

ture: "Ludvík, par précaution, monta dans le wagon de queue car s'il appréciait la fantaisie des doux dingues, il ne goûtait guère en revanche les cinglés grandiloquents." Only in very rare instances is Germain's lyricism overblown—"Ce jeune homme a des larmes d'oiseau de mer dont il parsème les ongles noirs des convives"—or her authorial presence unnecessarily intrusive: "En fait Ludvík était bien plus affecté qu'il ne voulait le reconnaître par tous ces événements et la déficience de sa vue offrait un dérivatif à son inquiétude." Such minor criticisms apart, *Eclats de sel* is a beautifully composed work, intricately linking apparently superfluous details to form an integrated narrative whole. Numerous thematic parallels run throughout the narrative, demanding the reader's active participation in their decipherment. The work's first reference to salt is in a description of Judas in da Vinci's *La Cène* (Biblical resonances are once again ubiquitous in *Eclats de sel*); in a similar vein, Ludvík considers his behaviour towards his former mentor to be an act of betrayal. His mentor is significantly named Brum, and with his death, Ludvík's misty vision of the past disperses and he is able to see more clearly; the destruction of his glasses also acquires symbolic value in that he can now face the past unaided. Shortly before his death, Brum sends Ludvík a card whose design he gradually deciphers, further highlighting his improved perception: "Il lui semblait parfois voir affleurer un vague motif dans cette image peinte ton sur ton,—des esquisses de silhouettes discrètement ivoirées se suivant à la queue leu leu dans une brume laiteuse."

A final example of the textual parallels which enrich the reader's understanding of the narrative frames *Eclats de sel*. The novel begins and ends with the protagonist on a train, travelling back from T. to Prague, the first trip after visiting the ailing Brum, the second after Brum's funeral. The psychological distance travelled between the two journeys is underlined in Ludvík's ability to confront his

past, embodied in a second self. On his first trip, he falls asleep, in a subconscious move to avoid contact with the strangely familiar man in his train compartment, yet on the second journey he enters into dialogue with his "sosie" and thus reintegrates his past with his present: "Il se rendait à lui-même, à l'inévidance du monde, au miracle de la réalité, à la foncière réalité du rêve." Brum's death helps him "à retrouver le goût de vivre," and like salt, gives him a new thirst for life. The numerous references to salt accumulate throughout the work and, in a manner analogous to Stendhal's description of the salt-covered branch in *De l'amour*, "cristallise" in Ludvík's sanguineness about his future.

While the combination of the fantastic and the everyday in *Eclats de sel* may produce a feeling of "dépaysement" in some readers, it is worth heeding the advice given to Ludvík by one of his many interlocutors. In what could be a direct exhortation to the reader, the stranger urges: "Rebroussez un peu chemin dans vos pensées par-delà le cercle étroit de vos idées toutes faites, surfaites et mal faites de surcroît, risquez-vous donc du côté de l'impensé...." It is a risk richly rewarded.

GENDER, GENRE AND RELIGION: FEMINIST REFLECTIONS

Morny Joy and Eva Neumaier-Dargyay, eds. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995.

by Judith Poxon

This volume, comprising 16 essays with a brief introduction, was compiled by a research network of women scholars organized to take stock of the current status of feminist scholarship in religious studies in Canada. The collective wager of those who participated in this project is that Canadian feminism, because of its double anglophone and francophone heritage, stands in a privileged relation to

both Anglo-American and French feminisms, and that, within the field of religious studies in particular, there exist many opportunities for finding ways beyond some of the impasses that trouble contemporary feminist theory. Toward this end, according to the introductory essay (co-authored by editors Morny Joy and Eva Neumaier-Dargyay), the essays in this collection both call into question and strategically affirm the categories of "gender" and "genre," and in the process the category of "religion" itself undergoes significant interrogation from both gendered and generic perspectives.

These themes are more fully elaborated in Mary Gerhart's opening contribution. Asserting the importance of the hermeneutical turn away from the desire for certain knowledge and toward an appreciation of the process of knowing, Gerhart suggests that religious studies, with the multiplicity of genres evident among the sacred texts and oral religious traditions of the world, provides a rich venue within which feminists may raise questions about the status of identities, gendered and otherwise. She takes note of the challenge to the epistemological coherence of feminist theory that has arisen within feminism in response to confrontations with race- and class-based critiques of white, middle-class, feminism, and acknowledges the need to interrogate the category of "woman" even as she also asserts the inevitability of reaffirming that category as the basis for political action. What is especially significant about this move for feminist scholars of religion, Gerhart notes, is its suggestion of an analogous approach to the category of "religion" itself, an approach which entails bringing both "gender" and "genres" perspectives to bear on the texts and traditions that make up the material of religious studies, so as to trouble both notions of identity and the traditional (patriarchal) insistence on canonical interpretations of those texts and traditions.

The fifteen essays that comprise the balance of this volume, then, are

divided into two groups. The seven contributions contained in the first group ("Gendered Perspectives") adopt the viewpoint of gender—and, in two instances, class and race—in order to explore and begin to rectify the historic exclusion of women's voices from religious scholarship and to raise issues of colonialism within the field of religious studies. Various aspects of Christian feminist theology are explored by Eileen Schuller, Pamela Dickey Young, and Monique Dumais; essays by Norma Joseph and Naomi Goldenberg offer orthodox and atheistic Jewish perspectives; and non-western perspectives inspire the essays of Doreen Spence, who explores the multiple and often conflicting religious and cultural identities of Native American women, and Sheila McDonough, who considers the volatile sociopolitical context of Islamic women today.

The eight essays of the second group ("Genre Explorations") illustrate the conviction that an appreciation of the plurality of genres available among the religious traditions of the world can invigorate feminist critiques of the categories and assump-

tions of religious studies, as historically understood. In this context, non-traditional genres figure prominently in these analyses of women's position in various contemporary and historical cultures. Eva Neumaier-Dargyay, for example, attends to Buddhist texts meant for lay audiences, such as epistles and tractates, while Katherine Young draws on Hindi popular cinema. Francine Michaud examines wills written by thirteenth-century French women; Fan Pen Chen looks to a traditional Chinese novel. Essays by Marilyn Legge and Winnie Tomm attempt to articulate new genres of religious expression, both based on a sense of the importance of inter-relatedness to any feminist understandings of self or ethics, while Marsha Hewitt draws on writings from outside the field of religious studies in order to consider connections between the writings of Mary Daly and Herbert Marcuse. And Morny Joy, in closing, recalls issues raised by Gerhart, arguing that it is in fracturing traditional, patriarchal notions of "truth" by pursuing knowledge from a multiplicity of (gendered and generic) perspectives that femi-

nist scholars of religion will make their most significant contribution.

In light of the theoretical questions that frame this collection of essays, then, this volume will be valuable both as a comprehensive survey of the status of feminist religious studies in Canada today and as an important contribution to current debates within its field.

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