in late medieval culture on the ties between women, embodiment and the visionary imagination (180). This discussion extends her critique of attempts to distinguish between male- and female-authored texts by highlighting the greater somatic, emotional and spontaneous nature of the latter. In the end, the visionary mode itself becomes crucial for this critique. While throughout Mechthild's writing a variety of contrasting rhetorical sources and styles can be found, her authority comes down to the prophetic visions in which God chooses her as the vessel for his teachings. Porete takes an alternative route, however: her choice of allegory to convey her teachings distances herself from explicit authorship of her book, placing that authorship in the voice of divine Love and rejecting the other bodily marks of divine authorization. And Eckhart, finally, describes a process in which the visionary experience is no longer needed, for the divine is present in the transfigured soul. Rather than see Porete and Eckhart as exceptions to a rule in which female-authored writings based on some kind of extraordinary visionary experience tell us about the nature of women, Hollywood suggests that all these texts reveal something about the "power structures in which [the women] found themselves and in which they attempted to find a voice" (203). Both Porete and Eckhart fail to demonstrate to the ecclesiastical authorities the divine authorization through visions or bodily evidence of sanctity that the latter had come to expect. Eckhart, however, had the authority of his position to protect his own body while his writings were condemned. Porete, on the other hand, had no such institutional authority to fall back on and as such, not only was her work condemned, but she herself was executed. This, then, is how the factor of gender becomes significant: the increasingly somatic quality of women's religious practices in the aftermath of Porete's death and Eckhart's condemnation attest not to a particular feminine nature or aesthetic, but rather to a complex political and social reality in which the only alternative for women was silence.

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Holman, Sheri. *A Stolen Tongue.* New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997. ISBN 0-87113-669-4 (hardcover).

True to its kind, this historical novel is a hybrid creature. Part mystery, part historiography, *A Stolen Tongue* is an imaginative reconstruction of a pilgrimage undertaken in 1483 by a German monk, Friar Felix Fabri of Ulm. The historical Felix left behind him the *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae Arabiae et Egypti*

Peregrinationem, a hefty twelve-volume work detailing his journey; this account, filtered through two modern translations (by Dame Hilda Prescott and Aubrey Stewart), provides the novel's setting and chronology. A host of other primary sources, from the *Wonders of the East* to medieval sermon literature, find their way ingeniously into *A Stolen Tongue*, too. But it is, one suspects, Felix's copious documentation that provides a good deal of the novel's rich historical detail, the peculiarities of which are keenly appreciated by its author.

Indeed, what sets Holman's novel apart from period-bedecked medieval mysteries is that it is singularly dedicated to probing, and taking seriously, some of the more peculiar aspects of medieval behavior. The quirks of medieval historiography and travel lore get their share of attention, but the real subject of scrutiny here is the saint's cult, that unique cultural nexus of faith and history-making. Felix was an ardent devotee of St. Katherine, and the narrative follows him as he fulfills his vows to his spiritual "bride": venerating each of her relics on his way to Jerusalem and dragging himself across the Sinai to the site of her translation. Though the intrepid friar frequently reminds himself that his debt is to Christ, Katherine provides the real substance and structure of the pilgrimage. Her bones grid the foreign landscape and provide the "alphabet" (232) of Felix's devotion.

The mystery arises when the bones begin to disappear. Several suspects take shape: Arsinoë, a female visionary, known among her Greek compatriots as "the Tongue of St. Katherine"; Niccolo, her brother, a linguist and translator of saint's lives; and Lord Tucher, Felix's own patron. Although this sets in motion the familiar machinery of the modern whodunit, the rest of the novel, thankfully, does not rely solely on tight plotting to move it along (though it is gratifyingly suspenseful). The thefts also catalyze the development of Felix's intellectual and emotional relation to his saint. Caught between his outrage and his faith in Katherine's ability to protect herself and her devotees, Felix struggles to interpret his beloved saint's apparent desertion. As he vacillates—not so much between faith and skepticism as between differing explanations of divine behavior—the novel moves deftly back and forth between mystery and *mysterias*, between characteristically modern and characteristically medieval views of the world.

As this movement between cultural perspectives suggests, *A Stolen Tongue* is also, self-consciously, about translation. Any attempt to make the sometimes curious, sometimes truly bizarre, practices of the medieval saint's cult accessible to a modern audience without the supporting structures of footnotes and scholarly apparatus surely must confront the difficulties of translation head on. Not surprising, then, that translation—linguistic, bodily, cultural, geographic—is everywhere in this novel. Holman's take on the subject is to acknowledge translation as an imposition of power, a medium of social struggle. Nations, religions, genders, and individuals exercise power by appropriating and

interpreting the productions of the disempowered. It is not hard to see, here, why the author was drawn to the hagiographic and iconographic history of St. Katherine: a humble virgin who, tortured and martyred, will later be depicted holding the wheel rather than stretched upon it.

This politicized view of translation should make the novel of particular interest to feminists. The relation of translation to gender is explored extensively in its portrait of Arsinoë where there is more than a hint of Karma Lochrie's work on Margery Kempe. Arsinoë and her brother are also the venues through which Holman represents the different histories of female and male devotion. While their characterization may strike some as too polarized, this perhaps results from the limits of the novel as a form for representing history (single characters must contain whole social groups), a fact which could itself prompt productive discussion.

The benefits of the novel as a form for representing history are, of course, a fit subject for discussion too, and this is where *A Stolen Tongue* might be most illuminating for medieval scholars. Holman is a fluid writer, and she dexterously weaves a remarkable amount of source material into Felix's first-person monologue. Not only does she make clever use of medieval literary forms (the friar is fond of division and enumeration when preaching, for example), she also draws upon much current medieval scholarship (one will spot the work of Peter Brown and Caroline Walker Bynum behind the novel's discourse). This is not to say that *A Stolen Tongue* is a mere pastiche of scholarly work and primary sources. On the contrary, one of the great joys of this book is that it does not make a fanfare of its erudition. All Holman's textual borrowing works toward the careful, thoughtful reconstruction of Felix's world.

The unique advantage of the novel form here, then, is that it enables the book's reader to move easily and associatively between aspects of the medieval world that, in scholarly work, are apportioned out to different disciplines and specialties. This broad range of reference makes the novel relevant to numerous projects. It is of obvious interest to anyone working on contemporary representations of the Middle Ages. But it would also make a fun addition to courses on medieval gender, religion or travel, especially when they have spent any amount of time on hagiographic literature and/or the phenomenon of the saint's cult.

Finally, *A Stolen Tongue* might be most valuable to feminist medievalists for its very fictionality. Feminists have long valued hybrid cultural forms for what they can tell us about the ideological nature of the "pure" work. Those of us who work exclusively in the medium of expository writing need more opportunities like the one offered by this novel—to think about the place of fiction in our own translations of the medieval world.

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