(chapter 5), after an energetic description of an execution which would doubtless produce “relics”—“blood flew, bits of bone scattered, and the victim screamed”—McClain asserts that Catholics present “participated in [the execution] and used it to enhance their understanding of the Catholic immanence of the holy in the flesh and to strengthen their commitment to their religion” (153). Of course, Protestants too collected physical mementos from execution sites—were they also expressing “Catholic immanence of the holy in the flesh”?

And what is the early modern “understanding of the Catholic immanence of the holy in the flesh”? Undeniably, Catholics (and non-Catholics) saw martyrdom as a holy event, and gathered the remains of such events when they could—but to describe these remains as objects with “powerful material channels” (154) to a martyr’s intercession within a particularly Catholic context does little to unfold the Catholic understanding of grace, and leaves unaddressed the issue of similar Protestant behavior.

Throughout her work, McClain avoids the use of the word *ecclesiology*, although that, it seems, is what she is really concerned with: what is the Church, and how do individual Catholics in various eras conduct themselves in it? She focuses on “Catholic community” and “Catholic identity,” and distinguishes both from a “Protestant authority” whose theology (not to mention ecclesiology) remains concealed. At her best, such as when she discusses Catholics in Cornwall and the Northern Shires, she shows herself adept as a social historian. Her weakness—perhaps the most common limiting factor in the entire genre of religious history—is capturing the *lived* religious experience of an individual, and making it speak accurately. *Lest We Be Damned* achieves its successes with mixed results.

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Margaret W. Ferguson. *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France*. Chicago, London: Chicago University Press, 2003. Pp. xiv, 506.

Margaret Ferguson’s ambitious, compelling, and frustrating study of literacy, gender, and empire contributes to the field less through its individual arguments than through its expansive scope. Ferguson draws together myriad research about the forms and meanings of literacy, and applies her findings to four female writers. Her analyses of these writers—Christine de Pizan, Marguerite de Navarre, Elizabeth Cary, and Aphra Behn—range confidently between France and England and across three centuries of literary and historical culture. In a field marked increasingly by calls for interdisciplinarity, *Dido's Daughters* provides a model for work that cuts energetically across national, historical, and departmental lines.

The book is divided roughly in half: the first three chapters situate questions of literacy in relation to theoretical and historical approaches, while the following

four chapters focus on individual writers. The central claim of the book's first half is that literacy is not a stable and unified concept, but rather "a shifting and plural phenomenon" (3) enmeshed in processes of gender differentiation and nation-building. Ferguson's major contribution to the discussion, whose groundwork has been laid by recent class- and gender-inflected criticism on literacy, lies in drawing together different strands of this research to articulate the difficulties involved in locating, defining, and describing multiple literacies. Ferguson's critique intervenes strongly in the debate between the "Great Divide" theory (in which the move from orality to literacy causes decisive shifts in a culture's thought-structures) and the relativistic, anti-essentialist approach to speech and writing championed by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*. Ferguson's careful analysis of the argument between Derrida and Claude Lévi-Strauss, a champion of the former theory, sheds new light on the stakes inherent in claims about literacy's effects.

Building on the work of recent critics, Ferguson goes on to argue that literacy is always implicated in political, legal, and social attitudes toward gender. Looming large here is "the image of the skeptical or resistant female" whose recurrent presence in male-authored texts suggests not silence, but rather an active struggle against the clerkly hierarchy that privileged literacy (in the narrow sense of being able to read Latin) above the oral or written command of various vernaculars (96). Using Renée Balibar's notion of *colinguisme*, Ferguson analyzes the methods by which competing languages, some of them state-sanctioned, interact with notions of empire and nationhood. She goes on to show that the gendering of these languages (the masculine Latin versus the vernacular "mother tongue," for example) had complex effects on how literacies were defined and measured throughout the period.

The arguments of the book's more narrowly focused second half sit awkwardly in relation to Ferguson's earlier theoretical claims. This awkwardness originates partly in the thematic role played by the character of Dido. As a skilled speaker, a usurper of male prerogative through verbal transgression (in one version of her story, she tricks the inhabitants of Carthage into giving her the city), and as a victim of Aeneas the male empire-builder, Dido touches upon literacy, gender, and empire in useful ways. But Ferguson's reading of Christine de Pizan, her first "daughter of Dido," depends little on ideas about empire, and to read her in terms of Dido's legacy seems a bit forced. While Ferguson claims that the *Cité des Dames* produces "a vision of empire with a transplanted female ruler at its center," it is hard to see how this allows the term "empire" to do much helpful work. In Ferguson's usage here, empire becomes any ruled area, thus losing the connotations she has previously established whereby empire involves, in Rupert Emerson's words, "the domination of one people by another" (18). Ferguson instantly (and justifiably) qualifies that definition by contesting the notion of "one people," and emphasizes that her use of the term "signals a site of contested meaning," but by the time we reach de Pizan even "domination *of*" seems in question, thus emptying "empire" of much specific reference. Further, the chapter never manages to clarify a connection between empire and De Pizan's attitudes about female authorship. The chapter on Marguerite de Navarre,

with its fascinating discussion of New World exploration in the *Heptaméron*, bears more on issues of empire, but has even less to do with Dido. I located only one reference to the Carthaginian queen, at the end of the chapter, which informs the reader that Dido and De Navarre both lie because they want to govern subjects—an analogy that, sadly, applies to more than a few rulers in Western history.

If the incongruities in structure between the book's two halves are discomfiting, so too are certain hallmarks of Ferguson's rhetoric. The poet Susan Howe talks of a game called "hunt the adjective," in which one tries to eliminate as many adjectives as possible from a given text. That game would afford hours of fun in Ferguson's book, in which ideas remain "not contested," phenomena are "highly influential," and propositions appear as "quite possibly true." A related rhetorical tic is to qualify a point to the extent that it becomes meaningless, while still insisting upon it as a strong statement. In the first chapter, for instance, Ferguson argues "It is when empires are rising or falling" that literacy shows up most clearly in the historical record. When do empires do anything else? If they do exhibit periods of stasis or stability, would those periods really correspond to fewer data about literacy? More serious, however, is the frequent disjunction between Ferguson's evidence and her conclusions, and in some cases, the *absence* of evidence for those conclusions. In a discussion of the printer's device on the cover of Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*, Ferguson explains that the printer had previously used the emblem (of a woman being scourged) on the cover of treatises detailing Protestant, especially Huguenot, dissent, and on a work of propaganda against "Popish Subtleties." She continues, "I do want to suggest that the emblem itself had cultural associations with *Catholic* dissent that were distinctive enough to be meaningful for some readers" [*italics mine*]. Since the only evidence she has provided suggests the contrary, this statement requires some justification. Instead, Ferguson goes on, "Such an interpretive surmise requires us to think of coded meanings as a set of cues that can be activated in certain historical circumstances by readers with certain kinds of knowledge...." An interpretive surmise, especially one lacking support, does nothing of the kind, and seems only tangentially related to the bewilderingly qualified clause that follows it.

These complaints would rate as mere quibbles if they did not occur so frequently in the narrative, thus calling into question many of Ferguson's conclusions on the local level. These problems tend to drop away, however, in the final chapter, a thoughtful and powerful account of Aphra Behn's *Oronooko*. The chapter provides a fitting culmination of the book's great strengths: the drawing together of disparate materials in order to articulate a nuanced and complex thesis, and the embedding of important questions within a matrix of historical and theoretical concerns. What does it mean to read or write? What is the relationship of bodies to those activities? How does gender inflect our answers to those questions, and indeed the questions themselves? "The answers to these questions," Ferguson asserts ironically, "will never fully accessible to empirical research" (4). To frame the questions themselves is at least as important a task.

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