

REVIEW ESSAY

"HISTORY THAT STANDS STILL": WOMEN'S WORK IN THE EUROPEAN PAST

JUDITH M. BENNETT

Working Women in Renaissance Germany. By Merry E. Wiesner. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986.

Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities. By Martha C. Howell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Women and Work in Preindustrial England. Edited by Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin. London: Croom Helm, 1985.

Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe. Edited by Barbara A. Hanawalt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Daughters of the Reconquest: Women in Castilian Town Society, 1100-1300. By Heath Dillard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

The Domestic Life of a Medieval City: Women, Children, and the Family in Fourteenth-Century Ghent. By David Nicholas. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc. By Leah Lydia Otis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

The tempting specter of a "golden age" has haunted the study of preindustrial women since the earliest decades of this century.¹ Writing at a time when middle-class women were slowly moving into many sectors of public life, the first medievalists to study

Feminist Studies 14, no. 2 (Summer 1988). © 1988 by Feminist Studies, Inc.

women eagerly supported the notion of a medieval "bon vieux temps."² Asserting through their own academic careers the public rights of women, these scholars were pleased to report that medieval women had also been active and competent members of their communities. They acknowledged the many disabilities of medieval women—exclusion from public office, limited rights of inheritance, second-rank status in guilds—but they emphasized women's public contributions to medieval civilization. Their essays describe women's vital work in agriculture and crafts, women's success as both local traders and long-distance merchants, women's power as wives and widows. As Eileen Power phrased it, "medieval society was neither one of superiority nor of inferiority, but one of rough and ready equality."³

For contemporary historians, this image of a medieval (or preindustrial) golden age exercises a strong attraction. Some medievalists have continued, in the tradition of Power, to extol the opportunities and contributions of medieval women.⁴ But historians of modern Europe have clung, perhaps even more than medievalists, to an ideal of a prior age of relative sexual equality. For modern historians, an idyllic image of women in preceding eras has provided a convenient starting point, a vague better time against which to contrast their own findings and conclusions.⁵ In this respect, the ideal of a medieval golden age for women simply reflects the historical tendency to romanticize the past; whether the vantage point is modern, early modern, or late medieval, the past looks better.

Notions of a preindustrial golden age also possess strong political implications. Feminists like Alice Clark and Ivy Pinchbeck—or more recently, Louise Tilly and Joan Scott—have favorably compared women's place in the preindustrial family-based economy to women's place in the modern capitalist and industrial economy.⁶ Their conclusions imply that the worst aspects of sexual inequality—at least in economic terms—are comparatively modern and therefore neither profound nor enduring. They offer a feminist vision of a world we have lost but can regain. Yet images of a past golden age can also be used to advance conservative agendas, as exemplified most recently in the writings of Ivan Illich. Contrasting the supposed separate-but-equal "rule of gender" in the Middle Ages to the together-but-unequal "rule of sex" characteristic of modern life, Illich has argued for a return to a world where

women were women and men were men.⁷

Despite its varied historical and political uses, the notion of sexual equality (or even near equality) in the medieval or preindustrial past is not sustained by current research. The studies reviewed here cover many regions and many centuries, but the picture they collectively paint is one of European women excluded, since at least the twelfth century, from full participation in their communities.⁸ Long before the advents of capitalism and industrialism, women faced profound and enduring disadvantages in their relations with men. And the disadvantages they faced in their precapitalist, preindustrial patriarchal worlds were, in many respects, remarkably similar to the disadvantages encountered by women in modern patriarchies.

These disadvantages can be traced most clearly in the history of work, especially the history of women's work in the cities and towns that became so important to European life after the twelfth century.⁹ Because urban governments produced voluminous records (law codes, ordinances, court records, council reports), historians can reconstruct the lives of urban women with exceptional detail for very early periods. And because it was in these urban centers that capitalism began to evolve in the late medieval and early modern centuries, towns and cities seem especially important to the history of European women; it is in the records of these communities that historians might best be able to trace how the critical transition to modern patterns of economic organization affected the lives of women.

But it is not easy to compare straightforwardly the working experiences of urban women between, say, 1200 and 1900. Aside from the regional, racial, and class differences that limit broad generalizations about any single period, generalizations across periods are inhibited by historical changes in the circumstances and meaning of work. In medieval towns, most women worked in households that constituted the basic economic unit for both production and sales. This "family economy" created a working environment very different from that of the modern "wage economy."¹⁰ A fifteen-year-old daughter of a medieval weaver might have spent her day spinning wool into thread, setting up her father's loom, selling cloth to customers, and completing a variety of small household and business chores; her counterpart in the nineteenth century earned a wage at a textile factory. Both worked

in cloth production, but the meaning of work—location, tasks, remuneration—differed dramatically.

In her pioneering study, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (first published in 1919), Alice Clark argued that differences such as these fundamentally altered the status of women as workers. To Clark, the spread of capitalistic enterprises in seventeenth-century England profoundly hurt women who had once participated fully in family economies. Some were forced into privileged idleness, others had to rely on inadequate wages, and others struggled to survive in low-status occupations and trades. Focusing on the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, two major recent studies by Merry E. Wiesner and Martha C. Howell have built upon and modified Clark's theory that the capitalist development of Europe curtailed significantly the working opportunities of women.

In the south German cities examined by Wiesner in *Working Women in Renaissance Germany*, working options for women between 1500 and 1700 eroded due to a conjuncture of economic and religious factors. As occupations in these cities became more specialized and required more training, women lost ground because they lacked the requisite skills and education. Working women also encountered more explicit opposition from men, especially those men disadvantaged by economic change. Guilds facing economic contraction acted to restrict women's work, and journeymen facing lifelong employment in the workshops of elite masters refused to work alongside the daughters and wives of these masters. And, as the Reformation inspired new moral concerns, city councils not only closed public baths and brothels that had employed some women but also passed legislation to ensure that "masterless" women were forced under the authority of some male, whether father, husband, or employer. Women never marshaled effective, collective opposition to these losses because they identified more strongly with their families than with other women.

In the northern cities of Leiden and Cologne, women's working options also declined during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but in *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* Howell explains the decline in very different terms from Wiesner. To Howell, the crucial variable in the working history of women was the household; when economic life was centered around the household, women enjoyed many opportunities for high status

work, but when economic activity left the household, women's work suffered. Two changes undermined the productive importance of urban households in Leiden and Cologne. First, as work was reorganized in ways that removed it from the household, it became increasingly incompatible with women's domestic responsibilities. Second, as work became associated with politics (through, for example, the linkage of craft membership with enfranchisement), women's work was necessarily restricted because of the importance of maintaining male control over politics.

Both Wiesner and Howell agree with Clark's emphasis on economic change as a major factor in the declining work status of women, but they modify Clark's monocausal argument in important ways. Wiesner not only asserts the additional importance of moral and religious factors in shaping the work of women but also adds a new perspective to the discussion through her fine descriptions of the symbolic importance of women's work. Guilds restricted women's work because such restrictions exemplified the independence of guilds from city councils (which occasionally defended the working rights of women); journeymen refused to work with women because to do so would have symbolized the denigration of their work already accomplished by external economic changes; and working women in general symbolized the potential danger of "unnatural" women who failed to marry. Wiesner does not fully explore the importance of these symbols—Were they new developments? Did they reflect change or cause change?—but she has raised an important and provocative issue.

In her forceful argument that the declining status of women's work in Leiden and Cologne was not precipitated by capitalism *per se*, Howell adds a new level of economic analysis to the discussion begun by Clark. To Howell, capitalism certainly could cause work to be reorganized in ways that hurt women, but similar changes could occur in other economic settings (particularly in what Howell calls an economy of "small commodity production"). And she proves her point well by showing how women's work suffered more severe restriction in noncapitalist Leiden than in Cologne where capitalism took hold early and strong. Clearly, the discussion of how the changing economy of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries affected women's work will no longer be dominated by the terms set in Clark's pioneering study.

But the discussion is not over. Wiesner presents detailed infor-

mation about women's work in health care, service, trade, and craft, but her treatment is more anecdotal than theoretical. Howell's theoretical vision is very strong, but she does not always prove her theories with hard archival evidence. More importantly, both authors share with Clark a tendency to exalt the working experiences of women in the centuries that preceded the changes they describe. Clark, Wiesner, and Howell might disagree over causes and timing, but all concur that something terrible happened to the working opportunities of women at the end of the Middle Ages. Things were better in the High Middle Ages; things worsened in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Is this accurate? Chris Middleton has recently argued that it is not. In his persuasive "Women's Labour and the Transition to Preindustrial Capitalism," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial England* edited by Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin, Middleton asserts that the changes of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries were gradual developments of medieval trends, neither dramatic nor new.¹¹ Although he recognizes, for example, that the growing occupational specialization characteristic of early modern economies hurt women, he maintains that the sex-specific terms of this specialization—with men taking the more specialized and more skilled jobs—were set far before 1500.

As Middleton's work reminds us, we cannot rely on studies centered on the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries to tell us about the conditions of women's work in earlier times. And the best new studies on medieval women show that women's disadvantaged status as workers was a pervasive feature of urban life long before 1500. Two studies of fourteenth-century English towns—Maryanne Kowaleski on Exeter, in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe* edited by Barbara A. Hanawalt, and Diane Hutton on Shrewsbury, in *Women and Work in Preindustrial England*—have detailed, by careful comparison of women's work and men's work, women's disadvantaged position in urban economies. Tracing women's work in five main sectors (retail, industry, service, brewing, and illegal trades), Kowaleski characterizes women's work as low-skilled, low-status, intermittent, and typified by the simultaneous juggling of several occupations. She concludes that women were forced into undesirable jobs or illegal trades because they lacked other opportunities for employment. Hutton analyzes how women were restricted to traditional areas of

female work (carding wool, spinning thread, sewing clothes, stitching furs), and to the lowest levels of market business (especially the food trades). She concludes that, given women's lack of work options, it is "no wonder" that so many women were fined by medieval town councils for misbehaving as "common scolds" (p. 98).

Heath Dillard's study of women in Castilian towns suggests that the working opportunities of medieval women in southern Europe were as limited as those of women in northern towns like Exeter and Shrewsbury. In *Women of the Reconquest: Women in Castilian Town Society, 1100 to 1300* Dillard concludes that the work of Castilian women "was often an offshoot of some domestic capability, or it was auxiliary and subsidiary to the occupation of the men they married" (p. 162). Even though the frontier conditions of reconquest settlement offered unusual opportunities for women in Castilian towns, Dillard shows that here too women worked in ancillary, low-status occupations associated with traditional female skills. Her work is complimented by the recently published essays of Christiane Klapisch-Zuber on women in Renaissance Italy.¹² Klapisch-Zuber paints a chilling picture of silent, effaced women living as pawns in a world dominated by men and their lineages. In Florence, even the wet-nursing business was controlled by men who "bought" and "sold" milk.

Perhaps the most chilling indictment of medieval women's work comes from a comparison of two essays in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*—Klapisch-Zuber's "Women Servants in Florence during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries" and Susan Mosher Stuard's "To Town to Serve: Urban Domestic Slavery in Medieval Ragusa." Both conclude that distinctions between servants and slaves were minimal and often obscured. In other words, domestic service—probably the most important occupation of unmarried women in medieval Europe—was often akin to domestic slavery.

To be sure, some medievalists continue to extol the "remarkable" opportunities of women before 1500. David Nicholas in *The Domestic Life of a Medieval City: Women, Children, and the Family in Fourteenth-Century Ghent* presents an idyllic and enthusiastic image of women's lives in fourteenth-century Ghent. But his study, like Steven Ozment's recent work, reveals how lightly historians trained in traditional specialties should tread when they enter the

field of social history.¹³ Nicholas has little understanding of either the methods of social history or its historiography. He cheerfully claims, for example, that women were "frequently found in the business world," but his own data suggest not only that few women traded independently of their fathers or husbands but also that most women controlled little wealth and worked in "traditional female occupations" (see pages 207, 84, and table 7). Nicholas's study is valuable for the archival information that it recites at great length, but his conclusions cannot be trusted.

Also problematic are recent positive assessments of medieval women's work by Kay E. Lacey (for London during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) in *Women and Work in Preindustrial England* and Kathryn L. Reyerson (for early-fourteenth-century Montpellier) in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*. Although Lacey eagerly lists the many women she has found employed in many occupations in London, her evidence is largely anecdotal, and she never compares the working opportunities of women to those of comparable men. It is good to know, for example, that Alice Drax worked as a bookbinder in early fifteenth-century London, but it would be much better to know how she entered that trade, whether she was paid equally with men, and what proportions of women and men worked as bookbinders. Reyerson's evidence suggests more that women controlled considerable property—thanks to their dowries—than that they actively participated in crafts and trades.

Indeed, even the optimistic narratives of Nicholas, Lacey, and Reyerson cannot obscure the fundamental disabilities of working women as revealed in the records of medieval towns. In Ghent, London, and Montpellier, as in many other medieval cities, married women encountered severe restrictions on their economic activities; they often, for example, could not transact certain types of business without the express permission of their husbands. In these three cities, as elsewhere, single women, often unable to be apprenticed in skilled trades, usually found work in domestic service or in other low-skilled, low-status employments. And the guilds of Ghent, London, and Montpellier were typical of most other medieval guilds in their exclusion of women from positions of power and authority.¹⁴

Moreover, as Leah Lydia Otis suggests in *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc*, structural

changes in the work of medieval women were not necessarily accompanied by fundamental changes in the experience of work. Using sources from southern France, Otis constructs a detailed chronology of official responses to prostitution. As prostitution became more common with the growth of towns after the twelfth century, it was tolerated, but marginalized; after the late thirteenth century, town councils began to institutionalize prostitution, first creating "red light" districts and later (beginning in the late fourteenth century) establishing town brothels; after 1550, moral scruples led to the closing of town brothels.¹⁵ Otis reconstructs this chronology convincingly, but she also suggests that governmental policies toward prostitutes—whether repression, toleration, or institutionalization—might have changed the circumstances of prostitution without altering prostitutes' fundamental lack of control over their work. Institutionalization, for example, offered prostitutes legality of action, but it also assured that their lives would be closely supervised and regulated by men. The working circumstances of prostitutes changed dramatically between 1200 and 1600, but they always worked in a low-status trade controlled in basic ways by others.

Current research on the working lives of medieval women suggests, then, that many of basic disadvantages faced by modern working women existed in medieval towns. Comparatively few women worked for wages in medieval Europe (since most women worked within household economies), but women who did work for wages were usually paid much less than men for comparable work. Moreover, the proportion withheld from female wages—usually one-third to one-half—is almost spookily close to modern U.S. wage differentials.¹⁶ Women also were clustered, then as now, in low-skilled jobs that paid less from the start. They carded and spun wool for male weavers, they made sausage from the offal supplied by male butchers, and they nursed leprosy patients avoided by male physicians. Denied easy access to most education and training, women took whatever work was available. Service—of any lowly type—was also as much a female forte as it seems to be today. Women ran bathhouses, provided sexual services, nursed the ill and old, and most of all, worked as domestic servants in both town and country. And many women worked, as do some women today, primarily as ancillary workers in terms of both motivation and occupation. Most women saw their work in

household terms (they worked to help parents, husbands, and children), and most women worked in occupations that supported the more skilled work of men (as with female spinners who supplied male weavers). In short, women who worked in medieval towns encountered some basic problems still characteristic of today's female work force; they clustered in low-status "female" jobs that were low skilled and low paid. Their work identity, not surprisingly, was weak.¹⁷

One of the basic objectives of history is to trace change. Historians, especially social historians, recognize that some aspects of human existence exhibit more continuity than change, but historians are generally more comfortable with change than with continuity. Change can be discussed, its causes and effects analyzed; continuity lends itself more to description than to explanation. Feminists are also, I think, more comfortable with change than with continuity. Change in the past suggests the possibility of change in the future; continuity suggests the possibility of insurmountable obstacles. The tracing of change in the past, even change for the worse, provides us with clear causes and villains; the presence of continuity presents us with the discomfiting possibility that the roots of women's subordination are embedded deeply in ourselves and the men around us.

Given the predilection of both historians and feminists for change, women's history has been largely a history of change, of advances and losses for women. But the history of women's work suggests that women were as clustered in low-skilled, low-status, low-paying occupations in 1200 as in 1900. A female wage earner in the thirteenth century lived in a very different world from her counterpart in the nineteenth century, but they both likely found jobs only in female occupations and received wages much lower than those of male workers. To be sure, certain aspects of women's work varied not only across place and time but also according to social rank. These are the sorts of changes traced earlier by Clark, Pinchbeck, Tilly and Scott, and more recently by Wiesner and Howell; but these changes seem almost incidental in light of the pervasive continuity of the main characteristics of women's work. Consider this quotation from *Working Women in Renaissance Germany*: "'women's work' came increasingly to be defined as that which required little training or initial capital, could be done in spare moments and was done by men only as a side occupation,

carried low status, and was informally organized and badly paid." This description by Wiesner of seventeenth-century German cities (p. 192) could just as easily describe fourteenth-century Exeter or nineteenth-century Paris.

These fundamental continuities suggest that some of the standard explanations for women's subordination as workers—especially the dual villains of capitalism and industrialism—are incorrect. What other explanations are possible? One option would be to push the "golden age" into the countryside, to argue that, although women's subordination as workers was already present in medieval towns, commercialization and urbanization had set the terms of that subordination. If this were the case, we might expect to find economic equality in the countryside outside medieval towns. Such equality cannot be found. The working lives of countrywomen in the Middle Ages have been studied much less thoroughly than the lives of townswomen, but what is known suggests that peasant women, like urban women, were disadvantaged workers. They lacked equal access to economic resources, they worked in jobs of lower status and lower pay, and they accommodated their working lives to the demands of men and family.¹⁸ Certainly, the experiences of medieval women suggest that neither commercialization nor urbanization caused the low working status of women.

Another possibility suggested in many analyses of preindustrial women's work lies in the domestic responsibilities of women. Wiesner argues that the primary concern of German townswomen with the welfare of family and household assured that they accepted low-status jobs without protest. Howell argues that the reorganization of work processes in Leiden and Cologne excluded women who could no longer combine domestic work with productive work. These arguments explain well the specific historical experiences of some women, but the logical links between women's work in social reproduction and their work in production or exchange are too tenuous to suit their application to the larger historical issue of women's subordination. Women's focus on family—demonstrable for many historical settings—could be as much a reaction to poor working conditions as a cause of poor work identity. Women (and others) who receive little status and low remuneration for their work are likely to search elsewhere for status and satisfaction. And domestic duties have also been neither

as unchanging nor as unchangeable as assumed by the theoretical link between reproductive work and other work. Wives in medieval towns could purchase prepared foods and finished clothing with perhaps as much ease as modern wives, and their houses probably required less maintenance and care. More importantly, childbearing and childcare need not rigidly dictate women's options as workers; instead of accommodating work to childcare, some women can and do accommodate childcare to work.¹⁹ Aside from pregnancy and lactation, the assignment of women to domestic work is itself a social decision that requires critical explanation.

Given the endurance of women's low status as workers—in pre-industrial as well as industrial settings, in rural as well as urban environments, in southern as well as northern Europe—the basic explanation must be a feature common to the experiences of all such women, patriarchy. Subordinated privately to the men who headed their households, women worked to benefit the household, a cooperative venture controlled by males. Subordinated publicly to the men who controlled political and economic structures, women worked under circumstances determined by others. The intersection of patriarchy in the private and public lives of women assured that advance in one sector would bring loss in another. Marriage brought a woman the private security of a husband's physical, economic, and social power, but it severely restricted her economic options—as both a worker and a holder of property. Life as a spinster or a widow brought more economic independence but also the private vulnerability of living outside the protection of a man. In deciding between family and work, women faced few good choices.²⁰

For historians, these continuities in women's work do not mean that there is no history to be written. The particular constraints and boundaries that framed women's work have varied over time in important ways that need to be reconstructed and analyzed. But that history must be written with clear and hardheaded vision; it is a history not of decline from a lost "golden age," but a history, at least for Europe since the twelfth century, of new designs embroidered on a cloth of oppression and deprivation. For feminists, these continuities caution against easy explanations and easy agendas. We need aggressive enforcement of affirmative action laws and legislative imposition of comparable worth, but measures

such as these will not alone provide economic equality. To achieve that end, we must seek changes more profound and more revolutionary.

NOTES

The first part of the title of this review essay has been taken from an English translation of "L'Histoire Immobile," Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's inaugural address at the College de France in 1973. See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "History That Stands Still," *The Mind and Method of the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1-27. I would like to thank Nancy Adamson, Trude Bennett, Jacquelyn Hall, Cynthia Herrup, Maryanne Kowaleski, Susan Levine, and Naomi Quinn for their thoughtful and careful critiques of an early draft of this essay.

1. The term "preindustrial" is problematic not only in its subordination of preceding eras to the modern, industrial world but also in its implication of a teleological relationship between the preindustrial and industrial eras. It does, however, serve as an umbrella concept for the diverse periods discussed in this essay; medieval (c. 500 to 1500), Renaissance (c. 1300 to 1600), and early modern (c. 1500 to 1800).
2. Olwen Hufton discussed the search for a "bon vieux temps" in her review, "Women in History: Early Modern Europe," *Past and Present* 101 (November 1983): 125-41. For early studies of medieval women see the essays by Eileen Power collected posthumously in *Medieval Women*, ed. M.M. Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Annie Abram, "Women Traders in Medieval London," *Economic Journal* 26 (June 1916): 276-85; Marian Dale, "The London Silkwomen of the Fifteenth Century," *Economic History Review* 4, no. 3 (1933): 324-35; E. Dixon, "Craftswomen in the *Livres des Métiers*," *Economic Journal* 5, no. 18 (1895): 209-28.
3. Power, 34. Although reprinted in a slightly revised form in the posthumous *Medieval Women*, this statement was originally made by Power in her essay, "The Position of Women," in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, ed. C.G. Crump and E.F. Jacob (1926; reprinted, New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), 410.
4. The persistence of this tradition in medieval studies might reflect the authoritative influence of Power's work, but it also might spring from an unarticulated desire to defend the Middle Ages against stereotyped, negative representations. Because most people identify the Middle Ages as a time of ignorance and bigotry, positive assessments of medieval women help to shatter that uninformed, derogatory image. For examples of positive assessments of medieval women, see Rodney H. Hilton, "Women in the Village," in *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 95-110; Angela Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), esp. 181-87; and Barbara Hanawalt's "Peasant Women's Contribution to the Home Economy in Late Medieval England," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, 3-19.
5. A recent and particularly clear example of the use of a prior "golden age" by a modern historian can be found in Jean H. Quataert, "The Shaping of Women's Work in Manufacturing: Guilds, Households, and the State in Central Europe, 1648-1870," *American Historical Review* 90 (December 1985): 1132-33.
6. Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919; reprint, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial*

Revolution, 1750-1850 (1930; reprint, London: Virago, 1981); Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1978).

7. In his deeply nostalgic study, Illich depicted the Middle Ages as a world of separate but complementary genders; women and men thought differently, acted differently, and took on different responsibilities, but neither sex dominated the other. To Illich, industrialization has brought an unfair mingling of the sexes and a new unisex standard (based on male norms) to which women are unreasonably expected to conform. See Ivan Illich, *Gender* (New York: Pantheon, 1982). See feminist critiques of Illich in *Feminist Issues* 3 (Spring 1983): 3-43.

8. The historiography of women in Europe before the twelfth century includes a strong tradition suggesting that women in these earlier centuries enjoyed unusual opportunities that later disappeared. For examples, see David Herlihy, "Land, Family, and Women in Continental Europe," in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 13-45; JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne F. Wemple, "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Medieval Women," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 90-118; and Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981). But historians must beware of using such observations to push the golden age back into the early Middle Ages (c. 500 to 1100). First, because of the limitations of the archives, comparatively little is known about women in early medieval Europe, and the few available studies focus on the atypical, elite women for whom at least some information has survived (especially nuns and queens). Second, an important distinction must be maintained between broader opportunities (which may well have existed for elite women in the early medieval centuries) and actual (or even near) equality of opportunity (a very unlikely circumstance given the militarism of early medieval life).

9. Because of the limited nature of early medieval archives, very little information is available on women's work—whether in town or country—before the twelfth century. Two recent studies of early medieval women are Wemple's *Women in Frankish Society* and Christine Fell's *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

10. The term "family economy" is from Tilly and Scott. I have also adopted their definition of work as excluding reproductive and domestic work (p. 3).

11. Quataert makes a similar point in "The Shaping of Women's Work," but she applies it to a different chronology (early modern versus modern) from that used by Middleton (medieval versus early modern).

12. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). For further discussion of Klapisch-Zuber's work, see Martha C. Howell, "Marriage, Property, and Patriarchy: Recent Contributions to a Literature," *Feminist Studies* 13 (Spring 1987): 207-10.

13. Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). As suggested by its nostalgic title, Ozment's study is unabashedly antifeminist.

14. In Ghent, women could not make contracts without the consent of their guardians (see Nicholas, esp. 70-83). In London, a wife could not conclude a contract unless she had been declared a *femme-sole* for business purposes (see Lacey's essay in *Women and Work in Preindustrial England*, esp. 40-45). In Montpellier, Roman law limitations on women's contractual abilities could be renounced, but wives generally obtained their husbands' consent to real property transactions (see Reyerson's essay in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, 118). For the limited access of girls to skilled training, the clearest evidence comes from Montpellier where only 30 of 208 apprentice contracts involved girls, most of them in crafts classified as women's work (see Reyerson's essay,

120-21). See also Nicholas, 125-26, for Ghent; see Lacey, 46-48, for London. For male control of guilds, see Nicholas, 98-99, for Ghent; see Lacey, 45-47, for London; and see Reyerson, 119-20, for Montpellier. In some medieval cities (most notably Paris), some all-female guilds existed, but even in Paris all the most powerful guilds were controlled by men.

15. Wiesner's work on German cities confirms the applicability of Otis's chronology to the north as well as the south; municipal brothels were opened in Frankfurt and other German towns in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries; they were closed, under moral and medical pressure, in the middle decades of the sixteenth century (see pp. 97-106).

16. Much more comparative work needs to be done on wages. For the best analyses currently available, see James E. Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, vol. 1, 1259-1400 (Oxford, 1866), esp. 252-302; and Kathleen Casey, "The Cheshire Cat: Reconstructing the Experience of Medieval Women," in *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays*, ed. Berenice A. Carroll (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), esp. 230-31. See also the conclusions of G. d'Avenal about fourteenth-century wage differentials as cited in Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1983), 198-99, 243.

17. For an exhaustive discussion of women's identity as workers, see Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women in the Crafts in Sixteenth-Century Lyon," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, 167-97 (originally published in *Feminist Studies* 8 [Spring 1982]: 47-80).

18. See my *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock before the Plague* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). For a rosier view of the lot of peasant women, see Hanawalt's "Peasant Women's Contribution to the Home Economy in Late Medieval England." Some authors have sought to explain the preponderance of women in medieval towns by arguing that towns, far from destroying rural sexual equality, especially attracted female immigrants because of the wider range of economic opportunities found in urban locales. For an example, see Dillard, 167.

19. See, for example, Ernestine Friedl, *Women and Men: An Anthropologist's View* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975), esp. 60-61.

20. This double-bind can be seen not only in the choices an individual woman faced over her life cycle but also in the tendency for women to face more expanded opportunities in times of social or economic crisis. The opportunities afforded English and American women during the two world wars of the twentieth century are well known. For examples of preindustrial women undertaking expanded work in times of crisis, see my article, "The Village Ale-Wife: Women and Brewing in Fourteenth-Century England," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, 20-36; and Mary Prior, "Women and the Urban Economy: Oxford, 1500-1800," in her *Women in English Society, 1500-1800* (London: Methuen, 1985), 93-117.