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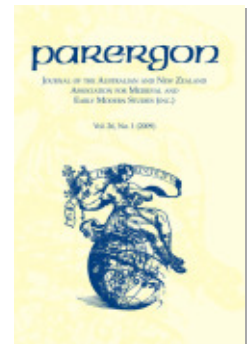
*Frauenlob's Song of Songs. A Medieval German Poet and his  
Masterpiece (review)*

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but, rather, the status of Mary as ancestor of the duchy of Brabant. On the other hand, Thomas' supplement did not have much later popularity.

Although Mary is such a well-known individual, scholarship tends to have been fragmented into different specializations which have rarely influenced each other. Mulder-Bakker's introduction does an excellent job of identifying these threads and, in the process, provides an historiographical survey which is a boon to scholarship and more than the sum of its parts.

Bolton's essay shows how much James supported Oignies in ways other than by the writing of Mary's *vita*; he sent eastern silks to the community, he commissioned works of art for the church, and in particular he took advantage of his eastern connections to send relics to Oignies. James did all of this for many years after Mary died; his interest was not fleeting. Given such support, it is worth asking why Mary was never canonized, but Bolton points out that bad luck played a role. Key supporters died or were absent and a change of pope put a lid on the cult until the modern period. But the stunning relic collection remained – Mary herself would stay up at night to care for the collection – and the relics as well as the two *vitae*, the Villers' office, and the academic attentions of modern scholars all indicate the wide interest in Mary and her holy sisters.

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**Newman**, Barbara, *Frauenlob's Song of Songs. A Medieval German Poet and his Masterpiece*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007; paperback; pp. xxi, 241; 7 b/w illustrations, 1 CD; R.R.P. US\$25.00; ISBN 9780271029252.

Frauenlob was the popular name of Heinrich von Meissen (c.1260-1318), author of a remarkable corpus of Middle High German poetry, in particular of the *Marienleich* – an epic poem of over 500 lines in praise of the Virgin Mary. In this volume, Barbara Newman presents her translation of the *Marienleich*, luxuriously presented on facing pages alongside Karl Stackmann's critical text of the poem. This serves to introduce her study of Frauenlob and his milieu, as well as a more detailed study of the *Marienleich* and its influence, supplemented by a rich commentary on each of the twenty strophes of that poem.

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Middle High German poetry is probably a closed universe to many medievalists brought up in an Anglophone, Francophile, or Italophile tradition. The great Germanic epics, like the *Nibelungenlied* or Gottfried von Strassbourg's *Tristan*, have long been known through the lens of Wagner, while the Minnesingers – often noble amateurs – are also celebrated for their writing about love. The religious compositions of Minnesinger like Frauenlob are perhaps less well known than their songs about love. Yet, as Newman argues, Frauenlob offers an unusually sensuous and earthy vision of the Virgin, as the Bride and lover of the Song of Songs. He was a contemporary of Eckhart and Dante, and stands in their company. Whereas many Minnesinger were noble amateurs, Frauenlob was a *spruchdichter*, a lyric poet who enjoyed the patronage of powerful nobility – including the Duke of Breslau and the archbishops of Bremen and Mainz. He seems to have been particularly active in the court of Prague. Perhaps most importantly, from the perspective of medieval music, his poetry survives with music, enabling his compositions to be appreciated in the original context in which they were composed.

The volume is best appreciated through listening to the accompanying CD of *Marienleich*, as interpreted by the ensemble Sequentia, directed by the late Barbara Thornton and Benjamin Bagby. Barbara Newman had already collaborated with Sequentia in their production of the songs of another great musical and poetic genius of the German Middle Ages, Hildegard of Bingen. As Benjamin Bagby explains in a moving note about their recording of the project, he and Barbara Thornton had originally recorded *Marienleich* in the early 1990s, and only through technological developments could that early recording be restored in digital form. For those who remember Barbara Thornton, the result is a particularly moving recreation of a voice from the past, in a double sense.

*Marienleich* is a particularly brilliant reworking of the dialogue between lover and beloved in the *Song of Songs*. In the recording, male and female solo and chorus combine with instrumental interludes to evoke a text that is both sensuous and mystical in its character. Newman's translation is itself richly poetic, successfully showing how the Bride is the archetypal lover, the Mother of God who holds all creation in her womb: 'I am the well of life on earth | as sweet as sugar – and the joy of birth | I am the mirror of great purity | in which God gazed before all time | I am the fire | in which the phoenix renewed its youth | I am the precious pelican's blood, | and well I know that this is truth.'

Newman draws on the same tradition of mystical discourse as she presented in the writing of Hildegard, but here we find that tradition given an earthiness through the vernacular that Hildegard never was able to achieve – even if she was pointing in that direction. *Marienleich* is celebration of the Virgin in a cosmic sense, as the eternal wisdom through which the universe was composed as well as the mother of the redeemer through which it was restored. It is also about the love between the Virgin and her Lord, as that of the archetypal lover and beloved.

There is much to appreciate in Newman's analysis. Particularly, it is helpful in presenting connections between the Latin culture, both religious and philosophical, on which Frauenlob draws. Alan of Lille provides a particularly apposite synthesis of these two traditions, combining Marian reading of the *Song of Songs* with Platonic respect for *natura*.

Newman's argument that Frauenlob may also have drawn ideas directly from Abelard is intriguing, given that the latter's theological writings never enjoyed wide diffusion. There can be no doubt, however, that Frauenlob is a sophisticated theorist of both worldly and divine love, convinced of their fusion rather than of their contrast. He was also a master of heterometric form, each strophe being unlike the other. Newman's comparison of Frauenlob to Gerard Manley Hopkins is not inapposite. Her account of Frauenlob's proclamation of his own genius, and the claims of his poetic rival, Regenbogen, demonstrates the literary sophistication of a poet who amply deserves to be listened to with respect. Newman's volume is a fitting memorial to the achievement of Frauenlob and his interpreters.

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**Pearson, Andrea, ed.,** *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity* (Women and Gender in the Early Modern World), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008; cloth; pp. xiv, 228; 63 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £55.00, US\$99.95; ISBN 9780754656661.

Andrea Pearson's Introduction to this collection of papers presented at the 2005 meeting of the College Art Conference in a session entitled 'The Face of Gender: Women and Portraits in the Early Modern World', asserts that although a number of important studies have addressed the topic of women and