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Fall 1993

Feminist Scholarship Review

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Trinity College

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Feminist Scholarship Review

Trinity College
Volume III, No. I

Hartford, CT
Fall 1993



THE MADONNA OF THE ROSE—OKAYAMA

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Letter From the Editor

Fall 1993

To the recipients of Feminist Scholarship Review:

The theme of this issue of FSR is women and religion. No--don't do it! Don't close the cover and put FSR aside!

In this issue, we are not going to advise you about the benefits or detriments to your life that embracing religion: either a specific religion or a generalized spirituality will bring. We are not going to tout any particular system of beliefs or even attempt to distinguish systems of beliefs from established religions. We are not going to sermonize, galvanize or organize you, either. The mission (good word for this theme, Don't you think?) of FSR is to provide you with sources of feminist scholarship on this campus, and that is what we intend to do for you on the subject of religion.

I admit to having had reservations about this topic. I wondered if I would be interested in the sources I would review. In reading one of these sources, however, I discovered that my reluctance might have had more to do with my own belief system than with any of the excuses I had concocted for putting off my research. The discovery came directly from a quotation in Women's Studies Quarterly one of the sources reviewed here. In an article on feminist studies in religion, Judith Plaskow states that "The suspicion on the part of many intellectuals in our secular culture [is] that anyone interested in religion must be a reactionary...While feminists can study and make without automatically being seen as in collusion with them, the same trust--and interest--has not been extended to feminist work in religion." (p.9)

I had to consider the possibility that this was an attitude I might be harboring in the reservoir of my assumptions, deep down in the pool. Anyone who has ever fished one of those deep pools knows that's where the biggest ones--the lunkers--loll, the ones who resist all but the most persistent efforts to pull them and reel them in. Once I admitted to this assumption, reeled it out and looked at it in the sunlight, I felt much freer about pursuing my research, and much more interested in what I might uncover in the area of women and religion.

Perhaps your reaction was not at all like mine. In another article in Women's Studies Quarterly Delores Williams reminds us that "For some women, religious experience provide[s] the self-esteem and courage needed to pursue their...work." (p. 81) Whatever your personal reaction, though, religion is a topic about which we all have lots of hidden assumptions. By its very nature, it touches on our deepest beliefs. The sources named and reviewed in this issue may shed some light on your assumptions, hidden prejudices and beliefs. Our hope is that, at the very least, these sources will provide some thought-provoking and interesting reading in an area not often dealt with in feminist contexts.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah Rose O'Neal". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the main text block.

--Deborah Rose O'Neal

Women's Center: Reviewed Sources

Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review

Volume 54, NO. 1 Spring, 1993

"Sociology of Religion" has gone through several actual and proposed name changes in an attempt to accurately depict its content and orientation. The spring, 1993 issue is the first issue, in fact, to carry this name. The journal does hold true to its title. Articles rely on case studies, survey data and ethnographic fieldwork to illuminate the status of specific groups, such as Catholic women pastors and women in Black Spiritual Churches, within the larger religious context. Since the theme of this issue is religion and gender relationships, the articles deal with empowerment and disenfranchisement of women within established religions. Consideration is given to such topics as the experience of conversion, ministry style and establishment of new monastic communities, all with regard to gender. Aspects of Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, the Catholic monastic movement and the Black Spiritual Movement are examined as they relate to gender.

Conclusions vary in terms of positivity and negativity. An article on dual ordination tracks by gender, for example, suggests that this trend seems to be creating positions for female clergy that "are likely to remain lower-level, functionally subordinate and female sex-segregated." (p. 28)-quite clearly a negative conclusion. In an article entitled, "The Limited Empowerment of Women in Black Spiritual Churches", Hans Baer recapitulates the history of this movement with regard to women and concludes that, though it does not directly address female empowerment, Black Spiritualism does accept "women's legitimate role as religious authorities without question..." (Haywood qtd. in Bae p. 68). This is one of the articles that sees the role of religion for women at least somewhat positively.

"Sociology of Religion" consists entirely of thematic articles with a short section of book reviews at the end of the volume. The articles are framed in a research format. Though occasionally, the use of "jargon" can obscure meaning for the layperson inexperienced in either field (religion or sociology), it is not so prevalent as to prevent overall understanding. That is, the articles are no "easy read", but are informative and interesting and are worth the effort sometimes needed to glean information. For a single volume, there is a surprisingly broad field covered here.

Women's Studies Quarterly

Volume XXI Numbers 1 & 2 Spring/Summer, 1993

The specific theme of the most recent issue of Women's Studies Quarterly (WSQ) is "Sprituality and Religions." WSQ defines its purpose as that of introducing "new feminist scholarship and theory applied to teaching and the curriculum, orginal sources and resources of direct use in course and program development." The quarterly also publishes essays and creative work on feminist themes and works to keep a focus on "intersections of race and class with gender" as well as on "perspectives of minority groups", both nationally and internationally. The articles contained in this Review require time and effort to read and digest; they are not an "easy read". But the information given is always stimulating, and seems to be true to the stated purpose.

WSQ divides this thematic issue into four topics of "Teaching about Women and Religion", "Scholarly Witness", "Spiritual Witness". The final subtopic, "Resources", contains an annotated bibliography and reviews of several books, a sourcebook and model course syllabi. In this issue, a variety of forms of the study of religion are covered, from the rational/analytical to the intensely personal. Articles include metacognitive studies such as Plaskow's review of the course of feminist study in religion which, she concludes, moves from critical analysis of patriarchal text through recovery of feminist history to recent creative writings which construct new systems or tranform the old to suit feminist needs. These stages can occur stimulataneously as well as sequentially. Scholarly witness articles include a study of "Visions, Inner Voice, Apparitions and Defiance in Nineteenth Century Black Women's Narratives" by Delores Williams, which is fascinating as well as focused on a unique topic. Personal witness accounts are not neglected, either, and includes Betty L. Hart's moving "Death Comes a Spirit: The Legacy of My Mothers" in which she connects personal loss with religion in the statement, "Yet death is a spiritual matter, for how else can I transform the pain and frustration of losing someone I love into a philosophy...forming a fearfully symmetrical balance between rationality and faith".(p.137)

In all, this issue of WSQ is highly informative on the topic of religion and spritually, though the articles are dense and take time to absorb. Perhaps some aspect of religious experience in the feminist cntext is neglected here, but not for lack of effort to include all levels of experience in this fine issue of WSQ.

Lost Goddesses of Early Greece (1992)

Charlene Spretnak

In Lost Goddesses of Early Greece, Charlene Spretnak skillfully pieces together myths of the pre-Hellenic goddesses as they existed before the shifts to a patriarchal, classical society. Spretnak reveals the exploitation of these goddess myths by the Olympian system of mythology, and explores the reasons for this exploitation. Her collection of myths is both colorful and absorbing and the introduction to each myth demonstrates how early goddess myths became distorted with the onset of classical mythology.

In her own words Spretnak hails the book's "political function of reclaiming stolen history and its spiritual function of illuminating a sacred tradition" ("Preface" XV). She successfully restores to the goddess myths what patriarchal society has undermined and inverted: the glorification of the feminine as representing the cycle of nature. Spretnak describes how thousands of years before classical myth evolved and was recorded in the seventh century B.C., Greece was firmly rooted in matrifocal society and the religion of goddess worship (17). From 2500 to 1000 B.C., a series of barbarian invasions resulted in a new patriarchal social order for Greece, as well as a new system of Olympian gods (17). The wise, powerful, life-giving goddesses who were incorporated into this Olympian system of mythology were greatly altered: "the great Hera was made into a disagreeable, jealous wife; Athena was made into a cold masculine daughter; Aphrodite was made into a frivolous sexual creature; Artemis was made into the quite forgettable sister of Apollo; and Pandora was made into the troublesome, treacherous source of human woes" (18). Spretnak brilliantly reclaims the goddess myths' original significance and integrity; she beckons them forth from obscurity and enthrones them in their rightful historical place.

The Lost Goddesses of Early Greece serves as more than a reinstating of lost history; it encourages readers to participate in "the gestalt fields of myth and symbol that are both ancient and elemental, the embodied recognition of the dignity of the female, the active concern about wisdom and justice in the Earth community, and the beckoning lifelong path of unfolding and transformation" ("Preface xii).

The Lost Goddesses of Early Greece is a poignant defense of a bedimmed women-centered tradition. Women readers especially will find it both empowering and freeing to discover their ancient and noble past and the possibility of incorporating its ideals into their spiritual lives.

**LANI
GUINIER**
The Untold Story

Women's Center: Additional Sources

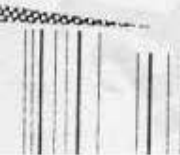
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No, Feminists Don't All Think Alike

(Who Says We
Have To?)



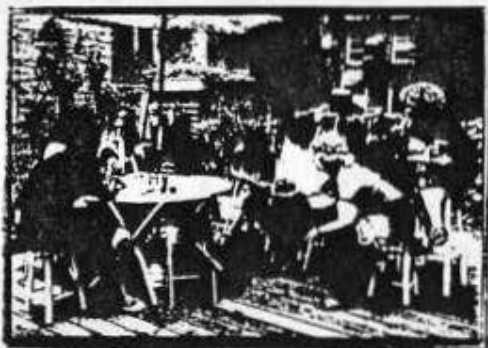
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ON THE COVER: Hip-hop's royal Highness, Queen Latifah, commands attention with her cool beauty. Photographer, Timothy White. Goddess braids by Anna Preston and Thomas Tilley of Khamit Kinks for Crystal, Brooklyn/Atlanta. Makeup, Rosanna Floyd/Zolt Illusions, N.Y.C. All makeup from ColorStyle featuring Color-Enriched Lipstick, Bohemian Bronze, Stylist, Elaine Wallace. Coat, Han Feng. Vest and pants, Kilorn Fisher. Earrings, Graves Design for Reddhead Studio. Necklace, Cheryl Moody Pommel Treasures. **On this page:** Photographer, Paul Amato. Hair and makeup, James Wells at WIK/N.Y.C. From the ESSENCE/Butterick '93 Collection, pattern #3072. Velvet, Wimpheiny & Brother, Inc. Silk crape, Exotic Silk. Earrings and necklace, Nancy Marshall Second Edition, Ltd. Rings, Maria Loberfeld. Hosiery, Hanes. Shoes, Ecco.

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An Educational Project of
The Feminist Press at The City University of New York

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INDEXED/ABSTRACTED IN *Alt Press Ind.*, *Amer Hist & Life*, *Ann Guide Wom Perio US/CANADA*, *Research Alert*®, *ASSIA*, *Br Hum Ind.*, *Current Contents/Social & Behavioral Sciences*, *Social Sciences Citation Index*®, *Fem Perio*, *Hist Abstr.*, *PsycINFO*, *Psychol Abstr.*, *Sociol Abstr.*, *Stud Wom Abstr.*

ISSN 0271-5195

WSINDA 16(4) 311-460 (1993)

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0271-5195(1993)16:04;1-5

Trinity College Library: Reviewed Sources

Women in World Religions: Collected Works

Women in world religions is a huge topic. How does one become sensitive to the differences in women's experiences across traditions and cultures without dedicating a lifetime to research and study? There are several volumes available which present collections of research on women and religion with both a scholarly and a sensitive perspective.

Holden, Pat, ed. Women's Religious Experience: Cross-Cultural Prospective. London: Crom Helm; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1983.

This book is the result of a program of seminars organized by the Oxford University Women's Studies Committee. It turns its attention to the everyday religious experiences of ordinary women, how do women perceive themselves and their roles within varying religious traditions.

The papers are linked together in pairs by similar subject material or common geographical area: "Mediums, Controls and Eminent Men" and "Theosophy and Feminism: Explorations in Nineteenth Century Biography", "Doves and Magpies: Village Women in the Greek Orthodox Church" and "Gender and Religion in a Turkish Town: A Comparison of Two types of Formal Women's Gatherings", "Essence and Existence: Women and Religion in Ancient Indian Texts" and "Women, Fertility and the Worship of Gods in a Hindu Village", Women in Judaism: the Fact and the Fiction" and "Between Law and Custom : Women's Experience of Judaism", "Women Excluded? Masking and Masquerading in West Africa" and "Men, Women and Misfortune in Bunyole".

Sharma, Arvind, ed. Women in World Religions. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987.

This book grew out of Arvind Sharma's decision to give a course on women and world religions when he was resident at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions. He admits that a man putting together a book written by women scholars is potentially male chauvinistic but found that academia is more concerned with what is "engendered" than the gender. This collection balances fact and perception with emphasis on sacred textual material.

The chapters on individual religions are by women scholars who are historians of religion. They are able to appreciate a religious tradition from within its own framework and from their own feminine perspective. The traditions presented include Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and tribal religions of aboriginal Australia.

The Annual Review of Women in World Religions (State University of New York Press)

This annual periodical grew out of the positive reception to Sharma's Women in World Religions. It describes itself as "polymethodic, interdisciplinary and multinational" in its approach to the study of women in world religions attempting to bridge humanistic and social scientific academic circles. Each annual has a different theme.

The goddess is the theme of the 1991 volume presenting major articles on the true story of Euripides' Helen, the three faces of Shulamite, Cinderella and the Black Virgin, the "permeable self": goddess consciousness and social realities, and a discussion of the intersection of goddess, feminist, and scholar.

The 1992 volume contains research articles on the heroic women including heroic modes of women in Indian myth, ritual and history, the role of Sister Nivedita in Indian Neo-Hinduism, the female hero in the Islamic tradition and Florence Nightingale as altruist.

--Linda R. McKinney

Gallows Hill Bookstore: Additional Sources

The Feminine Face of God: The Unfolding of the Sacred in Women
by Sherry Ruth Anderson & Patricia Hopkins

Women Mystics in Medieval Europe
by Emilie Zum Brunn & Georgette Epiney-Burgard

Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn
By Karen McCarthy Brown

Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion
Edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow

Mother Ann Lee: Morning Star of the Shakers
by Nardi Reeder Campion

Cult of the Virgin Mary
by Michael P. Carroll

Diving Deep & Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest
by Carol P. Christ

But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation
by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza

The Female Ancestors of Christ
by Ann Belford Ulanov

Women and the Genesis of Christianity
by Ben Witherington III

Women & Gender in Islam
by Leila Ahmed

The Gospel According to Woman: Christianity's Creation of the Sex War in the West
by Karen Armstrong

--Michael A. Smith

*Believe there is a great power
silently working all things
for good,
behave yourself
and never mind the rest.*

- - Beatrix Potter