

and not only because of its subject matter, it will repay the persistent reader handsomely.

Donald Wiebe  
Trinity College  
University of Toronto

*Feminine Soul: The Fate of an Ideal.* By Marilyn Chapin Massey. Beacon Press, 1985. 219 pages. \$22.95.

In *Feminine Soul: The Fate of an Ideal*, Marilyn Chapin Massey argues that the claim by modern women-centered writers for a distinctly feminine spirituality is not a reactionary retreat from the political; rather it is ripe with "culturally transformative potential." Massey holds that the proponents of a feminine soul have not adopted a male-determined representation. They offer instead a "new theory of religion, gender, and ideology" which, unlike the so-called liberating theories of Marx and Freud, does not implicitly accept the dominant culture's order of death: autonomous male ego, gender hierarchy, and denial of nurturance, difference, and woman's desire. The core of this book elaborates the revolutionary implications of feminine spirituality by uncovering within Western male discourse, which was regulated by the religious trope of God the Father and Son and which proffered the constraining representation of the domestic angel, the effort simultaneously to suppress what Massey describes as a tradition that idealized the feminine soul.

She situates within this tradition the works of the German pedagogue Pestalozzi, the romantic Novalis, and Froebel, the inventor of the Kindergarten. Massey attempts Foucauldian analysis whereby for each work both the specific social-historical conditions of its production and the textual and political effects of its publication are examined. For example, Pestalozzi's *Leonard and Gertrude*, a panegyric to the natural wisdom of mothers, and his later manual for the maternal pedagogue, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, are juxtaposed to the search for a solution to pandemic infanticide. Pestalozzi's representation of the mother-child union, while offering a resolution to the social problem, itself threatened the extant order because it was imagined as the basis of social interaction and the model for the human-divine relationship. Massey situates the suppression of these possibilities in the *Addresses to the German Nation* where Fichte appropriates Pestalozzi's "true intentions" by displacing the founding social relationship from mother-child to father-son. Although emphasizing less the local-historical conditions of their production, Massey examines how Novalis's *Henry of Ofterdingen* extends Pestalozzi's vision of feminine spirituality to include the lover, and she discusses how Froebel's *Mother and Play Songs* recovers the mother-child relationship as the site for moral and religious development. Massey details how the provocation of both works entailed either domestication, as Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve* functioned in relation to Novalis, or destruction, exemplified by Prussia's ban on the kindergartens which embodied the principles of Froebel's work.

Massey has written two books—one on woman-centered theory (chaps. 1 and 8) and one on a subversive male tradition (chaps. 2-7)—loosely joined by

the notion of a feminine soul. Unfortunately, feminine soul as a signifier lacks anchorage in the texts discussed and as a metaphor is too general to serve any but rhetorical uses. The concept refers to that which is both other than the masculine and implicated with the spiritual. This vague feminine soul and its goal, the "new theory of gender, religion, and ideology," are rendered more problematic by their double ground: an unquestioningly accepted "mother-goddess tradition" and woman's bodily experience. The latter undercuts any attempt to connect her two books since the subversive male tradition cannot draw upon it. Moreover, Massey's understanding of experience both assumes the old theory of ideology (falsehood superimposed upon the truth) and is an essentialism which belies her repeated claims that the references to woman's body are metaphorical.

This tendency to generalize also leads to one-dimensional (if not erroneous; cf. the discussion of woman's super-ego) depictions of Marxism and Freudianism as well as to the effacement of the differences among French feminists. The work also presents tendentious readings: the divine feminine is everywhere. Massey ignores the dialectical tension between her male authors and their encounter with feminine-coded otherness. In her all-too-brief treatment of Froebel she sloughs off the paean to God the Father which both opens and pervades his written text.

Massey confuses the reception of a text as subversive and the text's own ambiguous relationship to its alleged subversion. For example, *Henry* sustains as much as it subverts the determinant institution of the German bourgeoisie, the family. In all of her so-called revolutionary texts woman remains a medium for the articulation of man as both male and female. Woman is superseded. Like her misreading of Novalis's "blue flower" as woman's body instead of as a dynamic and unfolding unity, her analysis of *Henry* mistakes the poet's goal of the union of the masculine and the feminine for union with the mother-lover. Indeed her entire reading of the mother goddess in Novalis is placed in doubt by her mistaken identification of Ginnistan's lover, the father of Fable, with King Arcturus.

By employing the work of Foucault as a methodological tool, Massey extends our notion of religious data by displacing the history of nineteenth century German Christianity from the ideas understood by the few to the pedagogical construction of bourgeois Christian identity. She reminds scholars that the actuality of religion pervades everyday life and is not delimited to theological injunction. Moreover, she has drawn our attention to neglected texts which have chronicled and shaped the articulation of the modern individual, and she has through her interesting readings suggested the existence of an alternative tradition. Although deeply flawed, *Feminine Soul* compels us to explore further the intimate relationship between gender representation and the texts both included in and excluded from the dominant tradition.

Jay Geller  
Swarthmore, PA