

## Introduction

This volume is the second of two to emerge from a conference on "Images of Women and the Feminine in Maharashtra" that was held at Arizona State University in April, 1991. This conference, the Fourth International Conference on Maharashtra: Culture and Society, was intended, like the other conferences in that series, to provide an opportunity for some prominent scholars of Maharashtra to search out new materials, to reinterpret old ones, and to develop fresh perspectives on Maharashtrian culture and society. The conference was interdisciplinary, with special emphasis on the fields of religion, literature, anthropology, sociology, and history. The present volume brings together the works of some historians and social scientists who attended the conference, as well as of three (Conlon, Dandekar, and Kadam) who were unable to attend.

Compared to its sister volume,<sup>1</sup> which deals largely with mythological and literary images and religious ideas, the present volume approaches more closely the realities of women's lives. Using historical documents from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and photographs, interviews, and conversations from the twentieth, the articles collected here construct images of the conditions of women's lives in Maharashtra over the past 300 years. In addition, the authors search repeatedly, throughout the volume, for the ideas, understandings, and judgments that have shaped those conditions, for the conscious and unconscious images that have made women's lives what they have been.

Thus, here too, as in the other volume, the emphasis is not only or even primarily on the lot of women, but rather on one important set of conditions that have influenced women's lot. The articles in this volume examine ways that men (and some women whose thoughts have been recorded) have viewed

femininity and the power, status, and potential of women. Even more than actual women, it is *ideas* about women that are the focal point here. Understanding ideas of this kind is a necessary first step toward understanding (and eventually, perhaps, affecting) the actualities of women's lives.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, *Women in Eighteenth-Century Maharashtra*, consists of three articles based on documentary sources from the Peśvā period. This was the time when much of western Maharashtra was ruled from Pune by the Peśvās, originally and officially the prime ministers of the Marāṭhā kings. Two of the articles (Waters and Wagle), based principally on police and court records, deal mostly with what Waters terms the "predicaments" of women in their roles as wife, daughter-in-law, and widow. The third article (Kadam), using a variety of primary documents, sketches a picture of the lives of one of the few types of *unmarried* women in traditional Maharashtra: "dancing girls." The use of the English term "girls" for these women indicates, perhaps, the anomaly of their position in traditional Indian householder society.

If marriage was the condition of full womanhood in traditional India, it is also the case that many women were married as girls. This and other issues about women's lives formed the subject of intense debate in the nineteenth century, especially in Bengal and Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, the debate became especially heated after the fall of the Peśvās in 1818 and the extension of British rule to Maharashtra. Part II of this book, entitled *The Nineteenth-Century Debate: Conservatism and Reform*, provides a good sample of the subjects and terms of the debate in Maharashtra, and thus complements the growing number of excellent studies on images of women in Bengal and other parts of North India in the colonial period.<sup>2</sup>

The articles in Part II are arranged more or less chronologically. The first is Frank Conlon's exposition of the views about women held by Vishnubawa Brahmachari (1825–1871), a polemicist whose lectures and writings sought to defend "Vedic" religion against Christianity and the West. Conlon points out that the mixture of conservatism and apparent tolerance of reform that characterizes Vishnubawa's views reflected the conventional thought of his time; it is also typical of much modern Hindu religious discourse on the roles, status, and human potential of women.

The next two articles in Part II (Masselos and Kosambi) are based on legal cases. For the nineteenth century, as for the eighteenth, such cases provide one of the best sources for social history, but now newspaper accounts and editorials join police and court records as kinds of documentary evidence available to historians. The articles by Masselos and Kosambi use these kinds of evidence not only to discover some of the more sensational cases of marital violence that made it into the courts and the newspapers of nineteenth-century Maharashtra, but also to explore the underlying implica-

tions of the terms in which the debate about these cases was framed.

While Masselos's study deals with a variety of types of marital violence, Kosambi's focuses on the question of the "age of consent"—the age at which a girl may be asked to consent not only to marriage, but to the consummation of marriage. Masselos points out that, in the cases he examines, the British courts played a two-edged role: at the same time as they punished acts of violence, they generally reinforced the dominant norms with respect to women's place in the family. Kosambi finds that even the "reformers" in the age of consent controversy did not, for the most part, question the primacy of a woman's roles as wife and mother; rather, they advocated extending the period of childhood, the time before a girl was required to take on these roles.

Two nineteenth-century Maharashtrian women who presented more radical critiques of their culture's assumptions about the roles and value of women were Tarabai Shinde and the woman known as Pandita Ramabai. The last two papers in Part II of this volume (Lele and Bhagwat) provide quite different analyses of the same two works written by these women: *Strī-Dharma Nīti* (roughly, "Rules for Women"), by Pandita Ramabai; and *Strī-Puruṣ Tulanā* ("A Comparison of Men and Women"), by Tarabai Shinde. Both Lele and Bhagwat seek to understand the two texts in terms of the colonial context in which they were written: Lele analyses them in terms of the meaning of "modernity" in a colonial setting, and Bhagwat uses "orientalism" as the principal lens through which to interpret the texts' significance. Bhagwat also provides extensive summaries of Ramabai's and Tarabai's texts, while Lele presents a thorough analysis of the political and intellectual context in which they were written.

The concluding section of the book, Part III, presents some contemporary images of women in Maharashtra. The four papers in this section take different forms: a scholarly article (Kemp), a photo essay (Dandekar), an oral life history (Berntsen), and a bibliographical essay (Zelliot). Kemp's article, based on her field work in a village near Pune, presents a dramatic image of women that is used not only among the women and some men of the village, but also in contemporary Marathi literature. Women are bullocks, Kemp explains, because they are hard-working, strong, patient, beautiful, dangerous, and mute. Dandekar's photographs, taken in a village where she has done field work for a number of years, illustrate some of these qualities of women, and present striking images of a variety of life situations of women, including some of the kinds of "predicaments" that we know about in their extreme forms from the court cases of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Berntsen's summary of the oral autobiography of Sharda provides a gripping account both of a marriage that can only be described as a predicament and of the woman who somehow emerged from that marriage a whole person.

In contrast to these three papers, which are all concerned with the lives

of “ordinary” women in villages (Kemp and Dandekar) or a small town (Berntsen), Zelliott’s essay provides a deluge of information about the accomplishments of an enormous number of prominent, primarily urban, Maharashtrian women in the twentieth century. Those readers for whom the rest of this volume presents a fundamentally depressing picture of the conditions of Maharashtrian women’s lives will find in Zelliott’s essay a fresh and zestful basis for hope. Hers, the final essay in the volume, is bibliographic in form, and thus provides a wealth of hints for future reading.

## NOTES

1. *Images of Women in Maharashtrian Literature and Religion*, edited by Anne Feldhaus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

2. These include most notably articles in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) and *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, edited by Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (Delhi: Oxford, 1991), as well as Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Mrinalini Sinha’s “Gender and Imperialism: Colonial Policy and the Ideology of Moral Imperialism in Late Nineteenth-century Bengal” (in *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*. New Delhi: Sage, 1988). For women in nineteenth-century Maharashtra, see Rosalind O’Hanlon’s article “Issues of Widowhood: Gender and Resistance in Colonial Western India,” in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, edited by Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, and her translation of and introduction to Tarabai Shinde’s *Strī-Puruṣ Tulanā* in *A Comparison between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1994).

## Chapter One

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# Female Mysticism

## A Historical Perspective

### Female Mysticism and the Gregorian Reform

In twelfth- and thirteenth-century Western Europe a charismatic movement known as mysticism<sup>1</sup> emerged within the heart of the Catholic Church. This movement initiated new religious practices as well as new literary and theological traditions. Although historians disagree as to the meaning of mysticism, they do agree that mysticism attracted individuals of both sexes, particularly (if not exclusively) those individuals who had no other source of power.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that women representing all social classes flocked to the mystical movement in great numbers and that they developed a distinctly female mystical tradition. In short, as historians also agree, the movement was both inspired and dominated by women.<sup>3</sup>

Mystics claimed a direct union with God, a union not earthly but reserved for the redeemed after resurrection. Female mysticism was characterized by the importance it gave to the female body in the relationship between the individual and the divine, for it was thought that the female body was a privileged means of ac-

cess to God. Historians agree that, when compared to male saints, the body of female saints was more profoundly and more often traversed by psychosomatic and parapsychic manifestations.<sup>4</sup> Women's piety in this movement was most often characterized by corporeal imitation of Christ in his suffering humanity. This could translate into a mixture of self-inflicted suffering, accompanied by a general state of illness interpreted as God's gift. The underlying theological justification for such a practice was that through incarnation, whereby Christ/God descended on earth to save humans, mankind could mystically ascend to God through imitation of his suffering humanity.<sup>5</sup> The mystics' *Imitatio Christi*-piety could also be accompanied by parapsychic phenomena understood as supernatural graces sent by God, such as visions, voices, ecstasies, stigmata, localized bleeding, exudations, levitation, or inedia. The birth of this kind of piety, called affective or sensory mysticism by modern scholars, must be placed within the context of the religious revival experienced by Christianity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A new religious sensibility appeared at that time, which advocated the idea of a more accessible God and thus encouraged a more emotional, more affective, and more internalized form of piety. This new sensibility gave rise to what has been called the feminization of the language of male religious officials of the day; a feminization of religious language which, in all likelihood, had its origin in the masculine desire to view authority no longer simply in terms of discipline but also in terms of love. The feminization of piety was also signaled by an increase in the number of devotions being made to female saints and by an admiration for characteristics that people of the era conceived of as feminine (tears, weakness, compassion, and moral irrationality).

At the same time as sensory mysticism, there flourished what has been called negative or apophatic mysticism. The doctrinal roots of this mysticism go back to early Christianity. It was transmitted throughout the Middle Ages by the translations of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>6</sup> These translations from Greek into Latin were done by John Scot Erigenus (852), Jean Sarrazin (c. 1165), and Robert Grossetête (1240–1243).<sup>7</sup> Negative mysticism advocated a mental practice that led to a quieting of the logos and reached beyond memory, language, symbols, images, and representations to permit the meeting with the divine. Modern theologians

and scholars who have sought to discern two trends in mysticism have favored negative mysticism as the only true means of access to God, looking with suspicion at sensory mysticism, which they have attributed more to women.<sup>8</sup> Many female mystics, however, seem to have participated in both trends and even to have contributed greatly to the articulation of negative mystical theology, while many men who wrote mystical doctrine also experienced somatization.<sup>9</sup>

There is no question that the male mystic in a Christian, gendered ideology finds himself in a position that might be called "feminine," that is, one of submission vis-à-vis the masculine principle of divinity. The entire symbolism of the soul as God's bride, which we find in the Song of Songs, as well as in the nuptial symbolism developed by the Beguines during the thirteenth century and taken up again by the male mystics during the fourteenth century, bear witness to this assumption. Further, the male mystics—and this is true for Eckhart, Suso, Ruysbroeck, John of the Cross, Bernard of Clairvaux, Surin, Tauler, Rolle, and even Francis of Assisi—adopted a poetical or metaphorical position of loving submission to God the Father, and many of them also demonstrated a spiritual and literary debt to their predecessors, the Beguines. All of this, however, did not prevent them from occupying a position of social and hierarchical power in relation to women, for whom they served as spiritual directors, preachers, or confessors. Female mystics, to the contrary, held a social position of powerlessness, regardless of their social class. Furthermore, male mystics were more often legitimized through canonization even though female mystics were more numerous. Finally, male mystics may have been submissive to God, but they nevertheless wrote for the edification of women from a position of knowledge and authority that was accepted by both the world and the church. Female mystics, instead, wrote for male clerics because the latter were in a position to be guarantors of their legitimacy. God may have confided his most intimate secrets to "simple" women, but it was mostly in educated, religious men, established as their witnesses, that these women confided. Without recognition by at least one member of the clergy, the female mystic could easily find herself rejected as a heretic and a criminal and become a derelict. In addition, although they sometimes counseled their own spiritual directors, female mystics first

had to establish credibility by believing, and causing others to believe, that their authority came directly from God.

Caroline Walker Bynum shows that female and male mystics responded to otherworldly demands in a manner underlining their respective social and political powers (or lack thereof). She analyzes specifically male and female mystics' identification with the feminine. She states that for female mystics, who identified with women's poverty, deprivation, and loss, mysticism was a means whereby they could impose their will, deploy their particular genius in the world, exercise influence and power, and manipulate the symbolic to their own advantage. It was a means of recognition and empowerment. To the contrary, for male mystics who identified with women's poverty, mysticism might have been a way to exonerate themselves from the privileges of power and recognition. In a roundabout way this exoneration also allowed them to reaffirm their rights to temporal privileges. Bynum's comparison of female and male mystics precludes their assimilation and therefore precludes the erasure of the sociopolitical specificity of female mysticism.<sup>10</sup> Although I agree with Bynum on this point, I have some reservations concerning what appears to be an assimilation of medieval female piety with female nature.

The church could not accept, without reticence or a sense of paradox, this female-dominated movement in its midst. From the very beginning, the Christian mystics who talked of a union with God that transcended both the intellect and dualism of thought were in conflict with the institution of the church, which feared that their mode of apprehending the divine might bypass the hierarchy, the sacraments, and even the mediation of Christ. By the early fourteenth century, both the themes and forms of female piety were becoming suspect in the eyes of the church. Marguerite Porète, who had been accused of the Heresy of the Free Spirit, was burned in Paris in 1310, and the Beguines were suppressed by the Council of Vienna (1311–12).<sup>11</sup> The watchfulness of the clergy, the tendency to force female mystics to enter convents, and the threat of the Inquisition or of the stake remained constant throughout the history of female mysticism. The suspicion surrounding female prophets reflected that which surrounded all popular or secular religious movements and mysticism in general, whether in the fourteenth or the seventeenth century. This is also the case for Ma-



dame Guyon and the new religious consciousness that arose in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century.

Confronted with a growing number of individuals and groups who claimed direct, divine authorization to spread the word of God and reform society, the church kept a close, mistrustful watch on their teaching and behavior; at the same time, it either condemned or encouraged what it saw, according to how useful these individuals or groups could be to the church.<sup>12</sup> Although the church sometimes recognized certain mystics after carefully pruning their teaching of all heterodoxy, it refused to hold them up as examples to the people, preferring to keep them hidden away in cloisters. The most prudent of the female mystics succeeded in gaining acceptance for their exceptional status and, at the same time, in reassuring the church hierarchy of their obedience to the priests and need for the sacraments. This paradoxical situation made the mystics vulnerable to accusations of heterodoxy and anticlericalism, accusations that were all the more easy to hurl at them because women lacked a theological education and therefore could not avoid the pitfall of ratiocination. These fears and the need for caution often resulted in quasi-pathological scrupulousness in the female mystics and in religious women at large. The most vulnerable were those who refused the cloister, thus escaping ecclesiastical supervision, such as the Beguines in the Low Countries, Northern France, and Germany, the Beatas in Spain, and the tertiary orders in Italy. Such was also the case of Madame Guyon, who refused any affiliation, whether with religious or lay orders. But cloistered mystics were not safe from the accusation of heresy either, and even Teresa of Avila was harassed by the Inquisition.

### Female Mysticism and the Catholic Reformation

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, encouraged by the enthusiasm sparked by the Catholic Reformation, mysticism was revitalized and women were again prominent in the movement. Again, their enthusiasm was closely watched and restricted to convents. Within this confine, religious women, under what Brémond has coined the "mystic invasion," nevertheless made great strides in the early years of the seventeenth century, prying open the Gal-

lican Church and forcing it, by midcentury, to admit a greater number of women into its inner life of prayer. To begin with, a small group of Spanish Carmelite nuns appeared in Paris in 1601, bringing with them the spiritual heritage of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. In the next forty years, under the influence and organization of Madame Acarie, fifty-five Carmelite convents were opened in France. These became the center for female spirituality and had much influence on the spiritual life of the upper class.

Other orders were subsequently reformed or founded whose spirituality was influenced by that of the Carmelites and the Oratorians and which also had much influence on contemporary high society. Henri Brémond was right to say that in seventeenth-century France the world and the (female) cloisters intertwined. By midcentury there were more nuns than monks and friars in France; this was an unprecedented occurrence.

The Flemish and German mysticism of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in addition to Spanish mysticism as represented by Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross in the sixteenth century, were claimed as precursors by what has been named the French, or Abstract School, of Mysticism. Marie de l'Incarnation and Madame Guyon's spiritual doctrines are inspired by this school. The two mystics are also heirs of the medieval female mystics' bodily drama, as expressed in their visions, premonitions, ecstasies, prophecies, and illnesses interpreted as God's signs, as well as in their harsh bodily discipline and self-denial, which they each practiced in a specific period of their respective lives.

Female piety, as identified with both trends of mysticism, enjoyed widespread recognition from the thirteenth to the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> For five centuries the church and female mystics had an unwritten contract, agreed to by the rest of society, according to which the church would confirm the mystic's election, would look upon her bodily signs as sent by God, and would accept her charismatic vocation if she, in return, would submit to the church's authority and hierarchy, uphold its dogma, and profess to identify with the church's feminine ideal of humility, passivity, ignorance, silence, and total obedience. This was a powerful double bind. It was a contract productive of paradoxes for which female mystics alone paid a heavy price, notwithstanding the real empowerment they secured for themselves through mysticism. By the

end of the century, that option for charismatic prestige and authority within the church, however problematic, was seriously challenged. Various epistemological and social changes coalesced to profoundly transform the options available to religious women, the limits imposed on them by the Tridentine Reformation, as well as the perception of society regarding mysticism. These changes are recorded in Marie de l'Incarnation's and Madame Guyon's writings and were the source of transformations of their mystical discourse.

As Elizabeth Rapley reminds us, it would be a mistake to interpret the wave of women's religious enthusiasm in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as officially part of the Tridentine Reformation.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, when the Council of Trent in the midsixteenth century drew up its plans for reforming the Catholic world, it did not envisage any role for women. In the sixteenth century, the church was not better prepared than in the twelfth century to let women fully participate in religious life, and the Tridentine Reformation reacted as rigidly to this overflow of female charisma and vocations as it had to late medieval reforms. The female religious enthusiasm, sparked by the Catholic Reformation, renewed the irksome problem the church had had to face with the initial female response to mysticism in the Late Middle Ages: what was the church to do with this enthusiasm and these charismatic inclinations, as well as with women's desire to have a place in Catholic work outside the convent? Parallels can be drawn between the Catholic reformations of the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Indeed, history might have repeated itself, for the church tried to respond to this new wave of female religious invasion with its traditional marginalization of women. The church maintained that women could not have any other choice but *Aut maritus, aut murus*, either a husband or a convent wall.<sup>15</sup> The Council ordered bishops, under the threat of eternal damnation, to make sure to impose *clausura* on nuns under their jurisdiction. Nuns were strictly forbidden to leave their cloister without permission from their bishop.<sup>16</sup> During the first part of the seventeenth century, the leaders of the Catholic Reformation followed closely the orders of the church, and, despite the resistance to *clausura* on the part of religious women who desired to participate in the re-Christianization of society, the church triumphed in cloistering them. The church's prescription for religious women to return to the strict observance of *clausura*, cou-

pled with the solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, constituted for them a total separation from the world.

### New Options for Religious Women/Repercussions for Female Mystics

The seventeenth century saw the creation of multiple social and charitable institutions that aimed at educating both boys and girls as well as socializing, catechising, and helping the poor. These new social demands would eventually result in the creation of new female religious orders that would include women in the Catholic life of work in the world.

Since not all religious women were satisfied with the prospect of a cloistered and contemplative life but desired, instead, a religious life in a community that would remain open to the world, an organized resistance to *clausura* was felt throughout the seventeenth century. Religious women's desire to ally mystical union with service to others in the world was not new. Prior to this period they had been repeatedly barred from imitating Christ in his apostolic life, leaving them no options other than to imitate his suffering. Their earlier attempts to ally a regulated, religious community life with service to others in the outside world had repeatedly been circumvented by the church, even more so after the Council of Trent with its increased insistence on the total enclosure of women and their isolation from the world. Elizabeth Rapley has authoritatively documented the battle waged in the seventeenth century by several women's congregations to gain the status of religious women within the world. In the early part of the seventeenth century, the *Visitation Filles de Sainte-Marie*, the Ursulines, and both Congregations of the *Filles de Notre-Dame* lost the battle and succumbed to cloistering. Although women in religious orders had not yet won the right to be catechists, they impressed upon the public the need for women teachers for girls. Rapley adds that "the teaching of day pupils, permitted by the Holy See for the first time in 1607, on conditions that preserved *clausura* as much as possible, was a significant advance."<sup>17</sup>

Later in the century, the *Filles Séculières* won a freer life from a begrudging public who needed their services, and the *Filles de*

*Montréal* were the first congregation to not be confined by *clausura*. While compromising with Pope Urban VIII, local bishops, and elite family clients on several points of organizational and socioeconomic controls, these congregations, together with some of the regular orders of women, created a new tradition of female religious life that lasted well into the nineteenth century. From communal homes or semicloistered convents, these congregations, as well as several regular orders of women, taught poor and well-to-do girls alike catechism classes, set up soup kitchens, took care of the sick in hospitals, and, when not cloistered, assisted their parish priests in several pastoral cares. The impetus for this movement came from middle-class women, and as their work expanded, it began to take on the character of professionalism.<sup>18</sup> Rapley argues that “the complex of social services which developed in the seventeenth century, and especially feminine education, was the creation rather than the creator of feminine religious congregations.”<sup>19</sup> The assertion is bold. We need not be as radical as Rapley in crediting women with a great deal of agency in the development of female social services and the opening of the convents. Rather, we can say that religious women took advantage of the era’s debate on the education of girls to encourage a need for their education and appointed themselves schoolmistresses. Similarly, we can say that they seized upon the new socializing institutions to render themselves indispensable through their free services, thus creating a need for them outside the cloister. This perspective offers a more nuanced notion of female agency as operative within a society not run by women.

This battle against *clausura* could not have been won without the schism within the church brought about by the Reformation. The Catholic Church was unwittingly forced to respond to the Protestant Church; it could not simply counter it. In the battle to restore Catholicism, it became necessary to use female catechists in order to stem the stream of women into the reformed religion. The schism of the church and the loss of its hegemony thus provided an opportunity for religious women to forge a place for themselves in the Catholic world outside the convents.

Religious women, such as Marie de l’Incarnation, were quick to seize this creation of social institutions as an opportunity to render themselves indispensable and thus to fashion a life for themselves

and their orders outside of the cloister. This new avenue for religious women contributed, no doubt, to a displacement or at least to another expression of women's religious experience. The Ursulines and Marie de l'Incarnation were invited to participate in the settling of the French colonies in America *because* they were a teaching order with a mixed *clausura*.

Against various church authorities at different periods of her life, Madame Guyon avoided the convent altogether. Indeed, she conceived of her mission as bringing the spiritual life to people at large despite the clergy who were either ignorant of spiritual life or, if they were not, did not see fit to enlighten people on the subject. Madame Guyon's position illustrates the claims of historians of religion who state that the end of the seventeenth century witnessed the beginning of a divorce between religious sentiments and the church. I contrast Marie de l'Incarnation, who seized opportunities offered her to forge a new self-definition within the church, with Madame Guyon, who forged a self against, and eventually outside the church. In both cases, however, I examine how the self is defined against the demands of motherhood.

### A World to Conquer

The enthusiasm of the Catholic Reformation translated into the impulse to conquer or reconquer lost souls for the Kingdom of God. It is in this missionary spirit that the colony of New France was established. However, the New World was to prove a new avenue of expansion for religious women in general and for Marie de l'Incarnation in particular. The settling of the colony of New France in the New World played an important role in demonstrating the incongruency of *clausura* with an expanding world in need of women's work and services. Marie de l'Incarnation's writings reflect the difficulty that *clausura* created for her work as a missionary, even though the *clausura* of the Ursulines, as compared to that of contemplative orders, was somewhat open to the world and in Quebec was even more flexible than in France.

The male missionaries in New France urgently requested the participation of religious women in order to care for the sick and to instruct Indian and French women. This request in itself testified to the fact that women were needed not only to teach catechism but

also to render social services for which men felt unfit. This, indeed, was a new perception of women's participation in the social realm. As we have seen, the *Filles de Montréal* were the first French congregation not to be confined by *clausura*.

In the case of Marie de l'Incarnation, I consider how her role as a missionary, dependent on subsidy from France, demanded that she produce discourses other than a mystical one, thus positioning her both as an ethnographer of the New World and as a historiographer of New France. Furthermore, the New World, intrinsically linked to the formation of a new anthropology, was also an element that diversified her mystical discourse. I analyze how at times her representation of Indian women differs sharply from that of male missionaries. In her depiction of Indian women she created a new, positive version of femininity, even if that version conflicted with her official mission to convert and "civilize" her subjects. Her version of femininity also contradicted the European belief in a universal, essential nature of femininity and the Western ideal of female mysticism as self-sacrificing and hungry for suffering. I speculate on the conditions that made it possible for her to conjure such an image of femininity, and I conclude with the proposition that perhaps what permitted a vision of femininity that escaped all codes known to her was what in mysticism, precisely, escapes language and allows for deep resistance and the emergence of the unknown.

The frontier Madame Guyon set her heart on was Geneva, and her first impulse was the conversion of protestants. Soon, however, she was profoundly disappointed with the whole project of forced conversion, and, eventually, even conversion to a particular confession became irrelevant for her. Geneva was to prove to be a metaphor; Guyon's desire for a fresher spiritual horizon led her to participate in a religious movement that was emerging out of various confessional barriers and was inaugurating a new spiritual and philosophical era.

### A Different Epistemology/A Different Body

Parallel to these emerging options for religious women (working orders and missions in the New World), which had an impact on the mystical discourse of Marie de l'Incarnation, an epistemological

shift occurred, as we have seen above, that would profoundly transform not only the way mysticism was perceived but also the way mystics perceived themselves. The shift of society against mysticism throughout the seventeenth century can be perceived in increasing antimystic feelings, which succeeded in devaluing and emptying mysticism of the meaning it had held since the thirteenth century. This shift played a major role in Madame Guyon's tribulations. Even though the outcome of the century-long struggle between antimystics and proponents of mysticism affected both male and female mystics, it was all the more devastating for the latter, since they lost their only means of religious authority within the church.

Many reasons can be invoked for this turn of events, but beyond matters of dogma and political intrigues, the antimystic climate and the ensuing decline of mysticism reverberated with a specifically modern conception and perception of the world. Michel de Certeau has clearly shown how, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a revolutionary mode of scientific inquiry emphasizing reason defined itself against mysticism at the same time that it reified it, reducing it to visible bodily phenomena.<sup>20</sup> It is not by chance that the new female orders such as the Ursulines (which emerged in the seventeenth century) were overt in their denigration of the traditional female mystics' bodily practices. Of course, female working orders needed able-bodied women in their ranks; but what made it possible for them to openly disdain and oppose debilitating bodily practices was precisely the emerging perception of the body issuing from scientific discourse and medical discoveries that were increasingly prevalent in society. Indeed, this epistemological shift moved away from a conception of the body as existing in a premodern analogical relationship with the world (or as a vessel penetrated with magical, occult, and divine presences) to a rational, organic, and medicalized perception of the body. I do not suggest that this new scientific perception of the body has a relation of cause and effect with that of the Ursulines', but rather that its manifestations in discourses issuing from different disciplines substantiate the notion of "episteme," or epistemological rupture as defined by Foucault.

The notion of epistemological discontinuity at work in Foucault (and also in de Certeau) operates also in the work of those histo-



rians of science who argue that one can witness an epistemological change, a discontinuity, in the way texts produced by different disciplines in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries understand the world, the body, or nature.<sup>21</sup> Drawing from the history of science, historians of the body show how a different understanding of the world, coupled with medical discoveries, changed the understanding and the meaning of the body during this period.

Of course, one should not simplistically deduce from the notion of "episteme" or epistemological rupture that an absolute cultural break occurred in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. If we argue that a certain coherence or a different epistemology is present in texts of different disciplines at a given moment of history, this does not mean to suggest that the whole of culture changed overnight. Epistemological shifts penetrate the social fabric slowly and unevenly. This lag of time may account for a mix of premodern and modern elements in seventeenth-century society and in the works of the two mystics I am considering, but the mix does not invalidate the thesis of a rupture. That is why we can witness the survival in scientific texts, and in society at large, of certain practices (stigmata, holy vision, etc.) long after their meaning has changed. Accordingly, although bodily manifestations in female mystics provoked unprecedented repulsion among church authorities at the end of the seventeenth century, this change did not immediately affect cultural practices in general nor did bodily manifestations disappear. On the contrary, these manifestations lasted far into the nineteenth century (and occasionally even occur nowadays); by the end of the seventeenth century, however, they were marginalized by the prevailing culture of modern Western society.

It is within the assumption of an epistemological rupture that is coherently reverberated in different discourses at one given moment that I situate Marie de l'Incarnation's shift in midcourse, from a traditional understanding and practice of bodily phenomena to an explicit condemnation of these practices. It is also within this context that we must view the increasing, prevalent, antimystic feelings of this period, including the Ursulines', Bossuet's, and other theologians' suspicions and aversions for mystics' bodily phenomena or harsh body discipline. This epistemological rupture was dramatically illustrated by Bossuet's acceptance by the public when in his writings he ridiculed Guyon's bodily manifestations.

Finally, it is within this context that I place Guyon's response to the attacks against her.<sup>22</sup> While Marie de l'Incarnation actively sought those situations that resulted in altering her mystical discourse, Guyon reacted to changes that were forced on her. I examine how her mystical writings responded to theologians' attacks upon her during her trial in the Quietist Affair. Forced to interrogate her own practices, she began to relativize and belittle bodily manifestations, without, however, giving them up. These attacks also resulted partly in her elaborating, in collaboration with Fénelon, a tradition for mysticism so as to prove that her doctrine was orthodox.

### A New Era

Although a Western European phenomenon, the decline of mysticism occurred in its most spectacular fashion in France as it crystallized into the Quietist Affair at the end of the seventeenth century. Historians of religion agree that France was the center of mysticism throughout this period, as Germany and the Netherlands had been in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and as Spain had been in the sixteenth. But France was also the home of Descartes and, by the end of the seventeenth century, was greatly influenced by Cartesian philosophy, a philosophy that was yet another echo of the epistemological rupture and that played a major role in devaluing mystical experience, practices, and doctrine. The epoch was preoccupied with reason and science, and these new conceptual models infiltrated the church itself.

The Quietist Affair, in which Madame Guyon played a major role, marks the decline of Western mysticism and its diffusion into new genres. As a religious quarrel, it placed Bishop Bossuet (who championed the total authority of the church hierarchy in matters of faith) against Archbishop Fénelon and Madame Guyon (who defended mysticism and a more personal faith). Bossuet exemplifies de Certeau's assertions according to which at the end of this period there was an increasing divorce between theology and mystical doctrines, as well as between organized church and those who can be called mystics. Bossuet's triumph in the Affair thus signals a changing epistemology among theologians, and it had a disastrous

consequence for the status of mysticism in Western European Christianity.

In opposition to the increasing tyranny of scientific reification of religious life, on the one hand, and the rigidity of established churches, on the other, a religious consciousness emerged, and it grew out of the established religious institutions at the end of the seventeenth century. Tolerance—that is, the respect for individual conscience and lived religious experience allowed to all rather than to just a chosen few—together with a demand for freedom of thought, became the rallying cry of this movement. The new consciousness was shared by individuals whose spiritual hunger could no longer be satisfied by the discourse of knowledge nor by the increasingly rigid orthodoxies of the established churches, whether Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, or Calvinist. This new religious consciousness profoundly marked European philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>23</sup>

Opposed to Bossuet's authoritarianism in matters of faith, Madame Guyon was one of the prominent figures of this movement and, through the recognition a younger generation gave her, she exited the history of Western female mysticism and contributed to the philosophical making of a new era.

As for the female mystics, with the dissolution of a philosophical and religious context favorable to them, they were increasingly marginalized, losing their most potent means of making their voices heard and of having their desires taken seriously. It is true that as this option closed down for women, others opened up, such as those we have seen with open congregations (working orders with mixed *clausura* for women of the middle class, such as Marie de l'Incarnation). For upper-class women, new opportunities for education made possible a flourish of activity by female writers, scholars, and literary salons, all of which left their marks on the century. Various cultural historians have brought to light the female sphere of influence in seventeenth-century France.<sup>24</sup>

But the female mystic did not altogether disappear; paradoxically, she resurfaced on the stage of positivism. In its fight for power with the authority of the church, positivistic science amalgamated the medieval female saint with its new creation, the hysteric. In the passage between the medieval and modern eras, the names and the interpretations of female mystics' bodily phenom-

ena became a stake between blocks of power such as the church, the state, and the medical establishment, and women often became caught in a crossfire of interpretations and names. This is already the case with the convulsionary mystics of Saint-Médard (1727–1733), whom the king, upon the advice of medical doctors, decided to prosecute as frauds and sexual perverts, thus eluding altogether the church's dialectic of orthodoxy and heresy.<sup>25</sup> It is even more so the case with one of the last two collective demonic possessions that occurred in the soon-to-be French, backward county of Morzine, in Savoie, between 1873–1875.<sup>26</sup> The collective possession of Morzine resembles others that had convulsed whole populations in the seventeenth century, such as those of Loudun, Louviers, or Auxonne. The difference, however, was that Morzine was a repetition. Occurring in the second part of the nineteenth century, it appeared as if borrowed from another age, the emergence of an anachronism. In Morzine, the old system of belief in possession by the devil was held by the villagers and the possessed women, while the state, its troops, the medical establishment, and the city bishop held out for the new system and treated the possessed women as mad or sick.<sup>27</sup>

The coexistence of competing interpretations of female somatization, along with the lingering occurrence of this somatization in marginal sectors of society, explains the peculiar situation of Morzine. It also explains how Catherine Newman, in the second part of the twentieth century, could display inedia and stigmata, characteristics of medieval saints. Whereas medieval people considered the witch to be an ally of the devil and the possessed woman to be unwittingly acted upon by the devil (and in this way akin to the saints who were possessed by God), Charcot and positivistic medical science in general in the nineteenth century thought that the women of the Salpêtrière were sick and/or frauds. Some of the patients about whom Charcot wrote, namely the famous Madeleine de la Salpêtrière, displayed bodily afflictions similar to those manifested by the saints of times past. She, indeed, even attributed meaning to her symptoms according to beliefs expounded by those saints and mystics of former times.<sup>28</sup> What had changed, however, were the values and the beliefs of society at large, and particularly those of the men in authority who controlled these women. Where the psychosomatic manifestations of some of Charcot's patients might have been a proof of God's will for the priest of the late Mid-

dle Ages and the Renaissance, they were, for Charcot and his colleagues, a female pathology having to do with female nature.<sup>29</sup>

Above and beyond the epistemological revolution of the seventeenth century and the different discourses that have been produced about (or have produced) female psychosomatization in Western civilization, the contract between the suffering woman and the man having the power to name her is ubiquitous. With the advent of modern science, women were still expected to suffer and even had to reproduce suffering when demanded (before by the priest, now by the psychiatrist), so as to prove that they were worthy of attention and recognition. Charcot learned to reproduce at will the suffering in his female patients, to the delight of his male audience. Georges Duby and Philippe Ariès, in their analysis of the rapport between the female hysterics of the Salpêtrière and their doctors, state that the therapeutic aim of the doctors (which is not to be denied) and the necessity to refine clinical observation do not suffice to explain the complacency of the psychiatrists in soliciting, stirring up, and even creating in their female hysterical patients the manifestations of an eroticism suffused with suffering; nor do these scientific aims alone justify the psychiatrists' reveling in the hysterics' mimed pleasure.<sup>30</sup> Duby and Ariès further claim that the theater of hysteria of the nineteenth century might reveal a subtle economy of masculine desire, and that above all it displays the symptom of a masculine "dis-ease." What was staged at the Salpêtrière was a complex rapport between exhibitionism and voyeurism, in which both parties were foiled in their attempt to express their desires.<sup>31</sup> Duby and Ariès's analysis of this drama can also throw light on the rapport between the female mystic and her amanuensis (almost always a male cleric), who watched, wrote down, elicited confidences, and expected from the female saint the spectacles of her amorous commerce with God. Scientific discourse and justifications may have replaced the theological explanations of the premodern period, but male and female desire seems to have been caught up in the same theatrical arena, by a similar contract: a demand for love and recognition on the part of the woman; on the part of man, a quest for a knowledge (God in premodern times, replaced by the enigma of woman in later times) supposedly channeled, albeit unconsciously, through women. In the medieval as well as in the modern scenarios, man imposes an orthodoxy, reli-

gious or scientific, on the response he is soliciting from the woman. She mirrors back his desire when she perceives that she is recognized by him. Otherwise, when she perceives she is not recognized, she contradicts his orthodoxy (she most commonly contradicts him because, given the structure of patriarchy, he is always unlikely to recognize her as a subject). It is interesting to note that female psychosomatization adapted to the expectations of dominant conceptions. While the medieval mystic produced stigmata, the nineteenth-century hysteric produced symptoms indicating a repressed sexuality.

The main difference between these competing interpretations of female psychosomatization is, of course, that the late medieval period is the only one that socially and religiously rewarded women for the manifestation of their suffering. We should beware, however, not to fall prey to a nostalgia for an epoch that produced female saints, a nostalgia that reverberates in Bynum's work. Nor should we lament, as she does in *Fragmentation and Redemption*, that when compared to medieval women, who had rich symbols, modern women have lost all of theirs. If, historically, the medieval saints could gain social prestige from such phenomena, even though the hysterics of subsequent centuries could not, let us not forget that they were rewarded for outdoing what was expected of them, that is, suffering. Therefore the symbols they produced justified the system's production of female suffering.

This glimpse at a *longue durée* vision of the history of female psychosomatization allows us to conclude that it was misogyny that gave female medieval saints their agency and a particular shape to their self-empowerment; a vision impossible to have if we restrict the meaning of female mysticism solely to the context of medieval theology, as Bynum suggests we do.<sup>32</sup> We shall see, precisely, how the transformation of the female mystic into the hysteric was already being staged during the Quietist Affair.