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Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity (review)

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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

portraiture in early modern Europe, this phenomenon has not been the object of study in its own right. Pearson wishes to address several themes in a novel way: the use of female portraiture as a mechanism by which women could negotiate the boundaries of gender; female agency in portraiture; alternative means of self-representation; and female spectatorship. In addressing these themes, Pearson asserts that 'the book is the first to consider the topic of early modern women's portraits as a discrete topic' (p. 2). Her brief literature review of studies on women, gender and art in Early Modern Europe (mainly in English with some German references) supports this view.

Pearson then focuses on understanding the complexities of the links between gender, identity and agency, using Joan Scott's well-known formulation concerning the interrelationship between gender and power. She also supports Sally McKee's warning that agency (the ability to take action on one's own) is not the same as having power to change existing inequalities between men and women (empowerment). In other words, some of the women under study in this collection may have, by their own agency, successfully negotiated gender boundaries to fashion their image and create a desired identity, but they did not have the power to change the existing subordinated position of women in society.

Pearson provides succinct and nuanced summaries of each of the chapters, of which the first three concern themselves with fifteenth-century Netherlandish and Burgundian portraiture (Rothstein; Pearson and Roberts), there are two dealing with sixteenth-century Italy (McIver and Levy), one on Hans Holbein's portrait of Christina of Denmark for King Henry VIII (Hertel), one on seventeenth-century English double portraits of women at court (Hallam) and one each dealing with eighteenth-century France and England respectively (Hyde and McPherson).

Pearson suggests that each of these essays will mark the beginning of an ongoing scholarly discussion of the topic of women and portraits. Indeed, the nine studies in this collection discuss a diverse range of topics and periods but together build a coherent analysis of the relationship between gender, agency and identity in female portraiture in early modern Europe.

The first two articles suggest that in fifteenth-century portraits the focus is on the representation of women and the visual codes that the placement of figures represented as well as the intent of those who commissioned portraits. An example to consider is Margaret of York, whose representation in portraiture was not of her own making but rather that of her husband and his courtiers. It is in her gifting practices, that her agency can be demonstrated.

In contrast, during her lifetime Mary of Burgundy was able to commission portraits that demonstrated her persona as an active ruler through invoking classical precedents. After her death, however, her husband commissioned portraits of her in profile that represented her as passive and a conduit for his own dynastic claims to her kingdom.

Christine of Denmark, on the other hand, was able successfully to manipulate her representation by Hans Holbein so as to ensure that her proposed marriage to King Henry VIII would never take place. Christine's 'fleeting' image became a constant reminder to the king of that loss. Christine's subtle use of a commissioned portrait to convey a particular message is repeated in the double portraits of women in the court of King Charles I of England. The women that were part of the court of the often vilified Henrietta Maria, used their own commissioning of double portraits to convey their conformity to gender ideologies, whenever their reputations and those of the Queen might have been sullied.

Madame Du Barry, mistress of Louis XV, could perform in plays at court as a man while dressed in a skirt, yet employ portraiture to create an identity that suggested a more masculine persona, or did it? By the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century in England, the famous actress, Sarah Siddons demonstrated agency through her self-representation in portraiture. As a sculptor in her own right, she fashioned images of herself, similar to those commissioned by Mary of Burgundy in her own lifetime, in which she invoked classical precedents as part of her strategy to fashion carefully her own image and identity for posterity.

All in all, this an excellent collection of studies, which makes a major contribution to the subject of female portraiture in early modern Europe as well as raising questions that will hopefully lead to further fruitful research.

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