notes and bibliography are accurate and more extensive. In fact, as the editor of this anthology, Wilson shows herself capable of sensitive, intelligent, and careful work. By contrast, the failures of the present edition are the more glaring. This is particularly unfortunate since the book is published by a Canadian press, the Peregrina Publishing Company of Saskatoon, and is the kind of project one would wish to encourage.

Wilson, moreover, gives very little hint of her motives in preparing this new translation of the plays. How does this version differ from or surplant the other three translations made this century? What is the stage history of the plays? There is no mention of productions in Paris and London late last century and early this, nor do we learn whether Bonfante's translation, intended for the stage, has ever been so used. Though she mentions Hrotsvit's rhetorical practices, Wilson simply lists highly technical terms, certainly not familiar to the average reader, and some not even common in scholarly circles. Surely examples would enhance the discussion, and brief definitions of the terms would be both an aid and a courtesy.

Indeed, the powerful dialogue, whether it be angry or tender, the subtlety of characterization, and most of all the intelligence informing them, make Hrotsvit's plays important. More than 1000 years after it was first heard, the forceful voice of Gandersheim still speaks to us; and there is no doubt that it deserves -- and with 1000 years in which technology and knowledge have developed, it should have been given -- a commensurate medium.

[1] The form "Hrotsvitha" is perhaps most commonly used today, while earlier writers chose the variant "Roswitha".

[2] *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (+203) to Marguerite Porete (+1310)* (Cambridge: University Press, 1984).

[3] "The Saxon Canoness: Hrotsvit of Gandersheim" in *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 34.

[4] I have compared Wilson's text with H. Homeyer's edition *(Hrotsvithae Opera.* München, Paderborn, Wien: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1970) on which her translation is based.

FACE VALUE: THE POLITICS OF BEAUTY

Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

Linda Hunter

Face Value: The Politics of Beauty by Robin Lakoff and Raquel Scherr is an insightful and timely introductory reader which comes to terms with our taken-for-granted notions of the concept of beauty. In an intelligent and witty style the authors discuss and expand upon three separate, yet interdependent themes which are of central importance to such a concept. The history, psychology and politics of beauty are presented and discussed in a manner which adequately satisfies the interests of both academic and general readers.

Beginning with their personal childhood memories of the pains and joys associated with beauty and commenting on perceptions about women and beauty in adult life, Lakoff and Scherr convince us of the necessity of bringing a concept — which at one time was considered taboo in feminist circles — out of the closet and into the literature. As these authors state themselves, "Fairy tale, cautionary tale, romance — all lure us into the beauty-is-power paradox. We have to understand the force of that myth over all of us in order to free ourselves from it, to become politically effective in a true way."

In their first section, Lakoff and Scherr introduce and expand upon many of the myths that have been and continue to be associated with beauty. It is pointed out that myths reveal a great deal about how we want beauty to function symbolically for us. The existence of the "most beautiful woman in the world" (Miss Universe) or the notion that "beauty is allied with innocence, virtue and stupidity" (dumb blond) are two of the myths which the authors challenge with both realistic statements and countermyths. Lakoff and Scherr question our perceptions and classifications of beauty in order to understand the power that these myths wield over the centuries.

Feminine perfection has regularly been represented in art and literature, from the Greek goddess Aphrodite 4000 years ago, through the Roman Venus, to this month's captivating model on the cover of *Vogue*. Chapter 3 "The Representation of Venus" and Chapter 4 "Beauty in Our Time" are particularly insightful with regard to understanding "beauty and its vicissitudes across time and space." The "neat beauty," the "wild beauty," the "temptress," the "innocent beauty," the beauty of the "thin, childlike figure" or "matronly, buxom, womanly body" are some of the varying representations that Venus has endured over the ages. Lakoff and Scherr analytically interpret the myriad of ideal beauties by descriptively and visually contrasting these symbols of Venus which have been sculptured and painted throughout history. In modern times it is the camera which has become the vehicle for symbolizing true beauty. The "professional beauty" must be made to look good in front of the camera, her photogeneity uniting her with the cover of glossy fashion magazines. Yet, her airbrushed figure blurs the boundaries between illusion and reality, leaving us with feelings of deep dissatisfaction if we do not somehow live up to the expectations our culture seems to hold for us (at least in terms of our representation in the media). The authors candidly expand on this theme:

Today, beauty is pure illusion made to look invitingly common...The explosion of the visual media can be lethal for women since it opens up unrealistic expectations. The message we are given daily by the myriad images of beauty is that women must look a certain way to be loved and admired — to be worth anything.

This rapid and widespread proliferation of the goddess of fashion and beauty reflect and produce the mass democratization of social attitudes and values regarding beauty.

Beauty has become big business and the fashion industry has developed schemes that present the up-to-date style in appealing ways for all. Lakoff and Scherr demonstrate how fashions and fads intrinsic to a particular culture and time period provide insight into socio-political ideology and sentiment. According to the authors, "the pendulum of beauty swings along with the pendulum of politics." With detailed examples of fashions, well-known models and actresses, *Face Value* illustrates how fashion and beauty reflect rapidly changing social attitudes. At the end of the 1930s, for example, beauty

became patriotic as war became a reality (Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich). As if to overcompensate for the war, post-war fashions in the late 1940s transformed what had been practical and comfortable into ultra-feminine styles (Christian Dior). The 1950s fashion industry marketed the cute and innocent package with a focus on the teenager and leisure time (Sandra Dee, Hayley Mills). Youth became even more popular in the 1960s where androgynous, beautiful people in psychedelic colours promoted peace, black, feminist and gay liberation (Twiggy). In the 1970s reality was encountered at a political and economic level and fashion and beauty echoed this premise with a look of realism. Women preferred to look natural without masks or bras (Lauren Hutton, Cheryl Tiegs, Farrah Fawcett). Fashion and beauty in the late 1970s and the 1980s shocks the public once more. The woman-child portraying both innocence and sexuality brings into view an essential contradiction in women's role today (Brooke Shields, Roseanne Vela).

Social psychological research on attractiveness attitudes are measured and examined in "Psychology and Beauty," which includes an interesting discussion on stigmas attached to the very beautiful. Lakoff and Scherr question their respondents about what makes beauty an issue for women. Although we do not discuss the topic openly, their findings reveal that it is an important concept for women to come to terms with, especially since for many it is seen as the ultimate in competitiveness — that which separates woman from woman. As the authors maintain,

> *We are willing to go to all kinds of pain to achieve it, but deny any evidence that pains have been taken. Beauty is the only means by which women reach power and influence, but we do not take seriously those women who possess it... Beautification is a tireless and exhausting effort for which women receive little credit if they are successful, and much contempt if they are not...*

The devastating power that beauty has come to possess is a major issue for Lakoff and Scherr and one with which they deal perceptively. The pathology of beauty is evident cross-culturally, for it is acknowledged that undesirability is a universal threat for women. In our quest for beauty, women have submitted to a multitude of dangerous practices and *rites de passage*. Unhealthy diets, drugs, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, scarification rituals, footbinding, clitoridectomy, cosmetic surgery, facelifts, silicone transplants, etc. etc., all testify to this bizarre crusade for ideal female beauty.

In a passionate and emotional chapter entitled "Beauty and Ethnicity," the authors make known the endless pains of women of colour who judge themselves according to American standards and ideals of feminine beauty, who have themselves created

> *a hierarchy of beauty based on the closeness of their approximation to the white ideal... which has been extended into other countries, where women scramble to bleach or straighten their hair, undergo operations to round their eyes, narrow their lips, or reshape their noses.*

In all, Lakoff and Scherr discuss the importance of the concept of beauty by reviewing its varying forms, our attitudes, our myths, our feelings about it, the lengths to which we will go to achieve it — and ultimately its power in separating woman from woman, woman from herself, woman from man and race from race. It is in this latter sense that Lakoff and Scherr see beauty as political. Yet in coming to terms with the source of political power that beauty holds, Lakoff and Scherr disappoint us. In their explanations of how beauty holds power the authors fall into the trap of psychoanalytic reductionism. It's worth noting that other excellent qualitative feminist works such as Lilian Rubin's *Intimate Strangers* and Kim Chernin's *The Obsession* have also fallen prey to such a framework. In *Face Value* Lakoff and Scherr squeeze their psychoanalytic model into the last few pages of the book, almost apologetically, as if they aren't convinced themselves of its value. The authors admit that they cannot prove that "Beauty is for women... as the penis is said to be for men," yet they defensively write that there is a symbolic association worthy of study merely because of the mysterious and pervasive power that these symbols have over us.

And finally, speaking of symbols, my only other irritation with the book is the way in which the authors seem to be obsessed with blonds and blondness. To quote a few of the many examples,

> "It was not just a blond, it was, I realized, *all* blonds who made me feel different."
>
> "Well, the most immediate problem was that princesses are always blond — at least the good ones..."
>
> "Blonds have more fun...No identity crisis for them."
>
> "...blondness is, for us, the quintessence of the utterly feminine... the proverbial *tabula rasa* to be written upon, to absorb and reflect the ideals and illusions of those who look upon her... The blond, as *tabula rasa*, is someone who does not make a clear, bright mark upon her environment... and the best blond is the one who is the most passive, has the least direct influence on her environment."

But as a blond, myself, perhaps I am just being oversensitive!

WORKING WOMEN

Jessica Strang. New York: Harry Abrams, 1984.

Judith Posner

Working Women is an intriguing and sometimes delightful collection of images of functional objects which depict the female form or parts thereof. The introduction refers to them euphemistically as "women being employed to perform rather incongruous tasks." The two hundred image book is a distillation of several thousand images by photographer Jessica Strang, and my strongest regret is that it is not possible to see the entire collection. An actual exhibit of these items would make a wonderful women's occasion.

The text is brief and factual, individually describing the photographed pieces, but without analytic commentary. The author's selection of items and organization by themes (from tea cosys to golf tees) is the viewer's only analytic framework, save a brief politically vague introduction by Lorraine Johnson which only alludes to a feminist polemic. Johnson helped to initiate the project which is appropriately sub-titled *An Appealing Look at the Appalling Use and Abuses of the Feminine Form*: "Most of the *Working Women* were probably conceived, designed and/or manufactured by men. Why didn't they chose to exploit the male form instead?"

This is followed by increasingly politically limp remarks such as the following: