

on the three words “woman’s weak mind” ‘wifes wac geþoht’ (*Genesis B* 649a) but on those plus six more “God had marked her (with a) weaker mind” ‘hæfde hire wac-ran hige / metod gemearcod’ (590b–91a). Eve, the first woman, is weak-minded as the result of deliberate action by God. But since Eve represents womankind at the time of creation, her weak-mindedness becomes a trait of women. Thus, fifty lines later when the poet refers to “wifes wac geþoht,” I hear a reference to this inherent female characteristic.

My argument rests also on the nature of Anglo-Saxon poetry, which (whether composed orally or not) existed within a largely oral tradition. In an oral milieu, poetic images rarely exist in their entirety within the words themselves (in fact, I suspect they don’t today either). The use of a piece of an image would evoke the entire image for an orally literate audience. Thus, figures in poems could never be *just* individuals. They were always more. *Wealhtheow* is more than a queen or *the* queen; she is *Queen*. I will not argue, therefore, with Phillip Pulsiano over the translation of “wifes wac geþoht,” for the poet is speaking of “woman” regardless of which articles we supply in modern English.

I did not mean to lessen the significance of the source of *Genesis B* by mentioning it “in passing.” Most scholars agree that it is a quite close translation of an Old Saxon poem; in my article I concur. But we do need to keep in mind Michael D. Cherniss’s argument that *Genesis B*, demonstrating as it does a fair degree of structural unity, may be *not* a fragment of the translation of the whole Old Saxon poem but a selective translation designed to serve the purposes of the Old English translator (“Heroic Ideals and the Moral Climate of *Genesis B*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 30 [1969]: 482–83). I regret any impression I may have left that the translator-composer of the poem “created” a new image; I would have been wiser to say “re-created.” Just as we need to tread carefully on the ground of abstraction and generalization when discussing Old English poetry, so we need to tread even more gingerly when we discuss insight and creativity. Pulsiano wisely reminds us of this truth. What *did* it mean to be creative as an Anglo-Saxon poet? I’m not sure, but I do know that I must not depend for an answer on current notions of creativity. All I can claim is that this translator-poet *introduced* the word “wac” into the existing image of the regal woman in Old English poetry.

But I must disagree with Pulsiano’s conclusion that the appearance of this word would represent an “expansion” rather than an “erosion” of the female poetic im-

age. If this image had wisdom as one of its main characteristics, then the addition of weak-mindedness could hardly be an expansion; it would have to be a subversion. The weak-minded woman cannot be a new, separate image because this weakness of mind is connected to traits elsewhere used of regal women; the poet is not building a new image; he is altering an existing one. My point remains the same: the derogation of women’s minds does not appear elsewhere in Old English poetry. And since such derogation becomes prominent after the Norman Conquest, it seems quite reasonable to see this instance as a forerunner.

And, finally, as the words of Gregory attest, it was the “unprofitably occupied” mind that the devil seduced. The more comprehensive question remains though: Why, in this influential creation myth, was it the woman’s mind that was “unprofitably occupied”?

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Foucault’s Oriental Subtext

To the Editor:

I was pleased to see “Foucault’s Oriental Subtext” (104 [1989]: 306–16) in the pages of *PMLA*, even if that article was in a sense incomplete. Uta Liebmann Schaub’s article contains a lot of information about Foucault, but its argument for a “Buddhist subtext” offers very few Buddhist sources. Offering almost forty citations from contemporary critical theorists and only two from Buddhist writers, Schaub’s project is unbalanced. It brings Buddhist concepts of the mind into the world of *PMLA* readers, but it does so in a way that threatens to project the Western notion of the intellectual subversive onto the Eastern text. Schaub is very much aware of the danger of this sort of “Orientalism,” as the reference to Said makes clear (308), but she continues this Orientalism by giving voice mainly to Western philosophic texts when defining Foucault’s brand of Eastern philosophic discourse. “Foucault’s Oriental Subtext” is a step in the right direction, and future steps might enlighten readers with references to Dōgen, Gampopa, both Suzukis, Aitken-Roshi, and so on.

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