

"knowledge gaps." Theobald herself views her work as an important departure in the study of women's education. According to her, most previous historians have spent little effort exploring women's education in Australia before 1900, and have failed to connect the women's experiences to the political and social fabric of the period. In her introduction she explains that she wishes to provide new directions for feminist theory in this area, with the goal of "inspir[ing] a new generation of younger feminist historians." Due to her theoretical objections to "generalist history," Theobald pays scrupulous attention to the different experiences of women from different geographical, class, and racial backgrounds.

The strength of this book lies in Theobald's attention to detail, but it also becomes a major weakness through her neglect of structure and organization. Theobald provides the reader with many fascinating details on a range of women's educational experiences: the stories of working-class girls who were educated in inhospitable "reformatories"; the gradual marginalization of the woman teacher; the popular demand for ladies' schools where girls could learn "accomplishments"; the moral debate over coeducational schools. The list of topics is large, and Theobald's research on each is substantial. Once in a while the stories of the women get bogged down in too many details of names, places, and dates, but in each chapter there are many compelling moments (particularly when letters and diaries are used). Unfortunately, Theobald's laudable emphasis on specificity over blanket generalization has resulted in a hodgepodge of structure that could easily have been avoided. Each chapter is organized differently, and none of the chapters is adequately introduced or concluded. Many times I found myself saying, "So that's what she was getting at!" two-thirds of the way through a chapter, after struggling through a mass of detail that was seemingly unrelated. A simple "road map" introducing the agenda for each

chapter would have eliminated this difficulty, and provided for a more enjoyable reading experience.

This lack of structure also limits the efficacy of Theobald's use of feminist theory, which she is at such great pains to emphasize in her introduction. Once in a while a bit of theory is thrown in; Theobald does not use it to underpin the work, and her theoretical conclusions suffer as a result. Although I do not claim to be an expert on feminist theory by any stretch of the imagination, I was surprised at how basic many of her theoretical concerns were—I had heard some of the arguments and questions before, and only occasionally did her observations surprise and intrigue me (such as her compelling argument that women teachers' need to justify female education in secondary schools resulted in the grooming of top students to win scholarships and prizes—which actually prevented the average girls from experiencing a true "education"). Theobald's theoretical forays are also limited by her use of language. The text is rife with run-on sentences and convoluted paragraphs, and this makes her observations more obscure than they should be.

Knowing Women can be a frustrating book to read, and yet it is also full of fascinating detail. It is unfortunate that the contents of the book have been betrayed to bad organization and confusing diction, but the text is still worth reading. I will not soon forget the story of fifteen-year-old Annie S., who was beat across her breasts with a cane during a courageous and rowdy riot protesting the horrible conditions at the Bioela Reformatory. Nor will I forget the words of Louisa Macdonald, the first principal of the Women's College of the University of Sydney, when the financial situation of the college was in doubt: "There is one great comfort I have. It seems to me that ... the College ... has a tendency to create a feeling of solidarity amongst the women of the country ... and I think if it accomplished that, all the labour of collecting for it and planning it have not been empty."

TO THE GLORY OF HER SEX: WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE COMPOSITION OF MEDIEVAL TEXTS

Joan M. Ferrante. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997.

GENDER AND IMMORTALITY: HEROINES IN ANCIENT GREEK MYTH AND CULT

Deborah Lyons. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

by E. Lisbeth Donaldson

In 1405 Christine de Pizan initiated *les querelles des femmes* by publishing her *Book of the City of Ladies*. Peopled by "ladies of the past and present" and guided by the muses of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, this City was to be a refuge for women of the future. The radical arguments this widowed mother of three presented included statements such as it "is as natural for women to write books as it is for them to have babies" and "the intellectual spirit" is "equally good and noble in the feminine and masculine bodies" because the soul, more so than the body, correctly represents the image of God. Thus initiated, these *querelles* provided a major topic of debate among scholars for nearly three hundred years. "Another standard topic opposed the ancients and the moderns" (Anderson and Zinsser). Five hundred years after the publication of this incredible book, twentieth-century feminists are still learning about their intellectual and spiritual roots: many would not recognize Pizan's name and many, hurt by patriarchal religions, still do not understand the profound connection between spirituality and creativity. Therefore, the two books reviewed here are valuable scholarly contributions but their contents are not easy

reading for generalists outside the authors' disciplines.

Lyons' 1989 pioneering dissertation at Princeton on "Heroic Configurations of the Feminine in Greek Myth and Cult" was the only Classics dissertation title in that year to make a direct reference to women or gender. Since then her research on the ancient world has been extended by visits to Germany and Italy in her present book. She argues that Greek heroines comprise a "distinct category," differing from that of male heroes because as mediators between the immortal gods and goddesses and mortal leaders, they are more likely to metamorphose into an immortal themselves. Lyons thinks this phenomenon may be related to the "actual physical transformations of menarche, defloration, childbirth, and menopause which occur during the female life cycle, or to men's projections about these transformations." She postulates that similarities between heroines and goddesses heightened their rivalry, and tensions resulting in deadly conflicts occurred more frequently than amongst male heroes and gods whose roles were less interchangeable. To construct these arguments, Lyons utilizes vase paintings, archaeological finds, inscriptions and literary sources from the period between eighth century BCE to the sixth century CE (fourteen hundred years). Her citations are meticulous and include a 62-page "Catalogue of Heroines," most quite unknown to non-Classics scholars. Lyons is a young scholar and as she matures, perhaps her work will include more references to neolithic and paleolithic antecedents. Surely the great goddess myths and cults of the fertile Mesopotamian region influenced subsequent Greek (and Turkish) conceptions of immortality. Also, perhaps her conclusions will then be more than one-and-a-half pages and include some sense of which heroine stories were most prolific, and therefore most powerful. However, Lyons' work makes clear that during the highest development of Greek culture, usually considered the founda-

tion of western civilization, these pagans differentiated between male and female life cycles and the spiritual power inherent in each.

By contrast, for more than twenty years Ferrante has been conducting research on female images in the literature of the high Middle Ages (late eleventh to the thirteenth century). This Christian period precedes the development of universities that admitted only male scholars; thus the education of male and women leaders in political and religious life was not substantially different. Ferrante extends her discussion beyond religious texts and courtly literature to "women's visions of women" and "women representing women," concluding with an analysis of Pizan's important contribution. Women writers of this time period "are aware of themselves as women and identify with powerful or effective, not oppressed women in history": virgin mother Mary, Biblical queens, Christian female saints, and women regents or rulers. These "virile spirits" often did not know of each other but "the same women's problems come up again and again." Taught that they were responsible for the expulsion from Eden, Medieval women writers disguised their critiques with protestations of ignorance, feebleness, and self-deprecation. Notable exceptions were Hildegard of Bingen and, later, Christine de Pizan, who spoke authoritatively through Godly visions or female muses—Reason, Rectitude, and Justice—that nurtured their creative genius. A professor of literature, Ferrante concludes that "history in any form from the Middle Ages to the present which does not include the role of women is not true history." As a mature scholar, Ferrante has lived through recent changes in academia, acknowledging how much has been gained but noting the distance still to be travelled.

Within their respective disciplines, these women scholars uncover the past but "true history" is still not taught in most curricula. In *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, historian Gerda Lerner states that prior to

1700 only 300 women's names are known in western civilization. Furthermore one generation did not build upon the achievements of another, but "women's progress into historical consciousness was doubly delayed—by educational disadvantaging and by a lack of knowledge of the work of their predecessors." All women educated in the twentieth century need to come to grips with the "great man" implanted in their minds before they can fully access their own creativity.

As source materials for generalists interested in women's history, these two books are difficult reading, yet a necessary resource if the ahistorical bias of the women's movement is to be addressed. Within the specific discipline, this research offers substantive counterpoints to traditional scholarship. Educators should be stimulated into a necessary reflection about existent curricula. For future researchers and students, perhaps educational systems would then offer glimpses of a "universe-city" more inclusive than the recent past.

References

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Lerner G. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

FEMMES, ÉDUCATION ET TRANSFORMATIONS SOCIALES

Collectif Laure-Gaudreault. Montréal: les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1997

par Diane Gérin-Lajoie

Le présent ouvrage se veut une réflexion féministe sur l'école comme lieu de reproduction sociale et sur son potentiel de transformation sociale. Le Collectif Laure-Gaudreault (dont