with actions which they were admonished to correct. I think a much subtler use of misogynistic lore was at work in these sermons, one tinged with the "can't win" rhetoric of woman's inherently flawed nature, but always at the same time holding out the possibility of Christian purity, creating in the devout hearer a powerful blend of guilt, personal responsibility, and striving for grace. That blend would provide a far better basis for social control than a flat definition of woman as "supervenient" and it would, therefore, provide a better rationale than Bloch's for the material and institutional practices which denied certain social powers to women.

A similarly ingenious logic denigrates clothing and language (as clothing), and links woman with both, and especially with figurative language. The observation that woman is figure will not lead to the serene denigration of womanhood Bloch sees in medieval discourse, because from the time of *On Christian Doctrine* and after the figure was taken as God's preferred way of speaking to man--non-literal, perhaps, but persuasive and beautiful, sometimes linked with the Incarnation. That woman is rhetoric is similarly two-sided; rarely is the efficacy of rhetoric called inherently evil; like other words and coverings, rhetoric receives praise when "decent and comely" (as the English Reformation controversies put the matter). When it all adds up to women being like literature in their unredeemability, we see a rich and many-sided controversy about the moral status of both reduced to an ahistorical monotony which characterizes neither.

Marshall Leicester
English, Cowell College, Univ. of California, Santa Cruz


Surely Howard Bloch would agree that he is, to use his word, in a citational relation to the texts of misogyny, that is, that he is quoting and respeaking and paraphrasing them with the understanding that he does not agree with what they say, though he does purport to represent correctly what is said. What I wonder about is the source and character of the pleasure that speaks in his citing, and the way it spills over into his own style. What interests me is the impish chopping of logic, and the savoring of paradox and the outrageous, whether they are thought of as Augustine's and Tertullian's or as Bloch's, though neither he nor they quite owns up to them. If I think of this pleasure as Tertullian's, I find myself wanting to know the institutional setting and the reception of the impudence that is at work in the passages from him.
Bloch cites, which Bloch doesn’t credit, though it is close to his own. A characterization like "Tertullian, of course, does not seek...to wrestle with the supervenient status of his own thought upon the superficial" (13) seems less an analysis of whatever medieval misogyny might be than a doubling of the ideological logic produced by a certain way of reading these texts, a way of reading that creates a voice for them that will allow Bloch to patronize them in the way they patronize women. If, as Bloch pretty conclusively demonstrates, no one can speak misogyny because its contradictions undo it, one wonders if this impossibility is really as unapparent to the texts themselves as he assumes. I think Bloch could tell us a lot, if he would, about the pleasure that comes in forcing an outrageously perverse perspective, the pleasure, for instance, of insisting on the least complex understanding of the most extreme of positions, the enjoyment of quoting/creating/playing--"citing--a voice like the one ascribed to Tertullian, and then generalizing it. What is the character of the fun, for Tertullian, of producing an account of woman so improbable on the face of it? Is it allied to the fun of producing an account of something as aggressively partial and patently unlikely on the face of it as what is here called the Middle Ages, "medieval thought," or medieval misogyny? What I hear in this text, whether I call it medieval misogyny or Tertullian or Howard Bloch, is a witty and complicated speaker enjoying driving a conspicuously perverse argument as far as he can. That pleasure is not related in any simple way to the argument's "truth," which may well be perverse. I see that this speaker, whoever he is, believes something about this argument (he is not simply in bad faith), but I also see that he thinks that it is important to maintain what he calls a citational relation to it, to sustain his irony. That is not only because it may be important politically to sustain his distance from the content of what he quotes, but also because it seems important to keep open the question of his precise commitment to the argument for pleasure's sake: the enjoyment of the impossible purity of the stance is partly dependent on stipulating its impossibility.

Indeed, who speaks? I do not think it can be accidental that when such a speaker wishes to write about medieval misogyny he is drawn to Tertullian, unless of course such a speaker is what is produced, no matter who does it, by the project of writing Tertullian as the ideal type of medieval misogyny. In any case, my question, which is real because I don’t know the answer to it, has to do not only with the nature of the pleasure that speaks here, but with its gender, if it has one. Does the gender system Bloch delineates describe it? Is his pleasure "feminine" in those terms? Is Tertullian's? If Christine de Pizan is being sarcastic in the passage cited in note 13, is hers?