anti-marriage arguments directed to women. In both cases, his rhetoric against the opposite sex bolsters his campaign to win as many Christians as possible for the ascetic life—a life that is lived outside texts. Marriage is the lowly "thirtyfold harvest" (compared with the glorious "onehundredfold harvest" of widowhood) that Christians of both sexes would do well to eschew.3

The patristic writings, in other words, not only concern life outside texts, they are written to influence it. Their aim—and here we can speak confidently about authorial intention—is manifest: to keep women from the priesthood and from public activity in general, to reinforce the subordination of wives to husbands, and to lure as many Christians as possible to the renunciation of marriage and reproduction. Whatever "entertainment" the patristic authors provide for educated readers through their skillful incorporation of classical allusions, ringing rhetoric, and witticisms, their purpose is severely didactic in a way that the literature cited by Bloch is not—and didacticism, to be sure, aims at a world that exists outside texts. By blurring the different texts of patristic literature, by claiming misogyny as a constant that cannot be well historicized, Bloch contributes to the very generalizing and essentializing of woman that he repudiates intellectually. The factors that prompted the different constellation of anti-female and anti-marriage sentiments in medieval texts, as compared with patristic ones, are glossed over, to the detriment of a more historically nuanced reading.

Wendy Clein
English, Univ. of Connecticut, Hartford

Howard Bloch's essay argues convincingly that the instability and garrulousness attributed to women in misogynistic discourse is also an attribute of the very texts that execrate these "feminine" characteristics. But Bloch also suggests that these writings are finally concerned less with women than with rhetoric, that medieval misogyny is a hermeneutical rather than a political issue. To be sure, Bloch acknowledges "the very real disenfranchisement of women in the Middle Ages" (8); he even devotes a paragraph of his essay to a list of some examples of medieval sexism. Having made that gesture to social history, however, he questions the validity of connecting antifeminist discourse with the material conditions of women. [These material recriminations] "...are not the same as misogyny, and one has to be careful not to move too easily between the domain of institutions and the discourse of antifeminism"(9). Rather than risk a too easy movement between the two domains, Bloch then

---

3Jerome's famous exegesis of the parable of the sower (Mk. 4:3-9=Mt. 13: 1-9=Lk. 8: 4-8), found in his Adversus Jovinianum 1, 3, and Epp. 22, 15; 48 (49), 2; 66, 2; 123, 9.
decides to dismiss social history. Nonetheless, in a footnote arguing the distinction between the world and the text, Bloch leaves open a line of inquiry for feminists to pursue: "Leaving aside the unknowable affective element of woman-hating, misogyny is a way of speaking about women as distinct from doing something to women, though speaking may be a form of doing and even of social practice, or at least its ideological component" (22 n.15). That acknowledgment of a possible connection between ideology and social practice remains as one of the seams after Bloch's excision of social history.

I would like to construct a rather different interpretation of medieval misogyny, using as a point of departure the material circumstances that Bloch dismisses. Among the gender-differentiated legal and social practices he enumerates, a number serve to restrict women's access to public discourse and hence to the power inherent in the institutions of court and church. Antifeminist literature helps support those repressive practices, for in presenting woman as an unreliable user of language it helps to justify the legal and social mechanisms which silence her. Thus Andreas Capellanus' charge that woman is "a slanderer of other women," "fickle in her speech," "a liar," "a babbler, no keeper of secrets," and "loud-mouthed" (quoted in Bloch18) is not devoid of material consequences. Supplementing the negative and distasteful discourse of medieval misogyny are the literary portraits of exemplary women found in romance and hagiography. Those contrasting images remind us of Foucault's insistence that power operates as much in its capacity to incite desire as to repress it.

But what are feminists to make of the anxiety about writing that Bloch detects in the discourse of misogynists? Again, an appeal to material circumstances may be more helpful than Bloch allows. The act of writing inevitably cuts off a writer from his words; his physical presence no longer serves as a guarantee for their authenticity. If woman "as secondary, derivative, supervenient, and supplemental, assumes all that is inferior, debased, scandalous, and perverse" (10), she makes possible the Being, Truth, and Unity of the author and the text. In occupying the secondary position, woman shores up man's ascendant position in patriarchy and guarantees the validity of his discourse. But since that gender polarity is rather a cultural construct than a biological necessity, it is inherently unstable. Like other binary oppositions (logic vs. rhetoric, form vs. matter), it refuses to remain fixed. Thus the theologian or the philosopher who attempts to convey truth in language cannot purify his discourse of rhetoric. He must constantly confront the "perverse secondariness" of language. In order to ensure the authority of his own enterprise and to have access to the power he has vested in language, he must project that perversity onto women.