The Subtle Revolution is a presentation of research findings on the causes and consequences of women's growing involvement in wage work. The book highlights problems for women and the family and discusses changes in government policy and industrial practice that will ease these problems and promote women's equality. Comprising eight chapters, written by six contributors, the book is not only comprehensive and rich with information, it is also organized well enough to read like a single-authored text rather than a multi-authored anthology. Moreover, Canadians should find this American book useful, as the situations of American and Canadian women are similar.

After an introductory chapter by Ralph Smith, two chapters by Nancy Barrett describe women's disadvantaged position in the labour market, discuss its causes, and suggest remedies. Then, two chapters by Sandra Hofferth and Kristin Moore review the effects of changes in women's productive role on the family, first on the marital relationship and the household division of labour and then on child bearing and child rearing. The chapters end with a policy review and proposals for change. In the next chapter, Clair Vickery presents the results of investigations of changing household income and consumption patterns, in order to explore (very effectively) both the causes and the consequences of women's changing economic contribution to family subsistence. Finally, Nancy Gordon's two chapters compare the costs and benefits of the income tax and social security systems for two-earner families with those for individuals and for one-earner families. After calculating the penalty paid by two-earner families, Gordon considers various policy changes, tracing the consequences of each for men and women of various marital statuses.

Given the book's achievements, it is especially unfortunate that a short-sightedness (or perhaps 'tunnel-vision' is more accurate) pervades it. While the features of women's oppression in the labour market and the household are seen clearly here, both the causes and the solutions remain hazy, and often invisible. Consequently, the contributors' calls for change sound remarkably hollow — and the proposed solutions appear to be unreal.

Key issues such as the economic advantages (to men, and specifically to capitalists) of present arrangements, and the social relations promoting and maintaining these arrangements, are never discussed. Solutions to the problem, therefore, are offered without an understanding of its foundation. Moreover, the crucial demand for good-quality, socialized (i.e., cooperatively organized) day care — obviously imperative for women's equality — is never made in this book. Indeed, despite their ample documentation of an absence of significant change in women's social status and women's role in the family, these researchers assume that the 'revolution' has already occurred, and that minor reforms by government and private industry can remedy the wrongs women presently endure.

Let me be more specific. Nancy Barrett documents male-female wage differentials and the growing significance in unemployment for women needing to work. She accurately and convincingly pinpoints occupational segregation, and the resulting overcrowding of women's jobs, as a key factor behind these problems. Although she recognizes that affirmative action to eliminate all sex differences in occupational distribution is necessary to end women's super-exploitation in the labour market, she fails to address less obvious but crucial questions. Given the profitability of cheap female labour to employers, and the fact that occupational segregation supports low wages for women, is there any incentive for capitalists to integrate the labour market and raise women's wages to the level of men's? What is the likelihood that the state will force private industry to make changes not in its interest? What is the relationship between women's responsibility for domestic labour and their position in the labour market, and are both essential to capitalist accumulation?

Several chapters discuss the time-budget results showing that men's share of the housework fails to increase with the hours women work outside the home. As well, Clair Vickery shows that wage-earning women do not generally substitute commodities for things produced at home, but rather extend their hours of domestic labour to carry out most of the usual household production. In so doing, Vickery finds that women sacrifice time they would otherwise spend with their children.

In addition to a concern that children may suffer in households where both adults are full-time wage earners, these researchers display a recognition that women's responsibility for child care impedes their careers in the labour force. Yet, instead of recognizing the need for socialized day care, it is assumed that the problem can be solved within the family. Despite the evidence of a continued absence of sharing of domestic responsibilities, the authors argue that flexible work schedules for men and women will allow couples to mix child rearing with full-time work on the part of the mother.

The solutions offered in *The Subtle Revolution* are indeed confusing. While the short-term reforms of the income tax and Social Security systems that are advocated are sound, no sensible long-term strategy emerges from the book. It is acknowledged (p.49) that sex roles in the family underlie sex segregation in the labour force. Yet, a solution to sex segregation is said to lie in increased labour market flexibilities (pp. 88-89, 152) (e.g., more part-time jobs for men and women), which will allow couples better to work out their domestic responsibilities while both partners pursue careers. It is also argued, however, (p.124) that only when women attain equal status in the labour market will sexual inequality in the household disappear. The reader is left convinced of at least one thing: neither the family nor the economy, as they are presently structured, allow for the liberation of women. ◔

Women in the Middle Ages

by Frances and Joseph Gies, Barnes & Noble Books, 1980, pp.264
Frances Beer

We need information about women of different times and places, about their circumstances and the prejudices they lived with, about the roots of modern attitudes towards women. But while *Women in the Middle Ages* does provide us with this kind of information, its quality is uneven, sometimes giving a careless, thrown-together feeling. To be critical of a book about women in a

Women's Studies journal makes me uneasy; but the suspicion that its authors may have been hoping to cash in on the Women's Studies boom and use up some of their old notes at the same time makes me even more uneasy.

The book is divided into two parts: the first provides social, legal, and religious background from the early Middle Ages; the second, longer section presents a series of portraits of seven medieval women.

Problem number one: explicit credit ought to have been given to Eileen Power, whose 1924 volume, *Medieval People*, pioneered the model on which the Gies' work is based: drawing on contemporary records such as estate books, bishops' registers, and family letters, she recreated the lives of 'ordinary people' in a series of sketches. The Gies substitute 'women' for 'ordinary people,' but not to acknowledge their debt seems faintly stingy.

Problem two: principles of organization are often obscure; even chapter one is something of a jumble. It begins by announcing the book's premise, valid enough to be sure — that conventional history has neglected women because it concerns itself with 'male-dominated activities' — and proceeds to discuss various difficulties involved in writing about the Middle Ages. This much really is a preface. Then follow (1) a list of 'elements that affect a woman's life' (obstetrical practice, marriage, property and legal rights, etc.); (2) two pages on Classical, Hebrew, and early Christian misogyny; (3) two pages on Christine de Pisan, a 14th-15th century poetess.

(1) The list is tantalizing but its purpose here is not clear; it is pursued only sporadically in the portraits. (2) The pages on pre-medieval misogyny are fun, particularly the quotes about menstrual fluid and its fabulous qualities (it sours wine, dulls mirrors, drives dogs mad, rusts iron, kills caterpillars), but more relevant would be hard evidence that the Middle Ages shared these beliefs. (3) The mini-portrait of Christine de Pisan seems out of place, since part two supposedly contains the portraits; but as it happens, Christine has already been 'done' in another recent book about medieval women (*The Role of Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.T. Morewedge, 1975, Ch. 5, an item which also might have been mentioned by the Gies). It looks uncomfortably as though, not knowing what else to do with (1), (2), and (3), they decided to cross their fingers and shove them all in together under the ample umbrella of 'Women in History.'

Problem two (cont'd.): Chapter four deteriorates into a jumble as well. It starts out with an interesting enough examination of medieval ambivalence towards women, goes on to look at some roots of anti-feminism and the literary expression of this double view of women (the objects both of satire and of romance). But again the Gies start scratching their heads and asking, 'What are we going to do with the rest of this stuff? Do you think we can squeeze it in here?' So the rest of the chapter glances in rapid succession at questions of disciplining wives, women's 'contribution' in reproduction, supposed levels of sexual desire in women, contraception and the attitude of the Church, prostitution and the attitude of the Church. We are left wondering what these items have in common beyond the general fact that they pertain to women.

The problem of inconsistent quality continues into the book's second section. The range of portraits, stretching from a 12th-century German nun to a 15th-century English gentlewoman, indicates that the authors' aim was to cover as many centuries, countries, and social classes as possible. Chances are that fewer portraits done with greater care would have made for a better study.

The chapter on Hildergarde the abbess describes her extraordinary career and, in addition, provides another umbrella that permits the inclusion of some general information about women and monasticism (but see also Powers' *Medieval People*, ch. IV, 'Madame Eglentyne,' which ought to have been cited) and a few references to other noteworthy women religious of the Middle Ages, perhaps somewhat randomly selected: puzzling, for example, that they should give two pages to the minor (if colourful) figure of Margery Kempe, and fail even to mention Julian of Norwich, the greatest female English mystic of the Middle Ages.

In contrast, the portrait of Blanche of Castile sticks to its subject and is the stronger for it. Married at 12, widowed at 38, she became the monarch of France, first guarding the interests of her son, to be Louis IX, until his majority, then, in fact, continuing to reign as the power behind the throne. A very tough lady comes across: razing the villages of rebellious barons, having riotous students pitched into the Seine, running the country when her son, as king, decided to go off on a Crusade and got himself captured by the Saracens. A fuller sense of what her life was like would have been nice (what did she wear? what did she eat? where did she live?): she's an impressive enough figure that we would like to be able to imagine her in action.

Eleanor de Montfort's sketch, though dwelling at length on the struggles between Eleanor and her husband Simon on one hand, and her brother Henry III on the other, unfortunately fails to project anything about her personality except that she was obstinate and litigious. More successful are the portraits of Margherita Datini and Margaret Paston, probably because they are based largely on letters written to their oft-absent spouses: both women were attached to their husbands and were responsible for managing extensive households in their absence, so there was cause for frequent correspondence. We get a picture of the Datini house and furniture, its garden, Margherita's clothing and accessories, her 'servant problems,' her loneliness and resentment at her husband's long trips from home. Of the English Margaret we get a less clear impression, but her loyalty to her husband as wife, homemaker, and business partner is evident.

The Gies, on occasion, show themselves to be quite capable of effectively combining fruitful research and serviceable prose. A rigorous treatment on their part might have brought together the book's diverse elements, but, overall, we get the impression that they couldn't be bothered to make the effort. And this is what's troubling about *Women in the Middle Ages*: it's too important an opportunity to have been botched through lack of care. There is a great deal of important material here; it's a pity the presentation could not have been more thorough.

In/Sights

Compiled by Joyce Tenneson Cohen, David R. Godine, Publisher, Boston, 1978, pp. 134, softcover $10.95
Diane Schoemperlen
From more than 4,000 photographs submitted for this project, Joyce Tenneson Cohen has selected 125 black-and-white self-portraits by 66