli or pens with spindles?]\3 The discourse between these two brilliant scholars, one of whom began the first European university, ended in a partly self-chosen and imposed defeat by and for women in their apartheid from education. She called upon the classical text of Lucan's Pharsalia, identifying herself with the guilt and self-blaming of Cornelia in her relations with Pompey. But there was also, shadowing this acrimonious debate, the folk tale of Joseph's vociferous anger at the silent pregnant Virgin.\4 Behind her story, shaped equally by Heloise and Abelard in their letters, are other stories - in Latin, Greek and Hebrew - inscribed in men's books but once shaped within women's bodies, of the Word made Flesh.

The discourse Heloise and Abelard held is between the body and the book, between the physical world and the intellectual one, between praxis and theory. The debate had not always been divided along the moieties of gender. The tragedies of alphabets is that the powerful technology of scripts by means of which to generate texts was the possession of the male gender, rather than the female, women being segregated from the public within their families, not seeming to need to communicate across space and time. It was through the scribal text that messages and codes could be conveyed and have legal and religious power - other than through the frail living continuum of orality.\5 Hebrew women were forbidden literacy. European literacy is Semitic in its origins, not Indo-European; aleph, beth, becoming alpha and beta. Greek women, like Hebrew women, unless they were hetaerai, were likewise kept illiterate, though Roman girls and matrons could be portrayed as writing and we see their portraits with
styli to their mouths, wax tablets in their hands, their eyes gazing into ours across centuries of time.\6

Paradoxically, Roman literacy was originally the domain of slaves, such as the black former slave playwright Terence, whose texts centered upon the plight of women. Perhaps for that reason Roman iconography was comfortable with the portrayal, even emphasis, upon writing women, and Christianity, the religion of women and slaves, could initially adopt that greater textual, sexual equality. It was noble Roman ladies who aided Jerome in his labors of translating Greek and Hebrew scriptures into the Latin of the Vulgate.\7 It would be Anglo-Saxon queens who would bring Latin literacy into an island that previously used Germanic runes, likewise a Phoenician-derived alphabet as we see with a comparison between its letters and the alphabet used for Etruscan inscriptions.\8 Such women later would expend handsome sums upon the acquisition of exquisite Books of Hours, which they could barely read, and generously give to the founding and upkeep of university colleges, which they could not enter.\9 Which ever alphabet was in use, that technology for information retrieval granted its possessors powers over those who lacked it. Women sought access to it - and were blocked.

The Gospels convey a radical and liberationist religion, of a "world upside down," which gave women equality with men - until Paul, a practicing Jew, educated as a Greek and a citizen of Rome, thrust the structures of power, of Hebraism and Hellenism, back into this new and subversive sect by means of his less canonical Epistles.\10 Paul forbade women to preach; but Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle, in legend, preached in France, introducing the Asian and Egyptian religion to Europe.\11 In the early Christian and the Romanesque periods, women could choose virginity and learning, entering convents as nuns. Even though we normally think of Jerome as a misogynist, he strongly encouraged learning, as well as virginity, in women.\12 Paradoxically, both monks and nuns revered the figure of Mary Magdalene as apostle and hermit. They denied/affirmed the body and the book, sexuality/virginity and learning.\13 Then, in the Gothic, for women, both body and book began to be suppressed - with serious consequences. In this volume we shall witness the last flare up of medieval scarlet flames from these embers, where women passionately clung to the worship of the Magdalene, her image shaped by Gospel and Legend, resisting the Reformation's Pauline censoring concerning that image.\14

Christianity - because of Paul - came to forbid women the genre of the sermon; it tolerated - even feared and revered - their visions.\15 St. Thomas Aquinas, whose university learning drew upon Greco-Arabic philosophical materials as well as Judaeo-Christian theology and whose writings were used by the repressive Inquisition, carefully drew the distinction between sacramentum and prophet. While St. Thomas argued that only men could speak the word of God as priests, he explained
that the words of women visionaries must also be respected as equally divine since "propheta non est sacramentum sed Dei donum," ["prophecy is not a sacrament but a gift of God"].\(^{16}\) Caroline Bynum notes, too, that even the Dionysian wine of the Mass came to be denied the laity, being received for them only by the officiating priest. However, the crux of this form of the "separate but equal" doctrine hinged not upon equal access to theology, but upon women's exclusion from the pulpits of churches.\(^{17}\) The sacramentum, or male priesthood, required education and literacy, while the propheta was a "Dei donum," a gift from God, requiring no literacy or additional training, but merely the privilege of being chosen as God's mouthpiece. The distinction between sacramentum and propheta, following Aquinas, not only denied women access to the textual community of the university, confining their literacy to an increasingly minimal domain in the cloister, but also encouraged women to accept their growing dearth of educational opportunity as a "precious bane," as a blessing.

Concurrently we witness the intellectual logic of the virile woman saints of early Christianity giving way to the emotional hysteria of the later period, and we see then excessive devotional practices, such as contemplation of the profusely bleeding Christ, and anorexic fasting, formerly carried out by the Desert Fathers, now taken over by women, as if in answer to these pressures, these exigencies wrought by non-participation in the symbols and praxis of power.\(^{18}\) That self-silencing and internalization of aggression carried out by Heloise began in the twelfth and continued to the twentieth century - until Nora slammed the doll's house door, choosing freedom. Interestingly, both women rejected marriage, the logical outcome of comedies, romances and novels, as the solution to their problems. Interestingly, too, they rejected the mode of marriage which, in the Middle Ages, granted far greater sexual equality than does modern custom. Elizabeth Makowski, in her study of medieval canon law and conjugal rights, observes that women had equal rights with men in demanding the Pauline payment of the marriage debt, the act of coition. We hear both Heloise and Chaucer's Wife of Bath vociferously make those demands of their incapacitated husbands.\(^{19}\) Medieval wives were granted equal bodily rights and appetites as were their husbands; modern women have inherited Victorian frigidity. Our sexual paradigms have greatly shifted; from Greek homosexuality becoming Christian heterosexuality, both cultures believing women were insatiable,\(^{20}\) to our own where men may be forward but women must retreat. The title for this book is partly in response to Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martinez' study of the role of women from ancient Greece to the modern day, *Not in God's Image*.\(^{21}\) It also came about because of a debate within a book manuscript, where the thirteenth-century text proclaimed: "Li hom fu faiz a l'ymage de Dieu, mais le feme fu faite a l'ymage de l'ome, et por ce sont les femes souzmises as homes par loi de nature." ["Man is created in God's image, but woman is made in man's image and for that reason are women subject to men by natural law."]\(^{22}\) The text is that of Brunetto Latino's *Li Livres dou
Tresor, a book written to a king concerning politics, presenting to him material translated from Latin and Greek, from Cicero and Aristotle.\(^23\) As did Thomas Aquinas, Brunetto Latino sought to harmonize the Greco-Arabic culture, acquired from Spain and Sicily's wealth of learning, for the Christian Latin world. In so doing these authoritative scholars and transmitters of culture tragically also restored the Hebraic and Hellenic hierarchical attitudes concerning women as required to be necessarily submissive and inferior to men. Someone indignantly responded to this statement in a Tresor manuscript, declaring the earlier, Christian concept, "Et toutevoie est ele a l'ymage de Dieu." ["And yet she is in God's image"].(\(^24\) Whoever that inscribing writer was, whether a literate woman or a liberated man, the statement is scripturally true.

The time span of our texts takes fifteen hundred years. The Middle Ages is not an accurate term. In the Romanesque period, with equal rights to learning, women were forthright; in the Gothic, women became fragile, but clung to the memory of that strong past. Just before the year 1000, a Will written by Aethelgifu, an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman of great wealth and property, gives away items to women and states that if any oppose her Testament he shall be on God's left hand at Doomsday and hang like Judas.\(^25\) The Romanesque presented the Virgin as a strong figure upon the Throne of Wisdom, her Child in her lap, both looking directly into the eyes of their worshipers.\(^26\) The Gothic instead presented the richly crowned Virgin as coyly turned toward her Child held in her arm, the two simpering at each other, each as if sexually and incestuously courting the other. Gail McMurray Gibson's two spinning Madonnas, one Romanesque, one Gothic, similarly demonstrate that difference (Plate III. 1,2). The Romanesque presented certainty; the Gothic, the behavior of fear, of wooing favor where one has lost power, of exaggerated femininity and helpless dependency.\(^27\) We will find in the fourteenth century, St. Margaret as Margery Kempe's patron, Bridget of Sweden as named after St. Bridget of Ireland,\(^28\) Julian of Norwich going even further, echoing in her name both the female St. Juliana and the male St. Julian and opening her Showing of Love with a reference to Mary Magdalene. But, in each instance, the Gothic copy of the original Early Christian saint has to combat resistance and each pleats that against herself, rather than outwards. The shifts in style in these periods represented deeper paradigm alterations within culture that centered upon the relations of women to men, upon the history - and archaeology - of sexuality.\(^29\)

For as long as they could, women clung to the strong figure of Mary Magdalene, who could and did preach, who summed up the harmony of the Body and the Book. The figure of Mary Magdalene, perhaps, had been sculpted upon the Ruthwell Cross, as early as the seventh century, in Scotland, perhaps upon the recommendation of the Abbess Hilda of Whitby.\(^30\) Both Jerome and Abelard stressed that Paula and Heloise
knew Latin, Greek and Hebrew, and both also stated to them that it was the fallen
women, Mary Magdalene, who first saw the risen Christ, and who had anointed him
as such.\(^{31}\)

That anointing was certainly not carried out, in the Gospels, by a celibate
male. Twelfth-century monastic dramas, in Benedictine houses, were to stress this act
as performed by a scarlet-clad whore.\(^{32}\)

The Magdalene, "Venus in Sackcloth," had
functioned in relationship to Christ as had Dionysus in relationship to Apollo, as a
necessary and healing harmonizing of opposites. Finally, in a flickering of the flame,
in the face of the Reformation, came the swan song of Mary Magdalene, in her scarlet
robes, and Margaret, patron of childbirth and champion against the Devil, before the
imaging of women as figures of power was censored and repressed and such women
saints silenced from the canon.\(^{33}\)

Christianity, as a syncretic religion, had early
feminized the Godhead, and, when Gnosticism was suppressed, retained about the
worship of the Virgin, side by side with the Magdalene at the foot of the Cross,
powerful vestiges of Egyptian Isis worship.\(^{34}\)

The Virgin, in medieval art, was
garbed, not in blue, but red. Then, denied official presence, this sexual material went
underground, becoming again ethnico and the expression of the folk, rather than the
establishment. Instead of honoring the mother as the blessed one, she now was to be
silenced as the fury.\(^{35}\)

Both the Inquisition and the Reformation would persecute
such women as witches.

Interestingly, the change in style occurs simultaneously with women's loss of access
to learning because of the newly introduced universities - which came from the male
chauvinist cultures of Hellenism and Hebraism by way of Islam. In the texts men joke
cruelly about women's ignorance of Latin.\(^{36}\)

With that introduction of the
universities, from which women were rigorously excluded, literacy in Latin, or even
in vernacular languages, amongst women, even in convents, dropped alarmingly.\(^{37}\)
Yet the stories of the early Christian women martyrs, famous for their learning and
their disobedience to authority, continued to be loved by women and men through
time to the early Renaissance, and presented powerful, defiant, disobedient virgins or
whores, rather than wives.\(^{38}\)

They represented an opposing theory of heroism -
which had once been true \textit{praxis} - that mirror-reversed the new and artificial \textit{praxis} of
affected courtliness.

From the espousal of virginity\(^{39}\) - and learning - as an access to power, women were
now driven to anorexic fasting, previously the domain of the Desert Fathers, and to
hallucinatory visions in their quest to control themselves and others in the face of their
powerlessness.\(^{40}\)

With the Inquisition, women's quest for power by these means
came to be far more tightly tramelled. Denied, because of Paul's dictate, the right to
preach, Bridget and Catherine were so controlled - but nevertheless persuaded popes
and kings to do their bidding as being the conduit through which Christ spoke in
convenient politico-religious visions. Sometimes the Church could effectively stop
such power ploys, as Judith Brown has shown occurred with an Italian Lesbian nun; sometimes the Church could permit such a marginal person as St. Theresa of Avila, a woman and a Jew, to crystallize these forms of power; sometimes a woman using them could be destroyed by both the laity and the Church, as was St. Joan of Arc.\footnote{41} It was a dangerous path to pursue; but no other avenues were open unless one was, like Christine de Pizan, literate - and she praised Joan in her last work, identifying with her for her great courage.\footnote{42}

Women could attempt as did Heloise, to remain within the male textual community. We see this in the brilliant letters, written by Paula in the fourth century, Lioba in the eighth, Heloise in the twelfth, as they dialogued with Jerome, Boniface and Abelard, the later writers clearly using models from the past, from Ovid's \textit{Heroides} as well as Paul's Epistles, subverting the male form and coopting it for women in their discourse with those whom they loved.\footnote{43} All three women writers flaunted their classical learning, from the \textit{Aeneid} and the \textit{Pharsalia} to their male teachers - who only responded with Scripture. But women now also, and again subversively, sought learning in female teachers who would nourish their aspirations, thereby creating separate but equal textual communities. It was held that Virgin's mother, St. Anne, had taught her to read (for women had to subversively teach each other, without benefit of clergy),\footnote{44} and St. Birgitta attributed her learning of Latin to St. Agnes, rather than to the male clerics who surrounded her.\footnote{45} That tale is carefully repeated in the English Brigittine manuscripts. Noisy illiterate Margery Kempe, much influenced by such Brigittine texts, sought out anchoress Julian of Norwich's quiet wisdom.\footnote{46} Julian of Norwich, borrowing from Anselm, wrote of God as if her mother, as maternal in lieu of patriarchal.\footnote{47} Thus women often avoided male models, choosing instead to form their own identities and their own textual and interpretive communities by using feminine examples. To have used male paradigms - given the misogynist literature with which Latin was so often taught - would have been an act of self-cancellation.

Christine de Pizan described the crippling effect of this misogyny in the \textit{Book of the City of Ladies}, where she is discovered in a state of depression (which is, psychiatrically, suppressed, censored rage) after reading a book by a virulent misogynist, a book that is a product of the world of the university which excluded her and all her sex.\footnote{48} She first internalized that male text, with its hate-filled pages about wicked women who destroyed men, twisting it upon herself with pain. But then, in her own counter-text, by its means, we, the readers, join with her in her liberating challenge to such misogynist themes in such material. For she is able to succeed in that task because she had taught herself enough mastery of that male textual community, through having access to the King's library, to understand, withstand and and counter these negating images. She critically rethinks her predicament, revisions
her sex - she calls to mind women who have been virtuous, rather than vicious - and proceeds to write about them in order to help other women, other readers of misogynist texts. One powerful rewriting is of Xanthippe dashing into Socrates' judgement hall, just as he is about to quaff the hemlock, and dashing it from his lips.\textsuperscript{49} The original version of that tale, told by men against women, had Xanthippe not be the loyal and true and brave wife, but the selfish nag and shrew who would empty the pisspot upon her philosopher husband's head. Christine de Pizan thus subverted the male form, the book, by writing a revisionist book that intertextually entitles itself the \textit{Book of the City of Ladies}, after Augustine's \textit{City of God}, and which praises, rather than blames, women. She has raised her own consciousness and those of her readers, even that of the Chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson, winning his affirmation. We need to copy the pages of her wise books. Her codes for conduct at court are equally valid for today's women within universities.\textsuperscript{50} They are paradigms granting equality in the midst of power structures.\textsuperscript{51}

Women sensed that there was a strong connection between sacred books and their sexual bodies, between the doctrine of the "Word made Flesh," and Rousseau's adult "books to be read with one hand," books in Latin and the vernacular being both the truth and the \textit{pulcherrima ambages}, of the Bible and Arthurian romance.\textsuperscript{52} Women often introduced Christianity and its Book. Canon law, because of Paul, granted medieval women equal sexual rights in marriage. But then we were shut out of its modes of education and literacy. Heloise laid the blame on women's bodies as the bearers and nurturers of children. The dialectic was between textiles and texts, between distaves and pens, cradles and books, between the praxis of the body and the theory of the word, between writing in milk or ink.\textsuperscript{53} Women, like the Wife of Bath, were the labor-intensive producers of cloth and the brewers of ale.\textsuperscript{54} These occupations took all our time, letting us to be merely "chroniclers of small beer" - but they also gave us in that period considerable economic clout with this distaff participation in the commercial world, to be lost with the Industrial Revolution which excluded and exploited women further by means of its machinery.

Where can we find women's chronicles? As Hélène Cixous reminds us, women write not in black ink but in white milk.\textsuperscript{55} She was more likely to record history in cloth than upon parchment. Her story is the unexamined, seemingly wrong side, of the arras of history. Her chronicle was more likely to have been told to the baby in the cradle and to the family at the hearth, and to have been woven at the loom and embroidered with the needle, than it was to be inscribed with quills upon parchment and with chisels upon stone.\textsuperscript{56} Today, where garments are machine made, we forget and neglect the labor-intensivity of their production, we undervalue their artistry and their symmetry in their conformation to the human body, whether of men or of women or of children. But we can find these monuments where texts were being written in the
vernacular rather than in Latin, where they were inscribed in those languages spoken and known even by women and children.

Dante noted of merchant class Florentine women how:

L'una vegghiava a studio de la culla,
e, consolando, usava l'idioma
terre il padre e le madri trastulla;

l'altra, traendo alla rocca la chioma,
favoleggiava con la sua famiglia
d'i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma.

[The one kept watch in minding of the cradle, and soothing spake that speech which first delighteth fathers and mothers; another, as she drew its threads from the distaff, would tell her household about the Trojans, and Fiesole, and Rome.]\(^57\)

He writes of these women, himself writing for them in their vernacular Italian, as speaking in baby talk and the vernacular, as lacking access to Latin and its grammar.\(^58\)

The text of *Piers Plowman* - in English - also movingly tells us of such unwritten and marginal lives, of these forgotten illiterate peasant women, equated with prisoners in dungeons, and of the intensity of their labors. The most needy are our neighbours . and we name good hede,

As prisoners in puttes . and poor folk in cotes,
Charged with children . and chief lords rente,
That thei with spynynge may spare . spenden hit in hous-hyre,
Bothe in mylk and in mele . to make with papelotes,
To a-glote with here gurles . that greden after fode.
Also hem-selue . suffren muche hunger,
And wo in winter-tyme . with wakyng a nyghtes
To ryse to the ruel . to rocke the cradel,
Both to karde and to kembe . to clouten and to wasche,
To rubbe and to rely . russhes to pilie,
That reuthe is to rede . othere in ryume shewe
The wo of these women . that wonyeth in cotes. C.X.71-83

[The poorest folk are our neighbours, if we look about us . . . the prisoners in the dungeons and the poor in their hovels, overburdened with children, and rack-rented by landlords. For whatever they save by spinning they spend on rent, or on milk and oatmeal to make gruel and fill the bellies of their children who clamor for food. And they themselves are often famished with hunger, and wretched with the miseries of winter . . . cold, sleepless nights, when they get up to rock the cradle cramped in a
corner and rise before dawn to card and comb the wool, to wash and scrub and mend, and wind yarn and peel rushes for their rushlights. The miseries of these women who dwell in hovels are too pitiful to read, or describe in verse.]

We can see such women in the margins of manuscripts, such as the Luttrell Psalter or the Tres Riches Heures, and sculpted upon the misericords of abbey churches, such as those at Malvern and Westminster as wielding their distaves as weapons belaboring men.

We see them in the stained glass, sculpture, frescoes and tapestries, wearing along with their menfolk the magnificent artistry of their textile production. We can read of them in the Corpus Christi's dramatic palimpsesting of medieval and Biblical people. We can guess at their folk culture, their oral telling of tales, their secularity, in the world of time, now silenced because it was not committed by pen to parchment. In this secular and visual sphere is an explosion of color. We can piece together its cloth and its embroidery, its laughter and its tears. But, as with Ovid's Metamorphoses tale of Tereus, Procne and Philomela, and Shakespeare's retelling of it in Titus Andronicus, female protagonists are denied speech, their message/bodies instead criminally violated and mutilated. Similarly did the Anglo-Saxon women chronicle rape and arson against themselves within the Bayeux Tapestry.

Juxtaposed to their visible silence is the world in which women from the past can be heard as well as seen. That is the world of cloistered nuns in black and white, who write and who sing, composing both Latin books and Gregorian chant. In this book, linking present and past, are essays by nuns and monks about their models from the past and written within that continuum, cheating time and death. In this book we have pieced together parts of the history of medieval women from what records are available in textile and in text. The vivid colors of the one spelt mortality, the black and white severity of the other their eternity. The monastic world is a textual community, to use Brian Stock's term, which transcends time. It brought what was marginal into the centrality of texts, with black words upon white parchment, transcribing both words and music.

Strangely, the Inquisition's records of medieval Montaillou give us similar glimpses into women's lives - of the petty nobility and of the peasantry - allowing them to be heard as well as seen - and it is significant that these are texts about heretics, the Inquisition's records of a Cathar community, written in Latin legal prose, translating from the oral langue d'oc which it was to destroy. Piers Plowman, written in the people's language and poetry, is about Lollards. Both Cathars and Lollards were non-hierarchical, allowing these portraits of women to become inscribed in black and red in literate male texts. In the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Cathars, like the Jews, were to be put to the sword and the flame in genocidal pogroms. In the fifteenth century the Lollard followers of John Wyclif, including women, were to be
burned at the stake, to be followed in the Renaissance and later by the burning of witches - which was not a medieval phenomenon.

The universities, which imitated Greek and Islamic centers of learning in denying women access to formal education, increasingly imposed their dogma upon Christendom and trained theologians to be Inquisitors. These men, paradoxically, stamped out heresy, using what had once been heretical, the pagan philosophy of Aristotle, as their instrument, and by its means they persecuted the marginal "other" who lacked their access to power, whether these were Jewish or Muslim (who had paradoxically been the translators and preservers of Aristotle's texts), Cathar or Waldensian, Wycliffite or Hussite. Being of the other gender, as with being of another race or creed, likewise could render one victim to this rigid machinery for monoculturalism set into motion by the universities.\66 The religious sects, such as the Cathars and the Wycliffites, which upheld the threatening sexual equality of an earlier liminal and liberating Christianity, and which stressed the right of the poor to education, to literacy, were now quashed by the universities' gender-differentiated quills and pens, with the phallocentric tools and weapons of logic. Later the Reformation would succeed where the earlier heresies had failed. It may have succeeded because of the Inquisition's excesses. But women were not to be permitted a presence in the universities until our century. Nor could they enter now the dissolved convents of the Protestant regions. Men won. Women lost.

In the halcyon days before the storm, however, men like Wyclif and Hus, associated with Oxford and Charles Universities, in England and in Czechoslovakia, were able to use their academic positions from which to challenge hierarchies, proposing a return to Gospel egalitarianism with such proto-Marxist movements as the Great Society and the Peasants' Revolt. England, as a result, produced a great flowering of vernacular literature for the laity and for women - a literature in which women's treble tones were definitely heard along with men's bass voices. Thus Chaucer could permit his Wife of Bath and his Prioress of Stratford to tell their sermons and fables, their "old wives' tales" (I Timothy 4.7, "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself unto godliness") and hagiographic legends in disobedience to Paul, by speaking out in assemblies. Yet the women's voices found in these vernacular texts were, for the most part, written by men, as it were, in a literary cross dressing, a textual transvestism, that was to continue through time.\67 The heyday of women's writing had been before 1066 in the British Isles, with such women as Hilda and Lioba; after that time we find it rarely, with Christina of Markyate, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich and the Brigittine circles, where women's texts were more frequently written by others rather than by themselves - in their own right.

Medieval Studies and Feminist Studies can converge, the first being the second's "Distant Mirror," explaining present problems through past paradigm shifts, deriving
theory from *praxis*. In history we have both historiographers and cliometricians, some, like Natalie Zemon Davis looking at readership, some, like Susan Stuard, looking at women slaves. In literature, at last, we are permitted to examine texts in their contexts, bringing fact to bear upon fiction, history upon fantasy, linking praxis and theory. Marxist Feminist approaches can be of value, letting us see the world of the folk as well as that of authority.\textsuperscript{68} We also have deeper ways of investigating the material, ways which are less controllable. Just as each great male saint in the Middle Ages was typically associated with a companion woman saint (Augustine with Monica, Benedict with Scholastica, Guthlac with Pega, Francis with Clare), who was often his sister and who was often rebellious to his law,\textsuperscript{69} so famous psychoanalysts in our century, patriarchal Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan,\textsuperscript{70} have their sometimes rebellious followers, Anna Freud and Karen Horney in the case of the first,\textsuperscript{71} Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Jane Gallop in the case of the second.\textsuperscript{72} Some of their collective thought has influenced Rudolph Bell, Caroline Bynum and Laura Kendrick, though the emphasis on the body in literature had already been brilliantly broached by the maverick Marxists Mikhail Bakhtin and Roman Jakobson, in writings on medieval religion and literature.\textsuperscript{73} It has now become fashionable, rather than forbidden, to speak of women's orifices as wounds in discussing menstruation. But more work needs to be done with anorexia - once practiced by Egyptian Desert Fathers, then by St. Francis, and more recently by Gandhi and imprisoned Irish terrorists (thus by no means being an exclusively female complaint) - seeing it instead as a bitter political mirroring back to the oppressor of that denial of power, and even life, to the oppressed.\textsuperscript{74} More research needs to be carried out with gender studies, liturgical studies and symbolic anthropology, especially in the liminal rites of passage, such as pilgrimage, taking the work of Victor and Edith Turner, Clifford and Hilda Geertz, and James and Renate Lellep Fernandez concerning liturgy and ritual\textsuperscript{75} to an investigation of both the literate culture of the Middle Ages and of its folk practices. To view medieval Christianity as a syncretic religion, seeing, for instance, the use of the Isis Lactans motif in the powerful cult statues of the Virgin nursing the Child through time, Isis being associated with writing, could benefit scholarship.\textsuperscript{76} It is a contradiction that while literacy had so largely required celibacy, the presence of woman in early through late Christianity became dominant in its theory if not in *praxis*. Latin's allegorical abstractions are grammatically feminine in gender and therefore required women for their personifications - for instance Grammatica herself and her sisterhood, and we see these powerful, and often frightening, personifications run rife in the texts of Boethius and Langland.\textsuperscript{77} In both of the worlds of scribal literacy, the monastery and the university, the presumed need to avoid and exclude women had resulted in misogynist texts and tales, like that of Xanthippe, Socrates' shrewish wife, emptying the pisspot on his head along with her shrill invectives, Phyllis riding upon Aristotle's back, goading him with her spurs, to Alexander's superior laughter, and Virgil suspended in a basket all day in the hot
Roman sun by his imperial mistress whom he was to punish in turn. These are stories about women, written without their presence or consent, and against them. In these texts gender and sexuality, women's presence - because of our absence - become an important - and often negative - semiotic coding of threatening dyads and binary polarities.

Paradoxically, though Greeks suppressed women, the Parthenon was dedicated to the Virgin Athena; though the Gothic period treated women unequally, Chartres was built to the Virgin Mary; though women were denied entrance to the universities, the allegorical figures for learning and education were of women, Dame Grammar, Lady Philosophy, and the Queen of Sciences, Theology. The figures of Isis and her child Horus and the Virgin and her Child Jesus merged through time. For there was the further and deeper and now forgotten paradox that this literacy conveyed a theology whose central tenet was of the Word made Flesh, of a mother and a child, a human bonding it did everything to prevent. To attain equality we shall have to, like Lysistrata and her gossips, seize the Acropolis and take back the Queen of Sciences, Theology - which in the Middle Ages was their critical theory - making it our praxis.

Whether we investigate women in such textiles as the Bayeux Tapestry or the Unicorn Tapestries, or in the music of convents, such as written by the nuns of Las Huelgas or by Hildegard of Bingen, or in the texts which demonstrate women's strong identification with defiant female saints, such as the Magdalene, Cecilia, Juliana, Margaret, Catherine or Eugenia, many of whose Golden Legends recur in Hrotswitha's plays and in the Auchinleck Manuscript (which scholars have not noticed as being a woman's book), we trace labyrinths through time, gathering up - like Isis - the scattered fragments and leaves of manuscripts and texts. The answer is for women to reenter the worlds of the self and the book, coming to see at the ending of, for instance, Dante's quest and pilgrimage upon which he is guided by the wisdom of the Sibylline Beatrice, an incomparable Celestial Rose. That Rose of white and gold, mirror-reversing and echoing the Roman de la Rose's scarlet one, includes in its mandala women who are equal in number, weight and measure with men, where all are equally in the image of God who, Dante states, appears as if painted in our image and who mirror writes with Dante, and then, Christine, and now, ourselves, the book we hold and read.

Notes

1 Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 53, noting that the elements came to be withheld from women, being received in her place by the male priest; p. 62, on Hildegard's vision of Eve collecting the blood of Christ in the now forbidden wine chalice, God's voice stating to do so will save humanity; see
also Literature and the Body: Essays on Population and Persons, Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1986, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); books, like mandalas, are powerful symbols of the relationship of the self, the body, with the cosmos, the soul.

2 Sister Jane Morrissey, S.S.J., "Scholastica and Benedict: A Picnic, a Paradigm."


6 Patricia Corbett, Roman Art (New York: Avenel Books, 1980), plates XXIV, "Portrait of Pacuvius Proculus and his Wife," XXV, "Young Girl Writing," showing both women with styli to their mouths, wax tablets in their hands.

7 Jane Barr, "The Vulgate Genesis and St. Jerome's Attitude to Women."


"For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Corinthians 11.7-9); "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (14.34-35); "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5.22-23); "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (6.5). He also powerfully contradicted himself: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3.28); "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife" (1 Corinthians 7.3-6).

1 Corinthians. 14.34-35; Liesel Nolan, "Is She Dancing? A New Reading of Lucas van Leyden's Dance of the Magdalene of 1519."

Susan Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners,", p. 162, quotes Jerome writing to a mother and daughter, A.D. 403: "Have a set of letters made for her of boxwood or of ivory and tell her their names . . . . When she begins with uncertain hand to use the pen, either let another hand be put over hers or else have the letters marked on the tablet . . . . Let her every day repeat to you a portion of the Scriptures as her fixed task . . . . Instead of jewels or silk let her love the manuscripts of the Holy Scriptures, and in them let her prefer correctness and accurate arrangements to gilding and Babylonian parchment with elaborate decorations. Let her learn the Psalter first, with these songs let her distract herself, and then let her learn the lessons of life in the Proverbs of Solomon . . . Let her then pass on to the Gospels and never lay them down." Madame Montessori would advocate similar ways to teach literacy to slum children; tragically today her methods are exclusively for the privileged and Headstart discourages minority children's exposure to letters and books.


These conflicting codes became internalized in the intertexts of women as well, where the opinions on sexual equality gave the spectrum that ranged from "Man is the complete work of God . . . Woman the work of man," "Homo enim plenum opus Dei est . . . Femina enim opus viri est," of Hildegard of Bingen to the egalitarianism espoused by St. Catherine of Siena's Christ: "In my sight there is not man nor woman, not learned nor unlearned."

Religion thus forced women, through its behaviorism of prohibition and encouragement, into illiteracy, anorexia and hallucinatory psychosis as the means whereby they both lost and could attain a modicum of power and control. Women
anthropologists make similar observations concerning Afghan culture which is male-dominated, where girl babies are unwanted, neglected and thus subject to high mortality, and where the women resort to episodes of extreme hysteria to get attention. Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1977), discusses hallucinations as an aspect of the bicameral mind - before literacy.


17 In opposition to this dictate arose an entire body of literary texts in which allegorical women preach, Boethius' Philosophy, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's Reason, Langland's Dame Study, Erasmus' rosy-cheeked Folly, among others, all defying Paul.


19 Elizabeth Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law."

20 For which see Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*.


24 Guillaume de Lorris similarly carefully stated that feminine Reason was in God's image: "Sachiez, se la letre ne ment,/ que Dex la fist ou firmament/ a sa semblance et a s'image/ et li dona tel avantage/ qu'ele a pooir et seignorie/ de garder home de folie,/ por tant qu'il soit tex qu'il la croie" (2973-2979), *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1976), I, 92.

25 Aethelgifu's Will, Schiede Collection, Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University.


observation concerning nineteenth-century American women.

28 Bechtold, "St. Birgitta."


30 Holloway, "Crosses and Boxes."


33 Nolan, "Is She Dancing?"


39 This took the extreme form at times of women disguising themselves as men. See John Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and


42 Ester Zago, "Christine de Pizan: A Feminist Way to Learning."


45 Joan Bechtold, "St Birgitta".

46 Gail McMurray Gibson, "St. Margery: The Book of Margery Kempe."


51 Julia Bolton Holloway, "Convents, Courts and Colleges: Prioress and Second Nun."

52 Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1977); the dialectic, which is not dialectic, is that between the Bible's Song of Solomon and Dante's *Inferno* V; see Chauntecleer, "The storie is also trewe, I undertake, As is the book of Launcelot de Lake, That wommen holde in ful greet reverence," 3211-13.


56 It is interesting, however, that women are usually only shown spinning in the marginalia to texts; they themselves preferred their central portrayal to be as book-holding and/or praying. When Eleanora da Toledo in the Renaissance had her quarters frescoed in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, it was with a large Penelope at the loom at the center of the ceiling, a tiny peripheral Ulysses journeying about its margins.


58 De vulgari eloquentia, I.i.


61 See, for instance, the details in Flemish paintings, Erwin Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting (New York: Harper, 1971), II, Plates 111, 120, 150, 185, 196, 206, etc.

62 VBI.VNVS:CLERICVS:ET:AELFGYVA; HIC DOMVS: INCENDITUR.

63 Morrissey; Father Gerard Farrell, O.S.B. "Saints Benedict and Scholastica: The Liturgical Music."


67 Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Defoe's Moll Flanders, Flaubert's Madame Bovary ("Madame Bovary c'est moi"), James' Isobel Archer and Joyce's Molly Bloom. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) note that not until the Industrial Revolution freed women from the distaff and loom were we to have the self-educated women governesses, women novelists and women essayists, the Bronte sisters, with their adopted male names, George Sand and George Eliot, Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau and Margaret Fuller.

68 Cora Kaplan, Feminist Marxist preface to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh and Other Poems (London: Women's Press, 1978), pp. 5-36; Gayatri Spivak spoke on Bengali Feminist Marxists; authors of this book have similarly functioned as a collective.

69 This volume is dedicated to a brother's memory. See Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, pp. 100-109, on Francis and Clare, Richard Rolle and his sister.


74 Joan Jacobs Brumberg, Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa (New York: Penguin, 1989), gives the received opinion, seeing mothers and families as to blame, anorexia as a women's eating disorder, which is also Rudulph Bell's thesis. A Princeton senior English thesis, instead, saw the disorder as symptom, women mirroring back to society their rage at its injustice, and that women writers, for the same reasons, created literary characters, such as Frankenstein, Heathcliffe, Rochester, personifying their authors' self-destructive male animi and anger. It may be that women, denied access to male codes of discourse, deliberately create a baffling
counter code concerning the linguistics of hunger/anger.


76 Isis Lactans; The Goddess Obscured; Twice-Told Tales: Apuleius and Chaucer, ed. Constance Wright, Julia Bolton Holloway.

77 See Courcelle, La Consolation de Philosophie; Grammatica, in medieval and Renaissance versions, is shown as kindly and maternal; in a more recent sculpture in the Ambrosian Library, Milan, she is shown however with a visage of rage, her cat of nine tails brandished with ferocity, beating Latin into students; a manuscript associated with Brunetto Latino and created for his children, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, Magl. Conv. Soppr. F.4.776, folio 3, gives an illumination of Grammatica maternally protecting a schoolboy; Victor Turner notes that the Ndembu incorporate such sexual polemics into the world of game in their rituals, the two genders "cheerfully reviling" each other, to release tension and heal society, The Ritual Process, p. 79; but these classical/medieval tales have an aspect to them of cruelty and disgust, which is more homosexual than heterosexual.

78 See Nolan; this material would be culled by Jankyn against Alisoun in Chaucer's compilation within the Canterbury Tales of "The Book of Wikked Wyves," where it represents a continuum within the textual community of texts against women and against marriage, for which see Traugott Lawler, "The Chaucer Library: "Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves," The Chaucer Newsletter, 7 (1985), 1,3-4.

79 Jane Chance was writing on Chaucer's mythography, including these figures, at the time of this book's editing. See Pierre Courcelle, La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1967), plates giving manuscript illuminations.

80 Gibson, "Thread of Life."


82 This perception is owed to Professor Louise George Clubb who noted, in my Berkeley doctoral orals, that the Rose is like a Quaker Meeting, the women to one side, the men to the other, and that they are equal. When I first read Dante's line I thought it was blasphemy, then realized it was theologically correct. If we are in God's image, he is in ours. See Gerhart Ladner, Ad imaginem Dei: The Image of Man in Medieval Art (Latrobe, 1965); The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought.