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If, as Howard Bloch suggests, the question of reading, of interpretation, remains "a key issue with respect to the study of misogyny" (7), then one might well ask how Bloch's own strategies of reading bear upon, if not dictate, the kinds of critical apprehensions and judgments that he makes. Indeed, insofar as the insights of his article are so patently a product of a self-conscious act of interpretation ("the danger of woman," Bloch concludes, "according to this reading of the phenomenon of misogyny, is that of literature itself" (20), my underline)--it comes as a surprise to find no explicit discussion of Bloch's own stance as a reader. Sensitive as he is to the practices of medieval hermeneutics, at no point does he reflect explicitly upon the strategies, methods, present interests, shall I say, the politics of his own reading.

According to Bloch, there are "a series of paradoxes within the discourse of misogyny...if woman is conceived to be synonymous with the senses or perception, then any look upon a woman's beauty must be the look of a woman upon a woman, for there can be no such thing as a male gaze or desire" (15). So stated, the insight presents itself as having about it the force of logic, and it occurs, indeed, as the outcome of the particularly syllogistic analytic framework that Bloch has set up. If, as Bloch demonstrates through quotations of passages from the Church fathers, woman is allied with the senses, and if the act of gazing is a sensual act, then gazing is always a womanly act. Bloch's observation that there is "no such thing as a male gaze or desire" does in fact seem to make sense within his own syllogistic frame. But it does not make sense applied to the broader historical understanding of medieval culture in which Bloch purports to situate his essay. I would argue that close reading of any number of medieval vernacular texts does demonstrate that a "male gaze or desire" exists--in Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*, for one. Furthermore, not all women who gaze in medieval texts do so specifically as women. Noys, a creator goddess of Bernardus Silvestris's *Cosmographia*, gazes upon her creation in the manner of God the Father gazing patriarchally upon his handiwork. I mention these texts in order to suggest that the act of gazing represented in medieval writing is more complicated, more involved with questions of sexual difference, than Bloch's own discussion suggests. Offered in the service of global historical analysis, Bloch's strategy of reading--a procedure that involves distilling kernels of meaning extracted from various quotations into a logical whole--works to repress other sorts of historical insights, namely, those that emerge from projects that feature not ideas but details, and especially the problematic relations that exist between various textual details.

On the whole, Bloch's own rhetoric in this essay seems to be riddled with phrases that tend in the direction of the absolute: references to "language itself" (3), "vision itself" (5), "writing itself" (19), and "literature itself" (20) persist throughout. Historical particularities and those of any given text that Bloch quotes are subordinated and placed in the service of the single over-arching equation Bloch seeks to make: "woman in the Middle Ages = literature." Hence, Bloch concludes, the hatred of women in the Middle Ages amounts to nothing more than the hatred of "literature itself."

Bloch's discussion thus remains in the realm of large ideas about Writing and Woman. It is, in short, an idealist project. Naomi Schor's understanding of the complicity that exists between the norms of modern idealist aesthetics and the discourse of misogyny has bearing here.* Schor's discussion of the detail in terms of the ornamental and the feminine corresponds in a number of ways to Bloch's discussion of "woman" as she was apprehended by patristic writers. Schor's position as a reader, however, is quite different from Bloch's. Schor confesses her potential for getting lost in the very details she analyzes, explicitly eschews the "exhaustive history of the detail more congenial to male epistemological models." She acknowledges that her attempt to vindicate the detail in modernist aesthetics may be nothing more than an attempt to legitimate her own critical practice. That sort of explicit acknowledgment of a critic's present interests, of a political stance, is one which has become the hallmark of a specifically feminist reading strategy. In launching an idealist argument and in remaining silent about the critic's own motives for writing about medieval misogyny, Bloch's discussion leaves us wondering whether his is a critique of the misogynistic attitudes of the Middle Ages or just one more instance of them.

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In "Medieval Misogyny" Howard Bloch develops a persuasive case, first, that medieval literature was built on anti-feminist ideology and imagery, and, second, that the portrayal of women in many important works suggests a strong analogy between the misogyny of medieval authors and their appreciation of the deceptiveness of literature (see esp. 5-6, 13-14). According to Bloch, women appear in the mirror of medieval texts as manipulative and irrational; likewise, in his view, those who raised that mirror to their own

* Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail, Aesthetics and the Feminine*. New York: 1987. See esp. Introduction and chapters 1,2.