

*Ideology, History, and the Construction of "Woman" in Late Ancient Christianity**

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Theorists who specialize in ideology critique have noted various ways in which ideology operates to "fix" representations of the self: through stereotyping, naturalizing, universalizing, and de-historicizing of the self. Certain types of narrative writing and intertextual writing practices also serve as carriers of ideological meaning. In this essay, the writings of the Church Fathers pertaining to women are mined to demonstrate the ideological operations that can be noted therein. The effort to "re-historicize" these writings is explored in relation to the social location of the Fathers. The essay concludes with a brief suggestion that the ideological construction of an essentialized "woman" by the Fathers was not entirely successful, being in part subverted by both the patristic authors themselves as well as by the women whose identities they attempted to "fix."

"... and ain't I a woman?"

Sojourner Truth

I

When in 1851 the black abolitionist Sojourner Truth turned her rhetorical fire against a Protestant clergyman who had ridiculed the campaign for women's suffrage on the grounds that females were helpless and weak, she was not (we may assume) impelled by the debates over "essentialism" that

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have unsettled feminist theory for the past decade and more.¹ Nonetheless, the question “what is ‘woman?’” was posed far earlier than Sojourner Truth’s impassioned speech; indeed, it predates the patristic era, which is here our proper concern. Moreover, Sojourner Truth’s clerical opponent also stood in a long tradition of Christian males whose selective reading of Biblical texts, buttressed by a misogynistic inheritance from antiquity, was designed to create “good [female] subjects” who work “all by themselves,” freely submitting to their inferior status.² Such, of course, are the signs of ideology’s success. On the signs of its failure, I shall later remark.

I shall first discuss the meaning and the mechanisms of ideology as explicated by several modern commentators, before illustrating the operations of an ideology of gender with examples drawn from the writings of the Church Fathers. A third section of the paper suggests some features of the Fathers’ social location and the religious apparatus that produced these ideological markers. Last, I shall offer a brief caveat regarding the triumph of an ideology of gender in patristic literature: some early Christian women—without the help of Gramsci and other theoreticians—could use the hegemonic discourse to their own advantage.

Even within Marx’s own writings, the concept of ideology received different formulations, and the emphases developed by his successors have served to complicate further its definition.³ Does, for example, “ideolo-

1. The speech reads in part: “The man over there says women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over puddles, or gives me the best place—and ain’t I a woman? . . . Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have born thirteen children, and seen most of ’em sold into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me—and ain’t I a woman?” *The History of Woman Suffrage*, ed. E. C. Stanton, S. B. Anthony, and M. J. Gage (Rochester, NY, 1881; reprint, Salem, N.H.: Ayer Company, 1985), 1:115–117. See the discussion of these famous lines (which “evoke the themes of the suffering servant in order to claim the status of humanity for the shockingly inappropriate/d figure of New World black womanhood”) in Donna Haraway, “Ecce Homo, Ain’t (Arn’t) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York/London: Routledge, 1992), 86–100, quotation at 91.

2. Louis Althusser’s discussion of religious ideology in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” in Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 181–82.

3. See Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) (esp. 1–17); Jorge Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983); Bhikhu Parekh, *Marx’s Theory of*

gy” imply a distinction between “truth” and “falsehood” (i.e., “ideology”)?⁴ If so, does the commentator believe himself or herself to stand “outside ideology”? From whence did this privileged epistemological position derive? By contrast, those who claim that “ideology” is *not* to be equated with “falsehood” often argue that we are *all* “in ideology,” that there is no way of stepping “out” of it.⁵ But if we are *all* “in ideology,” then the concept surely cannot be as strongly tied to a *particular* class position as some have held:⁶ the term would rather function descriptively as a synonym for “worldview,” thus potentially muting the concept’s implied critique of power relations. Nonetheless, a middle position has developed in socialist thought since the time of Marx, in which it is alleged that different social classes have their own, varied ideologies; the analyst can, for example, distinguish between a subordinate and a dominant ideology.⁷ Here, an attempt is made to rescue the critical edge of the concept while conceding that not only the upper classes have—or exist in—“ideology.”

A helpful contribution to this debate has been Fredric Jameson’s suggestion that ideologies might profitably be viewed as “strategies of containment.” Rejecting the association of ideology with “false consciousness,” Jameson points rather to such characteristic features as “structural limitation and ideological closure,” features that he concedes can also serve to

Ideology (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). As Larrain points out (*Marxism*, 54), consistency in defining the concept was not assisted by the fact that the first two generations of Marxist thinkers did not have access to Marx’s *The German Ideology*, which was published only in 1923.

4. On the view of ideology as “pre-scientific error,” see Larrain, *Marxism*, 30; Barrett, *Politics*, 109. For a critique, see Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 118, and discussion in Barrett, *Politics*, 123.

5. See Larrain, *Marxism*, 205, 223, 228, especially his discussion of Althusser’s view that ideology is “necessary” to a society, that it serves as “social cement,” in effect (226–27). This interpretation bears some resemblance to Geertz’ and Ricoeur’s understandings of ideology as integrative: see George H. Taylor’s introduction to Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), xix, although Althusser no doubt gives a different evaluation of the “benefits” of such “integration.” For Antonio Gramsci, there is a certain “psychological” validity in ideologies which serve as tools for the organization of masses of humans (*Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith [New York: International Publishers, 1971], 376–77).

6. Some commentators argue that it is misunderstanding of Marx to think that social class (rather than the concealment of contradiction) was the defining characteristic of ideology in the first place (see Larrain, *Marxism*, 29 for discussion).

7. See discussion in Larrain, *Marxism*, 46, 88, 233; Parekh, *Marx’s Theory*, 33, 48; and Barrett, *Politics*, 21.

critique forms of Marxism.⁸ “Strategies of containment,” “structural limitation,” “ideological closure”: these concepts will prove especially useful for an analysis of the Fathers’ ideology of gender.

More recently, Michèle Barrett has argued that “new social groups” (by which she means primarily women, people of color, and native residents of post-colonialist countries) should prompt theoreticians to discard concepts of ideology that are based on economic class alone.⁹ When her critique is joined to the Althusserian program that rejects a simple model of economic determinism and assigns more productive force to such super-structural apparatuses as law, education, and religion,¹⁰ the way is open for the construction of a less rigidly deterministic model than is frequently associated with a Marxist notion of ideology. Yet over against those who neutralize the concept of ideology in ways that blur the structures of domination at work,¹¹ I prefer to keep the notion of power at the forefront.

From the numerous recent discussions of ideology, I extract two definitions that I think are useful for my purposes. The first is supplied by Anthony Giddens: ideology, he writes, is “the mode in which forms of signification are incorporated within systems of domination so as to sanction their continuance.”¹² The second is from John B. Thompson, for whom ideology designates “. . . the ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical . . .”; it is “meaning in the service of pow-

8. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 52–53.

9. Barrett, *Politics*, 32–33, 158–59.

10. For Althusser’s discussion, see his “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” esp. 141–57. Indeed, Althusser so privileges the realm of superstructure that he can write:

. . . in History, these instances, the superstructures, etc.—are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the ‘last instance’ never comes

(“Contradiction and Overdetermination: Notes for an Investigation,” in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster [London/New York: Verso, 1990], 113). Also see Gramsci’s discussion of Marx’s comment that “a popular conviction often has the same energy as a material force. . . .” (*Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, 377).

11. Singled out by Larrain as one of the most significant fates of the concept of “ideology” after Marx: *Marxism*, 88. Sometimes referred to as a more “positive” view of ideology, the developments are linked to Lenin and then Lukács.

12. Anthony Giddens, “Four Theses on Ideology,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale* 7 (1983):19.

er.”¹³ These definitions, in my judgment, have the advantage over many others in stressing power and power differentials, on the one hand, and the role of discursive formations in shaping the construction of the self, on the other—points often passed over by earlier theorists, who shied away from the Marxist tone of “domination” and remained blissfully ignorant of structuralist and post-structuralist analysis. In addition, both Giddens and Thompson eschew definitions which simplistically pit “truth” versus “falsehood,” thus implying that the theorist has a firm stand *outside* ideology from which to distinguish it from “science.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, most recent commentators, as political Leftists, tend to mean by the word ideology “the ideology of the dominant classes,” which to them necessarily cries out for critique.

Developing themes broached by Louis Althusser several decades ago,¹⁵ recent analysts of ideology who are informed by post-structuralist theory affirm that “the subject” created by ideology is not a unitary consciousness, but is multiple and always exists in a process of construction. This recognition, as John Frow puts it, leaves space for “the possible discontinuity between positions occupied within the economic, political, and symbolic orders,”¹⁶ and thus acknowledges the likelihood of “uneven developments” among an individual’s social, economic, educational, legal (and so on) statuses.¹⁷ This last point provides an important theoretical

13. John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7. Both Giddens’ and Thompson’s definitions seem to me to be more adequate than those of Michèle Barrett, who tends to underplay (at least in her definitions) the “power” aspect of ideology’s work: “discursive and signifiatory mechanisms that may occlude, legitimate, naturalise or universalise in a variety of different ways but can all be said to mystify”—although Barrett’s concern to lower “the epistemological profile of the concept of ideology, while broadening its practical applicability” (*Politics*, 167) is welcome.

14. Sometimes thought to be a problem in the early Althusser of *For Marx*. See discussion in Giddens, “Four Theses,” 19; John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), 26–29, 51; Bruce Robbins, “The Politics of Theory,” *Social Text* 18 (1987/88):15. For a different construction of Althusser’s understanding of “science,” see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London/New York: Verso, 1991), 139. For a recent critique of these points, see Nancy C. M. Hartssock, “Louis Althusser’s Structural Marxism: Political Clarity and Theoretical Distortions,” *Rethinking Marxism* 4 (1991):10–40.

15. Althusser abandoned the rigid Marxist notion that the material “base” entirely determines the cultural “superstructure,” allowing that religious, legal (etc.) systems also work on the economic. See Althusser, “Ideology,” 134–36, 141–48.

16. Frow, *Marxism*, 76; Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 7, 68.

17. The term is usually employed by Marxist writers focussing on the economy: see

tool for an analysis of notable Christian women in late antiquity who suffered from such “uneven developments,” from “status dissonance”: to this issue I shall return.

To unpack the central characteristics of ideology and to indicate their primary literary components is my first task. Commentators agree that a central function of ideology is to “fix” representations of the self,¹⁸ to constitute “concrete individuals as subjects.”¹⁹ The “fixing” of the self operates through various mechanisms, for example, through stereotyping, claimed by Roland Barthes as ideology’s central mode of operation.²⁰ Indeed, stereotyping will prove to be one of the Church Fathers’ most frequently-employed strategies for the symbolic construction of “woman.”²¹

Moreover—and related to stereotyping—ideology naturalizes and universalizes its subjects, ignoring the “historical sedimentation”²² that undergirds the present state of affairs. Ideology thus functions to obscure the notion that ideas and beliefs are particular and local, situated in specific times, places, and groups;²³ to the contrary, it encourages the view that our society’s values *have* no history, but are eternal and “natural.”²⁴ Situations that have come about through human construction are thus rationalized and legitimated as conforming to timeless truth. According to Marx, the ideologist turns the consequences of society into the consequences of nature.²⁵

the following references in Althusser’s *For Marx*, 200–201, 210, 212, 250; also see his essay, “Est-il simple d’être Marxiste en philosophie?,” *La Pensée* 183 (1975):17. The phrase seems appropriate in a wider context to suggest the divergence of statuses for one individual, perhaps analogous to “status dissonance.”

18. Coward and Ellis, *Language*, 2. Their discussion owes much to Lacan through-out; see especially 7 and chap. 6.

19. Althusser, “Ideology,” 171.

20. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. R. Miller (New York: Hill and Wang/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 40, discussed in Coward and Ellis, *Language*, 54.

21. On “symbolic construction,” see Thompson, *Ideology*, 60.

22. The phrase is from Gayatri Spivak’s discussion of ideology in “The Politics of Interpretation,” in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 347.

23. See Eagleton, *Ideology*, 59. His list of ideology’s functions: “unifying, action-oriented, rationalizing, legitimating, universalizing and naturalizing” (45).

24. Thompson, *Studies*, 131, citing C. Lefort; also see Parekh, *Marx’s Theory*, 36, 49, 136. For a discussion of this “naturalizing” aspect of ideology as “the pre-constructed” (“what everyone knows”), see Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, trans. Harbans Nagpal (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982; French original, 1975), 115–16, 121.

25. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* 2.1B; cf. 1.1.1.4; 1.1. 22 in Karl Marx and

Paradoxically, while ideology collapses history into “the natural,” it still directs its subjects to contemplate ideals of the past rather than to envision a different future. Traditional symbols and values are upheld in one arena—for example, gender—while other aspects of the social, economic, or political orders change. Closing the gap between the past and the present by privileging the past is thus one of the conservative operations of ideology.²⁶ As medievalist Brian Stock argues, this approach to history is basically “theological”: the alleged rationality of the past is pitted against the chaotic irrationality of the present.²⁷ Nowhere in patristic literature are such tendencies more evident than in the Church Fathers’ exhortations to and chastisement of women, based on nostalgia for the ideals of a bygone era rather than on the laws and customs pertaining to women in their *own* day.

Moreover, commentators on ideological literature claim that certain types of writing and signification are especially adept at conveying these effects. Thus myth, which in Roland Barthes’ phrase “transforms history into nature,”²⁸ is a prime suspect. According to some literary theorists, a second candidate, perhaps born out of mythic writing,²⁹ is narrative, for narrative, they claim, works in tandem with the “backward-looking” orientation of ideology to serve as the carrier of conservative values. It is perhaps no coincidence that the narratives from which such critics derive their examples were those that developed in bourgeois society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and which through their authors’ imaginative constructions suggested that the values of such society were universal and natural. In this approach to narrative, the focus is on the

Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 5: 479, 36, 39.

26. Thompson, *Ideology*, 41; *idem*, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 186. Also relevant is Karl Mannheim’s comment: “It is no accident that whereas all progressive groups regard the idea as coming before the deed, for the conservative . . . the idea of an historical reality becomes visible only subsequently, when the world has already assumed a fixed form” (*Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. L. Wirth and E. Shils [New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1946], 208).

27. Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 84. One could complain that this use of the word “theological” is overly pejorative: after all, theologically inspired visions have sometimes stimulated progressive social change.

28. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 129; cf. Coward and Ellis, *Language*, 29.

29. Roland Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” trans. Stephen Bann, in *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook*, ed. E. S. Shaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 3:18.

stories of the past told by the dominant classes, which “create a sense of belonging to a community and to a history which transcends the experience of conflict, difference and division”; such stories, in John Thompson’s words, “justify the exercise of power by those who possess it” and “serve to reconcile others to the fact that they do not.”³⁰ Since the coherence, integrity, and closure that narrative projects upon its depiction of life is purely “imaginary,”³¹ in Hayden White’s phrase, it functions to promote a “mythical view of reality.”³² White further claims that history-writing of the narrative type is likewise implicated, for the notions of continuity, wholeness, and individuality—the “essentialized self”—that mark historical narrative as much as novelistic narrative are the very qualities which construct subjects who will be the law-abiding and self-regulating citizens that our society demands.³³ Adopting Althusser’s definition of ideology for his own critique of narrative historiography, White argues that in narrative, individuals are taught to live “an imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence.”³⁴ Commentators such as White and Barthes, who hold this view of narrative, would deem it no accident that patristic writers turn largely to Biblical myths and historical narratives to create models of submission for female audiences.³⁵

30. Thompson, *Ideology*, 61–62; *idem*, *Studies*, 11. Commentators on ideology tend to view narrative much less positively than do contemporary theologians and philosophers who stress the valuable role of narrative in creating community: from the standpoint of ideological critiques, that “community” is precisely founded on exclusion. Although many feminists might argue that narrative is not necessarily a conservative genre and that it can serve progressive ends, commentators on ideology are more apt to stress the reactionary workings of narrative, no doubt because narratives are usually constructed by those who control cultural meaning.

31. Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 27. Poststructuralist commentators would complain with good cause that such language suggests that we can firmly differentiate “the real” from “the imaginary.”

32. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), ix; *idem*, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. R. H. Canary and H. Kozicki (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 48–49, 61.

33. Hayden White, “Droysen’s *Historik*: Historical Writing as a Bourgeois Science,” in White, *Content*, 87.

34. Althusser, “Ideology,” 162; White, *Content*, x. See also Michel de Certeau’s attack on narrative that produces a “textual globalization” for the unscientific discipline of historiography: “History: Science and Fiction,” in de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi. *Theory and History of Literature* 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 219.

35. According to Hayden White, narrative itself carries with it a moralizing message (“Value,” 18, 26).

Yet other literary theorists and feminist commentators would question both the characteristics here ascribed to narrative and their allegedly conservative function. The tendency to associate the literary inscription of ideology with purely formal categories such as representation, narrative closure, and the centered subject, Jameson comments, “brackets the historical situations in which texts are effective and insists that ideological positions can be identified by the identification of inner-textual or purely formal features,” as if the latter “always and everywhere bear the same ideological charge.” Such a formalist approach (which Jameson associates with a type of French theory that emanated from *Tel quel* and *Screen*, and in another mode, from Derrida) is simply “ahistorical.”³⁶ Feminists would here join Jameson to claim that narrations can embody utopian impulses as well as (negative) “ideological” ones.³⁷ On this alternative assessment of narrative—to which I shall return in my discussion of the Fathers’ construction of an ideology of gender—narratives are necessary for situating one’s analysis within a larger historical context;³⁸ in Jameson’s words, “the unity of a single great collective story” is important for understanding the cultural past, its polemics, and its “vital claims upon us.”³⁹ Feminist theorists such as Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson would add that although grand metanarratives inattentive to temporal and cultural specificity should be discarded, feminists indeed need “large historical narratives” that detail the particularity of sexism across diverse times and societies.⁴⁰ Presumably feminist theorists would agree that narrative can be used not only to open up the past and connect it with the present, but to sketch a vision of the future: here, narrative acquires a potentially utopian function. Given the varying political functions of narrative, it will be of interest to note how frequently the Church Fathers deploy narrative to restrict women’s activities in their own day, to offer “strategies of containment.”

36. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 283 n.2.

37. Feminist science fiction is sometimes noted as particularly adept in conveying feminist utopian effects. I thank former Duke graduate student Kathy Rudy for this reminder.

38. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Investigations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 186.

39. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 19. The “single great collective story” for Jameson is, of course, Marxism, whose master theme is “the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity . . .” (19).

40. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, “Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism,” in Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990), 34, cf. 22 on Lyotard’s critique of metanarratives.

The assistance that myth and narrative sometimes lend to impressing ideological meaning on their audiences is joined by a particular literary device that can be adeptly manipulated to express ideological meaning: intertextual reading and writing practices, in which one text is “read” in light of other explicitly or implicitly suggested texts, and in which both text and intertext are transformed by their new positioning.⁴¹ Originally explored by literary theorists in relation to the realist novel,⁴² intertextuality is sometimes claimed as a technique that contributes to making the story seem “natural”—that is, its effect is ideological.⁴³

Investigating ancient Jewish texts, Daniel Boyarin in his book *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* has explained the function of intertextual interpretation in these words:

Intertextuality is, in a sense, the way that history, understood as cultural and ideological change and conflict, records itself within textuality. As the text is the transformation of a signifying system and of a signifying practice, it embodies the more or less untransformed detritus of the previous system. These fragments of the previous system and the fissures they create on the surface of the text reveal conflictual dynamics which led to the present textual system.⁴⁴

Intertextual exegesis is especially apt to be employed when an ancient text has been granted sacred status—and hence must be retained as Scripture—but contemporary commentators feel called to “read” it so that it addresses the concerns of their own day rather than those of the text’s authors: texts that were unrelated, or worse, in conflict, are now harmonized into a new, unified system of meaning. The “fissures” that the critic’s eye spots belie the apparent smooth surface of the new text at hand,

41. Frow, *Marxism*, 157.

42. See, e.g., M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. M. Holquist; trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Julia Kristeva, *Le Texte du roman: Approche sémiologique d’une structure discursive transformationnelle*. Approaches to Semiotics 6 (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1970), 69–70; *idem*, *La Révolution du langage poétique: L’Avant-Garde à la fin du XIX^e siècle: Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974), 59–60. Kristeva was fascinated by Bakhtin’s understanding of the “literary word” as an “intersection of textual surfaces”; in her opinion, he was the first to see that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.” Language thus carries social and political messages: “History and morality are written and read within the infrastructure of texts,” she claims (“Word, Dialogue and Novel,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 36, 37; original English trans. in Kristeva’s *Desire in Language* [1980]).

43. Coward and Ellis, *Language*, 52; Frow, *Marxism*, 101–2, 125, 155–57.

44. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 94.

in which the “detritus” of the old system has been patched together with the new. In this sense, intertextual writing and reading practices could be seen as a form of interpretation pure and simple, if with Jameson we define interpretation as “the rewriting or restructuring of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*, it always being understood that that ‘subtext’ is not immediately present as such . . . but must rather always be (re)constructed after the fact.”⁴⁵ Although intertextual writing practices do not necessarily signal the conveyance of a conservative message, the Church Fathers, we shall see, construct a restrictive message for women of their era via some ingenious intertextual reading and writing practices: here, “strategies of containment” operate through intertextuality.

Given these strong workings of ideology, the critic’s task will be to show how “seemingly politically innocent objects, forms of subjectivity, actions, and events” are the effects of power and authority,⁴⁶ that is, the task is to “de-naturalize” and “re-historicize” what the ideological operations have produced.⁴⁷ The would-be unmasker of ideology must attend to “the constructed nature of the ‘real’”⁴⁸ and to the conditions under which that construction took place. By what Althusser calls a “symptomatic reading,” she must look to the gaps and absences in the text, read what in effect is “illegible,” note how the answers given by a writer do not correspond to the questions he posed.⁴⁹ By interpretive practices such as these, the critic interrogates “the implicit narratives, grammars, and rhetorics that reproduce and reinforce forms of power and authority.”⁵⁰ Thus she explores the use of symbolic forms in creating and sustaining relations of domination.⁵¹

45. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 81.

46. Michael J. Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Political Analysis* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 21.

47. *Ibid.*, 51. Here, Althusser’s claim that Marx was the founder of the “science” of history is striking; see his essay, “Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon,” in *Lenin*, 15.

48. Shapiro, *Politics*, 24.

49. Louis Althusser, “From *Capital* to Marx’s Philosophy,” in L. Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading “Capital”* (London/New York: Verso, 1979), 28. See also Shapiro, *Politics*, 22; Frow, *Marxism*, 24–25. Rosemary Hennessy defines “symptomatic reading” as “a practice which makes sense of the gaps in narrative coherence as signs of the dis-ease that infects the social imaginary”; a practice that “draws out the unnaturalness of the text and makes visible another logic haunting its surface” (*Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* [New York/London: Routledge, 1993], xvii, 93).

50. Shapiro, *Politics*, 54.

51. Thompson, *Ideology*, 85.

II

My exploration of the ideology of gender in the Church Fathers will proceed by first examining the characteristics of ideology as set forth in the previous section (stereotyping, universalizing, naturalizing, and the appeal to the past); then I shall turn to the literary forms and devices that offered “strategies of containment” through which the Fathers attempted to define female subjectivity.

Examples of the stereotyping, universalizing, and naturalizing of “woman” in patristic literature are so manifest that a few should suffice to remind us of their prevalence. Examining the literary corpus of Jerome, for example, the reader learns that the stereotypic trait of “woman” is her weakness, sometimes aligned with “softness of soul”⁵² or “fickle-mindedness”⁵³—yet Jerome can resort to the *topos* of “feminine weakness” to produce a variety of ideological effects. Sometimes he appeals to “female weakness” to deter women from embarking on actions that would lure them toward pleasures too difficult to resist—warnings against second marriage, for example, or against a widow’s appearing in public surrounded by handsome male servants.⁵⁴ At other times, the “weakness” characteristic of the sex serves to highlight the exemplary labors a few “token” women were able to perform *despite* their inherent disability: Paula and Eustochium’s monastic life in Palestine is case-in-point.⁵⁵ Moreover, the *topos* of female weakness can be used as a shaming device for males, as when Jerome mocks those men, would-be Christian teachers but deficient in Aristotle and Cicero, who dare to enter the company only of the uneducated and of “weak women.”⁵⁶ Or, finally (and contradictorily), he can praise a member of the “weaker sex” who has “overcome the world” (i.e., given up sexual relations), using his encomium on feminine “weakness” to shame the matron’s recalcitrant husband.⁵⁷ It is instructive

52. Jerome, *hom. 42 on Ps. 127/128* (CCL 78.265); *Nab.* (on Nahum 3.13–17) (CCL 76A.569); *Is. 2* (on Is. 3.16) (CCL 73.55).

53. Jerome, *ep. 130.17* (CSEL 56.197–98): here used as a reason why ascetic women should live in community. That Jerome’s stress on women’s “weakness” is an ancient notion that also can be found in Roman law is stressed by Antti Arjava, “Jerome and Women,” *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica* 23 (1989):8–9; Joëlle Beaucaup, “Le Vocabulaire de la faiblesse féminine dans les textes juridiques romains du III^e au IV^e siècle,” *Revue historique du droit français et étranger* 54 (1976):485–508, and Suzanne Dixon, “*Infirmitas sexus*: Womanly Weakness in Roman Law,” *Tijdschrift voor Rechts-geschiedenis/Revue d’Histoire du Droit/The Legal History Review* 52 (1984):343–71.

54. Jerome, *ep. 54.13* (CSEL 54.479).

55. Jerome, *ep. 66.13* (CSEL 54.664).

56. Jerome, *ep. 50.1*; 5 (CSEL 54.388–89, 393–94).

57. Jerome, *ep. 122.4* (CSEL 56.70).

how the same stereotype can thus serve very differing ends for Jerome: yet even when the intent is to compliment, the praise is delivered via the denigration of women-in-general.

In the writings of John Chrysostom, stereotyping of female characteristics appears especially in his warnings to men to eschew either first or second marriage, where Chrysostom calls women wicked, false, insulting, garrulous, irrational, and given to drink—“all the vices dear to the sex.”⁵⁸ But nothing surpasses Chrysostom’s rhetorical catalog of female characteristics that will be impressed upon the soul of any ascetic man who dares to take up residence with a female ascetic in “spiritual marriage.” The women, he writes

render them [the men] softer, more hot-headed, shameful, mindless, irascible, insolent, importunate, ignoble, crude, servile, niggardly, reckless, nonsensical, and, to sum it up, the women take all their corrupting feminine customs and stamp them into the souls of these men.⁵⁹

To be sure, none of Jerome’s or Chrysostom’s *special* female friends, such as Paula or Olympias, shared these characteristics—but they were not, it seems, “woman.”⁶⁰ They alone of their sex escape this negative stereotyping.

“Naturalizing” and “universalizing” are two additional mechanisms of ideology, and the naturalizing and universalizing of “woman” is likewise abundantly evident in the writings of the Church Fathers. The varied uses of the word “nature” in patristic literature have often been remarked: from serving as a synonym for “God”⁶¹ to designating bodily necessities such as food,⁶² from naming the limit for acceptable sexual expression⁶³ to designating a girl’s arrival at puberty,⁶⁴ from indicating “our common humanity”⁶⁵ to expressing women’s weakness and delicacy,⁶⁶ from sig-

58. John Chrysostom, *laud. Max. 2* (PG 51. 227); cf. Chrysostom, *virg. 40.1* (SC 125.232).

59. John Chrysostom, *subintr. 10* (PG 47.510).

60. Hence the frequent claim that they ceased to be “women”: see discussion in Elizabeth A. Clark, “Friendship Between the Sexes: Classical Theory and Christian Practice,” in Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations*. Studies in Women and Religion 2 (New York/Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 54–57.

61. Tertullian, *cult. fem. 1.8.1* (CCL 1.350); John Chrysostom, *hom. 26 1 Cor. 4* (PG 61.217).

62. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom. 19 1 Cor. 4* (PG 61.535).

63. Tertullian, *pubd. 4. 5* (CCL 2.1287).

64. E.g., Tertullian, *virg. 11.1–4* (CCL 2. 1220–21).

65. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom. 6 Matt. 8* (PG 57.72) (here the phrase is *koinon genos*); *hom. 48 Matt. 3* (PG 58.490).

66. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom. 8 Matt. 4* (PG 57.87); *hom. 55 Matt. 6* (PG 58.548).

nalling the sexual impulse itself⁶⁷ to (paradoxically) representing virginity (the “natural” condition of humanity)⁶⁸—and supplying the leading moral argument against homosexuality,⁶⁹ bestiality,⁷⁰ long hair on men,⁷¹ cosmetics,⁷² women appearing without head coverings,⁷³ adultery,⁷⁴ and non-vaginal forms of heterosexual intercourse.⁷⁵ As this catalog suggests, matters concerning sex and gender are by far the dominant category within which appeals to “nature” are made by the Church Fathers. In addition, women’s subjection to men as a “natural” phenomenon (i.e., instituted from the time of creation, by God’s command) is also a common theme,⁷⁶ although the alternative construction, that women were subjected to men only *after* the first sin, sits by its side in patristic writings.⁷⁷ The primary consistency in these appeals to “nature” lies in the use of the *topos* as a controlling device for sex and gender issues.⁷⁸

As for the universalizing tendency of ideology, nowhere is this more obvious in patristic literature than in the amalgamation of all women to “woman” and the identification of “woman” with Eve. Since Scriptural verses themselves (namely, 1 Tim 2.11–15) hold Eve to be the “reason” for the limitation of women’s activities and sphere of authority, the motif of “woman as Eve” was thought to come with apostolic sanction. Although numerous Church Fathers and ecclesiastical documents use the identification of women with Eve as the justification for women’s submission to men and for their exclusion from the priesthood and public teaching offices,⁷⁹

67. E.g., John Chrysostom, *virg.* 19.1 (SC 125.156); *hom.* 2 *Eph.* 3 (PG 62.20); Jerome, *ep.* 54.9 (CSEL 54.475).

68. Jerome, *ep.* 22.19 (CSEL 54.169); Gregory of Nyssa, *virg.* 12.2 (SC 119.400).

69. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom.* 42 *Gen.* 5 (PG 54.391); *hom.* 4 *Rom.* 1 (PG 60.417); *oppugn.* 3.8 (PG 47.360–61).

70. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom.* 9 *Rom.* 4 (PG 60.472).

71. John Chrysostom, *educ. lib.* 16 (B. K. Exarchos, ed., *Johannes Chrysostomos, Über Hoffart und Kindererziehung* [München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1955], 42–43).

72. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom.* 18 1 *Cor.* 3 (PG 61.148); Jerome, *ep.* 38.3 (CSEL 54.291).

73. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom.* 26 1 *Cor.* 4 (PG 61.217–18).

74. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 3 *Tit.* 4 (PG 62.682).

75. Augustine, *nupt.* 2.20.35 (CSEL 42.289); *bon. coniug.* 11.12 (CSEL 41.203–4).

76. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom.* 10 *Col.* 1 (PG 62.365–66); *hom.* 26 1 *Cor.* 4 (PG 61.218).

77. E.g., John Chrysostom, *serm.* 5 *Gen.* 1; 3 (PG 54.599, 602); *hom.* 26 1 *Cor.* 2 (PG 61.215); *hom.* 9 1 *Tim.* 1 (PG 62.544).

78. For a discussion of the use of the word “nature” in some roughly contemporary secular literature, see John J. Winkler’s analysis in *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*, especially 17–22, 38–44, 217–20.

79. See discussion of Chrysostom’s argument in Elizabeth A. Clark, “Devil’s Gateway and Bride of Christ: Women in the Early Christian World,” in Clark, *Ascetic Piety*

perhaps none is so vociferous as Tertullian. Informing his female audience why they should wear “garments of penitence,” Tertullian declaims:

You are the Devil’s gateway; *you* are the unsealer of that tree; *you* are the first foresaker of that divine law; *you* are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not brave enough to approach; *you* so lightly crushed the image of God, the man Adam; because of *your* punishment, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die. And you think to adorn yourself beyond your “tunics of skins” (Gen 3.21)?⁸⁰

Stereotyping, naturalizing, universalizing—three common ideological mechanisms through which the Church Fathers constructed “woman.”

Perhaps less well explored than these familiar motifs are the uses of history by which the Fathers attempted to mold women’s behavior in their own day, how they sought to “fix” the subjectivity of contemporary women by an appeal to the past: here, their construction of a Christian narrative is most often directed toward “strategies of containment.” Nonetheless, their project suffers from a certain incoherence, since their appeal to examples from yesteryear lacks a consistent approach to “salvation history” into which these examples could be inserted. The ideological function of their appeals to history is betrayed by their indecision as to whether *Heilsgeschichte*—which in many other circumstances they would read as a message of liberation—should so be understood when the topic is “woman.” Several problems beset the larger historiographical enterprise: could a progressive view of revelation that assumes an upward development from the realm of “the old” (“Law”) to that of “the new” (“grace”) be squared with the belief that each Scriptural verse—“old” as well as “new”—was equally sacred and meaningful? Was the trajectory of revelation upward, or simply “flat”? And where should the Church of the present be placed? Had it been even more gloriously endowed with grace than the apostolic era, or had it suffered a downward slide from its primitive lustre? Was “woman” to remain a constant in a history that itself evolved either “upward” or “downward”? Did the appeal to history work its ideological function by closing the gap between past and present—or did the appeal itself ironically serve to widen the gulf?

and Women’s Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity. Women and Religion 20 (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 31–32; for references to the patristic texts on the subject, see Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, trans. J. Laporte and M. L. Hall (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1976). For a lively recent discussion, see Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women’s Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

80. Tertullian, *cult. fem.* 1.1.2 (CCL 1.343).

Although typology and allegory were two common ways in which the Fathers resolved the problem of interpreting the Old Testament in relation to the New so that the validity of *both* Testaments was upheld, when they sought Biblical inspiration for directing female behavior in their *own* era, they were not much interested in either typology or allegory: they wanted stories about “real” women for their hortatory and moralizing projects.⁸¹ Insofar as they read Genesis 1–3 as “history,” they received extra assistance—from Eve—in their quest for “real” negative exemplars. Yet their approach to history was not motivated by antiquarian interests, for even when they appealed to sections of the Bible usually classified as historical writings, their very project—the chastisement and moral uplift of women—militated against a strictly historical reading. In their hands, the Biblical stories acquired a certain timelessness, that is, they took on features of myth. As John Frow has expressed it in writing of the literary canon, once a text becomes part of a canon that must speak meaningfully to daily life in a different era, it is “removed from its real historical time to be situated in a time of habitual repetition,” an “ideal nontime.”⁸² And here, once more, we find ourselves in the realm of ideology: history is (paradoxically) erased on the very occasion that it is appealed to. The “history of women” has been flattened to the “myth of woman.”

This approach to history in the Church Fathers we might label, with Brian Stock, “traditionalistic,” by which he means “the self-conscious affirmation of traditional norms” selected from the past “to serve present needs.”⁸³ Thus the Fathers call up examples from the Greek and Roman past as models for Christian women’s behavior: Lucretia and Dido are put to the service of Christian chastity and monogamy.⁸⁴ Patristic writers liked to recall the “good old days” of Greece and Rome when women were under stricter control of their fathers and husbands. Then, women stayed at home, spun, and were submissive to their husbands. Thus the Fathers align themselves with the distant legal and social past of Greece and Rome,

81. Douglas Burton-Christie has also noted the appeal to exemplary characters of Scripture as “the primary means through which the Bible entered and affected the imaginations of those who took up life in the desert . . .” (*The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* [New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], 167).

82. Frow, *Marxism*, 101, 230.

83. Stock, *Listening*, 164, contrasted with “traditional action,” defined as “the habitual pursuit of inherited norms of conduct, which are taken to be society’s norm.”

84. Tertullian, *mon.* 17.2 (CCL 2.1252); *cast.* 13.3 (CCL 2.1034–35); Jerome, *Iou.* 1, 43; 46; 49 (PL 23.286, 287–88, 294); *ep.* 79.7 (CSEL 55.96).

not with the legal and social “present” of women’s lives in their own era.⁸⁵ Their rhetorical appeals to the glories of past tradition were noticeably out of step with the actual legal condition of women in their own era—women who could, for example, retain their own property separate from their husband’s, serve as guardians to their children, and initiate divorce.⁸⁶ The

85. Jerome, *ep.* 107.10 (CSEL 55.3). In *ep.* 121.6 (CSEL 56. 22), Jerome has high praise for Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, which contains traditional household regulations. For Augustine, see *ep.* 262 to Eclicia (CSEL 57.621–31). For Augustine’s picture of his own mother’s wifely submission, see *conf.* 9.9.19–22 (CCL 27.145–47). Judith Evans-Grubbs notes that Augustine’s close tie to his mother may represent a “continuity with the pre-Christian Roman past,” in which close relations between mothers and adult sons appear to have been common (Review of Suzanne Dixon’s *The Roman Mother*, in *Classical Philology* 85 [1990]:338). The hearkening back to “the good old days” is characteristic of (pagan) Latin moralists and satire writers: see Judith Evans-Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine’s Legislation on Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 1995), chap. 2.

86. For discussions of the changes in Roman law pertaining to women by late antiquity, see especially Percy Ellwood Corbett, *The Roman Law of Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930); Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), passim; Jean Gaudemet, “Tendances nouvelles de la législation familiale au IV^e siècle,” in *Transformations et conflits au IV^e siècle ap. J.-C.* Colloque organisé par la Fédération Internationale des Etudes Classiques, Bordeaux, 7. au 12. septembre 1970. *Antiquitas* 1, 29 (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag, 1978), 187–207; Richard P. Saller, “*Familia, Domus, and the Roman Conception of the Family*,” *Phoenix* 38 (1984): 336–55, especially 338–40; Yan Thomas, “The Division of the Sexes in Roman Law,” in *A History of Women: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, ed. P. S. Pantel, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass./London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 83–137; Jill Harries, “‘Treasure in Heaven’: Property and Influence Among Senators of Late Rome,” in *Marriage and Property*, ed. Elizabeth M. Craik (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991), 54–70; Suzanne Dixon, “The Marriage Alliance in the Roman Elite,” *Journal of Family History* 10 (1985): 353–78; Beryl Rawson, “The Roman Family,” and J. A. Crook, “Women in Roman Succession,” in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 1–57, 58–82; Philippe Antoine, *Le Mariage: Droit canonique et coutumes africaines*. *Théologique Historique* 90 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1992), chaps. 1–2 (on engagements). The various essays of Jean Gaudemet on marriage are collected in his *Sociétés et mariage*. *Recherches institutionnelles* 5 (Strasbourg: Cerdic-Publications, 1980), especially 46–103, 116–39; and the forthcoming book by Antti Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity*. Although Antti Arjava reads Jerome, *ep.* 147.11 and John Chrysostom, *virg.* 52.3 to mean that husbands in their time may have been reclaiming the ancient legal right summarily to kill a wife and her lover caught in the sex act (*Women and Law*, chap. 2, 2), it seems to me that such expressions (in the absence of any legal evidence to support Arjava’s claim) betoken these Fathers’ rhetorical appeal to a past in which husbands had more power over their wives. For a summary of developments as they affect the notion of “consent” to marriage, see Elizabeth A. Clark, “‘Adam’s Only

Fathers' appeals can be better understood, however, if we contemplate the lack of success churchmen had experienced in making law their *own* stands against divorce or a husband's sexual straying⁸⁷: the force of rhetorical exhortation necessarily was their major weapon in the enforcement of what they considered Christian values, since they lacked actual legal sanctions for their views.

But more than the recollection of the pagan past, the Fathers liked to summon examples from the ranks of *Biblical* women for the eyes and ears of their female audiences. Thus we find frequent appeals to Rebecca⁸⁸ and Sarah,⁸⁹ to Prisca,⁹⁰ Mary and Martha.⁹¹ Nonetheless, the question remained: into which narrative trajectory should they be placed? Was there an upward sweep from the Old Testament to the Christian era, in which the shocking behavior of the Hebrew forefathers and foremothers was explained (away) as belonging to "different times?" Thus Methodius in *The Banquet* has one of his female symposiasts describe how God had allowed incest in the early days of the human race, which had later been prohibited by the Mosaic law; next polygamy, formerly permitted, was

Companion': Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage," *Rech. Aug.* 21 (1986), especially 158–61, with numerous references on Roman marriage law. For a discussion of the ideological nature of texts pertaining to adultery, see Amy Richlin, "Approaches to the Sources on Adultery at Rome," in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Helene P. Foley (New York/London/Paris: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1981), 379–404. The conflicts between state need and Christian ideology regarding women is well noted by Judith Evans-Grubbs in her essay, "The Good, the Bad, and the Holy: Women in Late Roman Law," forthcoming.

87. On the Fathers' lack of success in influencing imperial law on such points, see Arjava, *Women and the Law*, chaps. 2 and 3, and "Divorce in Later Roman Law," *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica* 22 (1988): 5–21; Hans Julius Wolff, "Doctrinal Trends in Post-classical Roman Marriage Law," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Romanistische Abteilung* 67 (1950): especially 268, 276, 278–79, 296–98, 311, 318–19; Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 319, 463–64; and Roger S. Bagnall, "Church, State and Divorce in Late Roman Egypt; in *Florilegium Columbianum. Essays in Honor of P. O. Kristeller*, ed. K.-L. Selig and R. Somerville (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 41–61. The degree to which legislative changes by Constantine do or do not reflect his religious sentiment is carefully examined by Judith Grubbs-Evans in her essay, "Constantine and Imperial Legislation on the Family," in *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity*, edd. Jill Harries and Ian Wood (London: Duckworth, 1993), 120–42.

88. Tertullian, *virg.* 11.3 (CCL 2.1220–21); *Or.* 22.10 (CCL 1.271); John Chrysostom, *laud Max.* 6 (PG 51.235); *hom.* 48 *Gen.* 5–6 (PG 54.441–43); *hom.* 50 *Gen.* 1 (PG 54.448).

89. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 32 *Gen.* 5–6 (PG 53.300); *hom.* 41 *Gen.* 5 (PG 53.381–82).

90. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 1 in *Rom.* 16:3 3 (PG 51.191–92).

91. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 62 *Joh.* 3 (PG 59.345).

forbidden. Eventually came an attack on the previously-tolerated adultery . . . and finally, the Christian era bloomed, in which continence and virginity reigned supreme. According to Methodius, God like a skillful pedagogue had educated the human race in morality by stages, from the time that humans were allowed to "frolic like calves," through their "student days," to full maturity.⁹²

Yet even if the trajectory of *Heilsgeschichte* were upward, where should it stop? Should it continue to soar beyond the New Testament era to the Church Fathers' own time?⁹³ Although such an approach supplied a useful shaming device for contemporary men ("how much better 'weak women' of our day are than you!"), it lacked rhetorical leverage for the chastisement of contemporary *women*, who might foolishly imagine that they excelled all Biblical characters in virtue. Perhaps it was better to stop the moral ascent with the New Testament, claiming only that grace had devolved more fully on women there than in the Hebrew past.⁹⁴ For if grace were allowed to flourish too fulsomely after the New Testament period, the Fathers might lose the ground for their critique of Montanist women, who prophesied and claimed to receive revelations in accordance with Jesus' promise that the Paraclete would soon bring fuller truth (Jn 14.26; 15.26).⁹⁵

Given such interpretive perils, perhaps more rhetorical force against contemporary women's behavior could be derived from adopting a "downhill" trajectory for women after the New Testament era. By this means, the greater dissoluteness—mysteriously unexplained—of women in the Church Fathers' own time could serve to rationalize the curtailment of women's earlier freedoms. In this scenario, women of the Bible could be raised up as models of a virtue and chastity that were sadly lacking in the present. Thus although Rebecca, as depicted in the book of Genesis, could move at will in public space and interact with men without endangering her purity,⁹⁶ and although New Testament women could travel with men, perform ministries, and even be called "apostles,"⁹⁷ none of these possi-

92. Methodius, *symp.* 1.2.16–18 (GCS 27.9).

93. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom.* 13 *Eph.* 4 (PG 62.99).

94. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 5 *Acta* 2 (PG 60.51–2).

95. Jerome, *ep.* 41.4 (CSEL 54.314). Tertullian came to favor the New Prophecy: *mon.* 14.4; 6 (CCL 2.1249, 1250).

96. John Chrysostom, *laud Max.* 7 (PG 51.236); not to speak of her physical strength in leaping on camels and carrying water jugs (*hom.* 48 *Gen.* 6 [PG 54.443]).

97. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 73 *Matt.* 3–4 (PG 57.677–78); *hom.* 31 *Rom.* 2 (PG 60.669–70). Chrysostom is exceptional among the Church Fathers in allowing Junia of Romans 16:7 to be a woman; he even grants her apostolic status. See Bernadette Brooten, "'Junia . . . Outstanding among the Apostles' (Rom 16.7)," in *Women*

bilities now obtained, due to the negative "slide" that Christian women had suffered.

Still another historical trajectory was proposed by the ascetic writers of the later fourth and fifth centuries. According to this narrative, human life had begun on a virginal "high" in the Garden of Eden, but had plunged to the abyss with the institution of sexual intercourse and marriage. Humans had gradually risen from the swamp of carnal concerns and desires to reclaim, in the Church Fathers' day, the virginal Paradise: this epic tale of defeat and recovery held much appeal to writers such as Jerome, Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa.⁹⁸ On this "ascetic trajectory," Genesis 1 and 2 exemplified the lofty chastity of the later Christian era, while the behavior of most Old Testament characters was at best explained as a sign of the human weakness that God had graciously tolerated in the shadowy era after the first sin and before Christ's advent.⁹⁹ Of course, this strategy ran the risk of denigrating Old Testament ethics, which carried with it the charge of Manicheism, as Jerome learned to his distress.¹⁰⁰

Thus all possible historical scenarios entailed some explicit or implicit difficulty. In consequence, it is not surprising that the Fathers' appeal to female exemplars from the Bible remains uncoordinated with any consistent trajectory that *Heilsgeschichte* was imagined to have followed: any metanarrative that stressed the liberating effects of Christianity ran up against the Fathers' perceived need to construct "strategies of containment" for women. It is not just that this incoherence is found among the various Church Fathers; nor that it is exhibited from treatise to treatise in a single patristic writer's corpus: the incoherence is apparent in one and the same treatise. A case-in-point is Tertullian's *De monogamia*, which begins with a denial that monogamy is a novel idea propagated by the New Prophecy, since it is found not just in the New Testament but in the Old as well.¹⁰¹ Yet Tertullian then switches in mid-stream seemingly to reverse his argument: from chapter seven on, he posits that there really *was* a

Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration, ed. L. and A. Swidler (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 141–44.

98. Jerome, *Iou.* 1.4; 16; 2.15 (PL 23.225, 245–46, 319–21); John Chrysostom, *virg.* 14.3; 17.1–3 (SC 125.140, 150–52); Gregory of Nyssa, *virg.* 13.1 (SC 119.422).

99. E.g., John Chrysostom, *hom. in 1 Cor.* 7:39 2 (PG 51.219–20); *virg.* 41.1 (SC 125.236).

100. Jerome, *Iou.* 1.3 (PL 23.223); *ep.* 49 (48)2 (CSEL 54.352). Compare with the ethics of the anonymous, presumably Pelagian, author of *De castitate*, for whom Old Testament sexual ethics are not worthy of defense; here, a very sharp breach is registered between behavior allowable under the Old Law and the New: *cast.* 11.2; 12.2–4 (PLS 1.1490, 1491).

101. Tertullian, *mon.* 2–6 (CCL 2.1229–37).

"difference of times" between the two Testaments, the Old allowing sexual behavior no longer acceptable to Christians.¹⁰² None of us, I think, would accuse Tertullian of intellectual dullness: the example rather signals how the appeal to the past by the Fathers is polemical, rhetorical, and moral¹⁰³—and in these cases, it serves as a regulatory device for women of the present.

If these were the workings of the Fathers' appeal to "history," how did they attempt to construct female subjectivity through appeals to certain literary forms and techniques? Given the ideological cast of the Fathers' approach to "the woman question," their turn to the grand Biblical narratives and myths—and their reading of them in a decidedly conservative way—is not surprising: stories, according to some analysts of ideology, are often its effective carriers. Thus it is to the historical narratives, to books such as Job and Song of Songs (read as embodying stories), and to the mythic material of Genesis 1–11 that the Fathers turn over and over again. Moreover, the examples they lift therefrom are often themselves elaborated in story form, ancient narratives being encapsulated in contemporary ones, such as sermons constructed along "story" lines. Homilies of this type were surely one of the most successful ways to address women, since they were preached to congregations; longer commentaries and treatises designed to be read, in contrast, would have found a largely, although not exclusively, male audience.¹⁰⁴

In the Fathers' sermonical narrations of Biblical tales, all Christians are bound into a seamless history that runs from the Garden of Eden to the present: they are "one people of God." But this account is somewhat deceptive, since the Church Fathers, after all, had constructed their *own* master narrative by appropriating the Jews' sacred history from them, so that all of the Hebrew Scriptures could (and should) be read as a "Christian" document. Moreover, although tales of women as well as men comprise the narrative of "the unity of God's people" (as Galatians 3.28

102. Tertullian, *mon.* 7 (CCL 2.1237–39).

103. See de Certeau, "History," 220, on how history is essentially an "ethical" discipline; also see White, "Value," 18, 27, on the moralizing quality of narrative history.

104. Several of Jerome's longer commentaries are dedicated to women; one presumes he thought that they might read them. To Paula are dedicated his own commentaries on Ephesians, Philemon, Titus, Galatians, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Haggai, plus his translation of Origen's *Commentary on Luke*; to Marcella (and Pammachius) he dedicates the *Commentary on Daniel*. For a discussion of Jerome's dedications of treatises to various friends, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), chap. 1.

proclaims) this narrative was not run in a liberatory direction such as contemporary feminist exegetes might press: for the Fathers, there was a notable discrepancy between the male components of that "people," who could preach, publicly teach, and offer the sacraments, and the female members, who could not. The unity of all Christians in the allegedly common history that the sermonic narrative proposes is sharply called into question by the recognition of its selective application. Salvation history, if not differentially salvific for men and for women, was differentially elaborated: "Christian freedom" meant something different for women than for men. The universalizing effect of the Christian master narrative thus concealed the subaltern status of many of its characters.

That the appeal to female inferiority and "danger" also received a ready hand from the literary device of intertextual writing is suggested by a variety of patristic sources. A few examples will here suffice to show how it assisted the Fathers in their construction of an ideology of gender. Take the explication of the opening chapters of Genesis. John Chrysostom, in his *Sermons on Genesis*, reads the creation and "Fall" stories with the help of 1 Corinthians 11 as an intertext. The Genesis 1 account of the first man and woman as created "in the image of God" is here "corrected" through 1 Corinthians 11, in which only males enjoy the blessing of "God's image." Why is this so, Chrysostom asks? And he answers: because "the image of God" means "authority," and only males possess this quality; like God in the heavens, so the male on earth has no superior and rules over all beings (including woman). She, on the other hand, is called in 1 Corinthians 11—though not in Genesis 1—"the glory of man" because she is under his authority.¹⁰⁵ Thus the force of the creation of both sexes "in God's image" is mitigated to send a message of female inferiority.

Elsewhere, in his longer *Homilies on Genesis*, Chrysostom also employs 1 Corinthians 11 as the intertext for Genesis 1–3, but here, it is Paul's designation of man as the "head" and woman as the "body" that provides the correct interpretation of these chapters. Thus for Chrysostom, man was the "head" at the time of creation. This "natural" hierarchy was upset by the first sin, when the "body" (Eve) did not obey her "head" (Adam); rather, he was allured by the "body" and put himself in submission to her.¹⁰⁶ Read with the help of 1 Corinthians 11, Genesis 1–3 conveys the message that sexual hierarchy was given at creation as "natural," but was disturbed by the first sin. Yet Chrysostom brings more than 1 Corinthians

11 to his interpretation: various motifs from the Pastoral Epistles and other late New Testament books are introduced to reinforce the point that the "oneness" of the first couple consisted not just in being "head" and "body"; "head" and "body" are elided with "teacher and disciple, ruler and subject."¹⁰⁷ For Chrysostom's exegesis in this homily as well, the intertext supplies the theme of female inferiority and submission that then governs the interpretation of the stories of creation and "Fall."

The past master of intertextual interpretation in later Latin Christianity was doubtless Jerome. Two illustrations from his writings will suggest how he creates meaning, more specifically, how via intertextual interpretation he "raises the stakes" for asceticism. The *Adversus Jovinianum* 1, 7 provides an instructive example. According to Jerome—who here exegetes 1 Corinthians 7—when Paul in that chapter advises his male audience that it is "better for a man not to touch a woman," the passage should be read in light of verses from Proverbs 6, 7, and 9 that warn young men against dangerous women who "touch," "preying upon" their lives, and causing them to lose their understanding. The view that Jerome here argues—that if "touching" isn't good, then it is necessarily bad—becomes a misogynistic message of the dangers that women pose to men.¹⁰⁸ Paul's advice regarding male restraint is thus lent different coloration by the insertion of an explicit message about "female danger."

Likewise in *Epistle* 123 to a Gallic widow, Geruchia, Jerome cleverly revises the message of 1 Timothy 5 that young widows should remarry: this advice, not at all to Jerome's taste, is explained away with the help of two intertexts that "constrain" the text of 1 Timothy 5. First, Jerome reminds Geruchia (and other readers) that Noah's ark (a figure for the Church) contains unclean animals as well as clean ones (Gen 7.2–3): she can still be called a Christian if she remarries, but only an "unclean" one. Next, he summons up the Parable of the Sower, accompanied by his own famous interpretation in which the 100-fold, 60-fold, and 30-fold harvests (virginity, widowhood, and a single marriage) leave no room for countenancing remarriage if a Christian wishes to be present at the "harvest." For Jerome, second marriage is better represented as "the weeds among the thorns."¹⁰⁹ By interlarding his exegesis of 1 Timothy 5 with such passages, Jerome seeks to ensure that his readers comprehend the lowly status of second marriage. The carnal "destitutus" (in Boyarin's phrase) of the Pas-

107. John Chrysostom, *hom. 12 Col. 5* (PG 62.388).

108. Jerome, *Iou. 1.7* (PL 23.228–29); he appears to borrow the argument from Tertullian, *mon. 3*.

109. Jerome, *ep. 123.8* (CSEL 56.81–82).

105. John Chrysostom, *serm. 2 in Gen. 2* (PG 54.589); cf. *hom. 7 de statutis 2* (PG 49.93).

106. John Chrysostom, *hom. 17 Gen. 4* (PG 53.139).

toral Epistles is here reconfigured for the new message of female asceticism: texts have not been discarded, but rather given their proper interpretation—an interpretation that again betrays the Fathers' "strategies of containment" regarding women's sexual and marital activity.

Thus in three ways related to literary forms and technique—through intertextual reading strategies, through the appeal to Biblical narratives and myths, and through encoding these stories in narratives of their own—the Fathers helped to promote the ideology of "woman" that would prevail through the centuries to come.

III

Theorists of ideology challenge historians to uncover the conditions that prompted the production of such interpretations, that is, to "denaturalize" and "re-historicize" the conditions that produced ideologies of gender such as we have been considering. Some notable efforts have already been made to ferret out the contexts of early Christian writings by such New Testament scholars as Jouette Bassler and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who engage in a kind of Althusserian "symptomatic reading" by noting the gaps, by attending to what might seem "illegible," in the text. Bassler and Schüssler Fiorenza have thus offered illuminating suggestions regarding (for example) the social situations that perhaps produced the message of female subservience that mark the Pastoral Epistles: "false teachers" were making significant inroads in wooing women to their camp and allowing them more freedom and opportunity for leadership than did the church represented by "the Pastor."¹¹⁰ A similar explanation has been offered as one reason for Catholic writers' slander of the Gnostics: they wished to use the different treatment of women in their own group and among (at least some) Gnostics as a marker to differentiate "us" from "them."¹¹¹

For the period of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, from which I have drawn most of my evidence, I have elsewhere argued for the following scenario regarding the relative prevalence of women in literature composed by ascetically inclined writers: with the conversion of the Roman aristocracy, women of vast wealth and exalted social status not only em-

110. Jouette Bassler, "The Widows' Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim 5:3–16," *JBL* 103 (1984):23–41. For interesting comments on the importation of hierarchy from the patriarchal household, and of the values of the patronage system, into the Church, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), chap. 8.

111. See discussion in Clark, "Devil's Gateway," 33–37.

braced Christianity, they embraced a rigorous asceticism that impelled them to renounce their fortunes for charitable and religious causes. The Church became a primary outlet for female patronage, just at the moment when some older avenues of patronage were closing to aristocratic women, in part due to shifts in patronage arrangements: local benefaction tended to give way to the linkage between patronage and the holding of high governmental offices which were, of course, closed to women.¹¹² The almost-unimaginable wealth of some of these aristocrats-turned-ascetics (recall that a conservative estimate of Melania the Younger's annual income—not her entire fortune, to be sure—could have supported 29,000 persons for a year¹¹³) was enthusiastically accepted by the Church, which with the expansion of Christianity in the post-Constantinian era and with the burgeoning ascetic movement, needed extensive income for its charity and construction operations.

The ambivalence that these women occasioned for Church Fathers such as Jerome and Chrysostom was, I posit, considerable; here were humans of the highest virtue, self-control, and intelligence, whose incredible generosity made possible their own monastic and ecclesiastical operations: yet Olympias, Paula, Marcella and the others were most clearly "women." *Could they be "women" without being "woman"?* The gender bias that renders them unequal is a most telling expression of "uneven development" among these women whose economic, social, and educational positions would have suggested no such disability. The "status dissonance" they suffer is linked solely to their sex and to no other factor.

112. Elizabeth A. Clark, "Patrons Not Priests; Gender and Power in Late Ancient Christianity," *Gender and History* 2 (1990): 254–61, especially 256–58.

113. *Vita Melaniae Junioris* 15 (Latin): text in *Santa Melania Giuniore, senatrice romana: documenti contemporanei e note*, ed. M. del Tindaro Rampolla (Roma: Tipografia Vaticana, 1905), 11. The Greek version attributes this amount to her husband's income (SC 90.156–58). The calculations are based on the costs of supporting the poor at subsistence level, given what we know of late ancient wages and prices. See Roger S. Bagnall, *Currency and Inflation in Fourth Century Egypt*, *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, Supplement 5 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), especially the prices and salaries listed on 61–72; Richard Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire, Quantitative Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 4–5; idem, "Costs, Outlays and Summae Honorariae from Roman Africa," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 30 (1962), 75, who emphasizes the difficulties of calculating purchasing power that corresponds to modern price structures. For a survey, see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 1, 438–48; on prices of clothing, 2, 848–50. A contemporary discussion of grain equivalents, food requirements, and basic consumption needs is provided by Colin Clark and Margaret Haswell, *Economics and Subsistence Agriculture*. 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1970), esp. chaps. 1, 4, 11. I thank Keith Hopkins for assistance with these details.

Moreover, the Church Fathers' *own* social location should be noted in relation to that of the women to whom they directed their exhortations and correspondence: for the most part—Ambrose excepted—it was not of the aristocratic status occupied by the two Melanias, Marcella, Olympias, and others. John Chrysostom's father was, in all likelihood, merely a "high grade civil servant."¹¹⁴ Jerome's family lived in a town in the Dalmatian hinterlands,¹¹⁵ a fact that in itself sets his family's "society" apart from that of the Roman senatorial aristocracy; moreover, Jerome, even with Paula's assistance, did not have sufficient funds to build monasteries for men and women in Bethlehem when they first settled there.¹¹⁶ Augustine's father was apparently a minor official in Thagaste, a small and not very distinguished city in Roman Africa;¹¹⁷ when Augustine rose to the bishopric of Hippo Regius, he came to control church property worth twenty times his own patrimony.¹¹⁸ Thus although Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine cannot be said to have come from poverty, their families' social and economic statuses were no match for those of the women on whom they came to depend: their own social location, by virtue of family background, is noticeably lower. It is tempting to speculate whether their attempts to reign women in under the control of male ecclesiastics and monastic leaders do not relate in part to their own lower social and economic status—now bolstered by the positions of authority they had come to occupy by virtue of their intellectual (and "political") achievements.

It is perhaps the Church Fathers' emotional and financial dependence on such women—recall that Olympias almost singlehandedly supported the operations of the Constantinople Church during Chrysostom's episcopate¹¹⁹—coupled with their misogynistic constructions of "woman" that gives an unpleasant edge to their diatribes against rich women. Thus Chrysostom reminds men that if they pick wealthy brides, they will have many woes—as he simultaneously tries to impress upon any women who came into marriage with fortunes equal to their husbands' that the "law of obe-

dience" causes any presumed equality to vanish.¹²⁰ The woman who has her own money, he claims, sets up her own will and becomes a "wild beast," failing to exhibit desirable wifely submission.¹²¹ In a most telling merger of the financial with the sexual, Chrysostom interprets the "becoming one (flesh)" text of Ephesians 5 to mean that brides should deposit their money in their husband's coffers¹²²—a stunning example of the social conservatism exhibited by the Fathers on gender issues, for both law and custom in the Roman Empire had for several centuries (since the decline of *manus* marriage) supported the separation of the wife's and the husband's property.¹²³ Jerome's theoretical approach to rich women takes a rather different tack: that they are prone to fall into heresy, being much courted by heretical leaders who know where to find their sustenance.¹²⁴ Likewise, women who attempt to dispose of their own property without their husband's consent become the targets of patristic wrath,¹²⁵ even though legally their property was separate from their husband's.¹²⁶ The ideal, it appears, was for a committed virgin or widow to donate her entire substance to the Church, and like Althusser's "good subject," willingly to submit herself to the control of ecclesiastical authority.

Although the Church Fathers overwhelmingly appeal to the divine will, to the order of creation, and to "nature" to justify the unequal treatment of a significant portion of their Christian flock, there are occasional—very occasional—lapses in their argumentation that stand against their rhetorical appeal to female disability. Thus although Chrysostom calls women of his own day "weak," he acknowledges that the "weakness" results not just from a fault of their "nature," but from their upbringings: they have been improperly educated and encouraged to lead indolent lives.¹²⁷ Likewise, he can abandon the *topos* of "woman as temptress" long enough to suggest that it is not women's beauty that is at fault in the arousal of lust, but the unchaste eyes of men. "We should not accuse the objects, but ourselves and our own sluggishness," he intones,¹²⁸ in a view far more in keeping

120. John Chrysostom, *virg.* 53–55 (SC 125.298–304).

121. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 49 *Acta* 4 (PG 60.344).

122. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 20 *Eph.* 9 (PG 62.148). The nineteenth-century sexual metaphor of "spending" here seems replaced by one of "saving."

123. See, for example, Gardner, *Women in Roman Law*, 68–77.

124. Jerome, *ep.* 75.3 (CSEL 55.36).

125. Augustine, *ep.* 262.4; 5; 7; 8 (CSEL 57.624–25, 626–27).

126. On the separation of husbands' and wives' property in later Roman law, see especially the works listed by Gardner, Dixon, and Treggiari in note 86 above.

127. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 29 *Heb.* 3 (PG 63.206).

128. John Chrysostom, *hom.* 15 *de statu* 3 (PG 49.158); cf. *hom.* 7 2 *Cor.* 6 (PG 61.450–51).

114. A. H. M. Jones, "St John Chrysostom's Parentage and Education," *HTR* 46 (1954): 171.

115. Jerome, *vir. ill.* 135 (PL 23.697–98). For the relatively undistinguished situation of late ancient Dalmatia, see J. J. Wilkes, *Dalmatia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), especially 271, 333–36, 417, 419.

116. Jerome, *ep.* 108.14 (CSEL 55.325).

117. See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 20–22.

118. Augustine, *ep.* 126.7 (CSEL 44.13).

119. *Vita Olympiadis* 5; 13 (SC 13bis.416–18, 435); Palladius, *v. Chrys.* 61, ed. P. R. Coleman-Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 110–11.

with his belief that world is not to be blamed on our "nature."¹²⁹

Jerome's writings also work against his more usual ideological appearance, when discussing the marital and sexual relations in his treatise *Against Jovinian*, he offhandedly ethnic groups take for a "law of nature" that practice most familiar to them¹³⁰—but not for concede that this dictum applies to his *own* view arrangements! In a similar vein, Augustine notes the understanding how their *own* modes of life are of other nations and times¹³¹—but he does Jerome, apply this observation to his *own* noted sexual relations. Here we have striking example that those who are "in ideology" always believe stand outside it.¹³² One wonders how differently might have been if writers such as Chrysostom further the "constructedness" of their own vitality, if they had allowed insights such as I have gender politics. It is worth noting, however, that could have spurred a trenchant critique of the gender, seem *not* to have been stimulated by the universal human sinfulness: although in other times or theologically motivated call to self-repentance such critiques, in these instances, the counter-argument simply from the Fathers' observation of the variety." Such observations thus provided no theological or critical critique of gender ideology.

IV

Theorists of ideology as there is at present, or has been anytime during that ideology¹³³—that is, an ideological consensus population that is perpe-

129. See discussion in Enslin *Politeia* and Plato's *Republic*: John Chrysostom on "Woman," in Clark, *Jerome*, 3–4, with references.

130. Jerome, *Ion*, 2.7 (1).

131. Augustine, *doct. a*.

132. Althusser, "Ideology."

133. *Ibid.*

trated by the class(es) in power and accepted by those whom they dominate. Yet even the skeptics¹³⁴ (those who *don't* believe there is a "dominant ideology" in the present) sometimes claim that in the distant past there was one, variously described as lying in "the pre-capitalist historical period"¹³⁵ or, more narrowly, in the "feudal era."¹³⁶ According to these commentators, the name of this "dominant ideology" of the past is—as one might expect—Christianity. The untestability of the thesis renders it dubious. But more: the little we know about the actual women who were represented in patristic writings makes us question whether the ideological stance of the Fathers entirely won the day. Although we have no body of literature by early Christian women which could be used to compare with that of the Fathers, we can infer even from the representations of these women by male writers that the gender ideology described in this paper did not result in their total silencing. For one important lesson that women historians have learned in the past decades—and without the explicit assistance of theorists of ideology—is how women and other subject populations manage to find small openings for their own projects and expressions of value¹³⁷: in this case, how women even "within ideology" used the patristic discourse to gain positions of monastic leadership, and access to education and to travel. Although Church Fathers such as Jerome and Chrysostom through stereotyping, naturalizing, and universalizing present an unattractive picture of "woman," they encouraged the actual women they esteemed to pursue lives of study and extra-domestic activity, and left us portraits of them that suggest the patristic ideology of "womanhood" had been to some degree subverted from within, by the women themselves. Probably it is too much to see in ancient Christian women's manipulation of the system an emerging form of consciousness. Yet if such small moments of subversion had been more systematically registered by the Fathers and connected to their occasional reflections on the "constructedness" of all human argumentation, a somewhat different rhetoric regarding women might have dominated the discourse of late ancient Christianity. Still, it is worth noting that the triumph of the Fathers' gender ideology was not complete.

134. See Eagleton, *Ideology*, 35–36, 56; Giddens, "Four Theses," 20 (where the integrating effect on society is questioned); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 132, discussed in Eagleton, *Ideology*, 47.

135. Althusser, "Ideology," 151.

136. Frow, *Marxism*, 63; also see Eagleton, *Ideology*, 154.

137. For a discussion of the formation of counterhegemonic discourses, and the difficulty of Althusser's notion of "interpellation" to provide a space for "subversive agency," see Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism*, 75, 92–93.

For as Sojourner Truth and other women in 1851 learned, even the dominant ideology can be manipulated: when her opponent claimed that women should not be accorded equal rights with men because "Christ was a man," her retort—entirely orthodox from a Christian perspective—might provide the grounds for a counter ideology: "Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with him!"¹³⁸

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138. In Stanton et al., *History*, 1:116.