book is its consistent focus on space, and this is a difficult matter to convey in ordinary language, as Bantjes would be the first to agree. What he has done is to illustrate how one can discuss space and place in such a way as to ensure that, as he writes, "neither nature nor structure is reified as an absolute limit" (p. 126).

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BRUBAKER, Leslie, and Julia M. H. SMITH (eds.) — *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. 333.

Leslie Brubaker and Julia Smith have produced a volume of assorted approaches to the problem of gender in the pre-modern world. The editors begin by reminding readers of the multiple, flexible meanings of gender and the difficulty of defining it. As in similar volumes, gender ends up meaning whatever is discussed in the included essays, which is to say, the usual topics: political and social discourses restrictive of women, concepts of bodies and sexualities, and definitions of masculinity. Three articles in the collection focus on Byzantium, two on Abbasid society, one on the late empire, and nine on early medieval northern Europe.

Although the book's topics are predictable, many of the fine articles offer fresh approaches to well-defined historical problems. The authors use case studies to deconstruct the presentation of gender in the primary source material and, at the same time, to destabilize misleading assumptions of modern historiography. Walter Pohl uses barbarian origins myths to probe the overlap of gender roles and ethnic identities, pointing out that most studies of historical ethnicity ignore half the population under study. Mary Harlow also tackles barbarian identities and masculinities by tracking late antique fashions in trousers and togas. Three essays about Byzantium focus less on gender definitions in the past than on how modern historians have burdened the familiar evidence, such as Prokopios's *Secret History*, with their own gendered baggage. Brubaker shows how Prokopios's portraits of Justinian and Theodora together formed a complex rhetorical statement about good government. In the most daring essay of the collection, Martha Vinson compares nineteenth-century romantic narratives with stories of Byzantine beauty pageants or "bride shows" from the seventh to ninth centuries. By teasing out subtexts, she is able to identify important shifts in female sanctity and the social position of Byzantine wives.

The two articles on Abbasid society work well together for readers unfamiliar with Islamic history. Even the uninformed will conclude from these essays that the historiography of Muslim women lags behind other areas of women's or gender history. El Cheikh offers a fairly traditional study of women behind the throne or, in this case, the harem door and their influence on court politics. Julia Bray's article, on Abbasid readings of gendered behaviour in earlier periods, reads like a summary of a larger analysis; however, it offers plenty of interesting tidbits about businesswomen and thoughtful points about the literary recasting of gender.

In general, the articles on northern Europe treat themes familiar from other essay collections. In the volume's best essay, Bonnie Effros uses a case study in ethno-archaeology — brooches associated with the burial of female skeletons — to discuss migration and ethnic mixing in the early Middle Ages, but also to critique the gender assumptions of traditional archaeologists and historians. This lucid article should be assigned to all graduate students as a model for making specialized topics meaningful to a wide, multidisciplinary readership. Janet Nelson examines Frankish evidence and concludes that royal women introduced courtliness long before the age of chivalry. Gisela Muschiol's piece on liturgical practice looks at church rituals and sacred space to locate religious experience by vocation — lay and clerical — and gender. Although the topic is not new, the material about liturgy is probably unfamiliar to most readers, as is Muschiol's intriguing notion that liturgy itself modified gender roles.

Articles by Yitzak Hen, Ian Wood, and Mayke de Jong remind us again of how women typically got the wrong end of men's pens. Hen rehearses a theme first suggested by Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple: things got worse for women when the Carolingians took over. Merovingian women apparently enjoyed more opportunities for cultural and religious patronage. Wood, meanwhile, shows how Frankish women helped craft a political dynasty. Wood balances official genealogies of the Pippinids, which ignored women, with hagiography, which tracked the "alliances, estates, and memories" of abbesses and matriarchs in the family. De Jong revisits the issue of bride shows in the story of Judith, embattled wife of Louis the Pious, showing how writers from different factions of the Carolingian court invoked the story of Queen Esther's beauty pageant to argue for Judith's guilt or innocence in an adultery charge.

Lynda Coon contributes an entertaining and persuasive explication of Hraban Maur's work on Leviticus. As Coon points out, Carolingianists do not usually think about Frankish men in terms of body, gender, and pregnancy. Yet Hraban's Leviticus was an extended analogy of semen, blood, and logos, from which he created a homoerotic theology of mystical impregnation and birth, along with a redefinition of clerical masculinity. Coon's article does exactly what an essay about male gender should do: rather than queering yet another aspect of medieval life in the cloister, she limns a particular sexuality and masculinity to make general points about both a unique thinker as well as a religious habitus.

The last essay by Dawn Hadley takes us back to death and burial. Hadley argues that the English used the location of bodies and cemeteries, as well as funerary monuments, to make a whole range of statements about the power and property of the living. Only at moments of crisis, when great leaders and their warriors were crucial to the preservation of communities, did burial displays speak of warfare and masculinity.

Hadley's article, last in the book, suggests a conclusion for the whole volume. Most of the articles in this book on gender are about either women or masculinity. The authors analyse men's readings of women's experiences and of men's self-definitions. Despite some very game attempts to disengage from traditional misunderstandings of gender, this book still uses gender as a lens for a history rooted in bodily, heterosexually determined categories. Clearly, our own modern academic culture remains deeply implicated in these same categories. Smith writes that it is not enough

for historians to point out sexual asymmetry. It is not enough, either, to remind readers about "hegemonic masculinity in the ruling elite" of past societies. We are left with the old conclusion that boys will be boys and, as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne wrote gnomically in another collection of articles, that "women are always there".

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CALDER, Alison, and Robert WARDHAUGH (eds.) — *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005. Pp. 310.

Social historians often read fiction to enhance their understanding of particular places and eras, and a book with the words "History" and "Literature" in the title promises to assist this endeavour. Unfortunately, this volume offers the historian little, although it may interest literary theorists. Four of the essays are concerned with analysing novels written since 1990 and thus are "contemporary" rather than "historical". Almost all the contributors have been trained in literary studies rather than history, and their footnotes contain few references to the work of historians or to historical documents. Finally, most of the contributors are postmodernists who distain such notions as fact, chronology, and coherent narrative. Thus much of the book is irrelevant to the work of historians, and the remainder is actively hostile towards it.

The editors quickly establish that the notion of "history" or even "time" is largely an arbitrary concept, if not entirely devoid of meaning. They asked each contributor to address the question "When is the prairie?" in order to produce "a recontextualization that both contests traditional models of prairie history that privilege the explorer or settler moment, and also seeks to deconstruct narratives of patriarchal, white authority" (p. 16). The statement suggests that bold, new ideas are sure to follow, but such challenges to traditional scholarship have now become so commonplace as to constitute a new orthodoxy. One advantage of postmodern thinking is the freedom it confers to utter astonishing statements without reference to such inconvenient conventions as "evidence" or "logic". Thus we read, "we must re-evaluate the concept of 'progress', as this way of moving into the future has turned out to be profitable only for big business" (p. 18), or "[artifacts in prairie geology] ... insistently recall the brutal wiping out of First Nations people" (p. 58). The response of traditional humanists and modernist historians to postmodern assaults has been to fall on their backs and offer as much resistance as overturned turtles, fearing, perhaps, that any complaint they might register will brand them as racist, sexist, capitalist, or otherwise "privileged".

Nonetheless, consider the three essays of most relevance to the social historian, two of which analyse memoirs rather than fiction. S. Leigh Matthews argues that memoirs authored by women, notably Kathleen Strange's *With the West in Her Eyes* (1937) and Mary Hiemstra's *Gully Farm* (1955), demonstrate how the challenges of the rural prairies forced women to deviate from the idealized behaviour prescribed for them by society and "internalized" by the women themselves. The observation is