

1 "Hearts and Minds," dir. Peter Davis, Rainbow Pictures, 1974.

2 Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries" in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd deMause (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974), pp. 101-181.

3 London, British Library, MS Additional 21978, Aristotle, *Problemata*, 3 translations by [Bartholomew of Messina, attrib. to] Peter of Abano, George of Trebizond, and Theodore Gaza, fol. 110ra. See Georges Lacombe, Aleksander Birkenmajer and Lorenzo Minio-Paluello, *Aristoteles Latinus: Codices*, Union Académique internationale, Corpus philosophorum Medii Aevi, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Academia, 1955), cod. # 1674.

4 A note at fol. [1]ra of the same manuscript mentions a brother who is a physician ("Die 16 februarii 1478 secundum cursum terre firme obiit florentie frater meus magister Franciscus fisticus."); Hieronimo Suriano, a physician, edited medical books in Venice around 1500. See also Raffaele Adimari, *Sito riminese*, *Historiae Urbium et Regionum Italiae Rariiores* 94, n.s. 10 (Brescia: Gio. Battista & Ant. Bozzoli, 1616; repr. Bologna: Aldo Forni, 1974), bk. 2, pp. 99-100; Stanley Chojnacki, "In Search of the Venetian Patriciate: Families and Factions in the Fourteenth Century" in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. J. R. Hale (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 47-90.

5 Adimari, p. 100, mentions an epitaph recorded before 1576: "Andriolae Curr. Uxori Dulcis Jacobus Surianus Ariminensis Physicus sibi liberis postque suis posuit," which may well refer to the author of the colophon and his family.

6 The *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years MDCCLIV-MDCCLX: Additional MSS. 19,720-24,026* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1875), #21978, reads *strata* for *contrata*. Like the *Catalogue* and Paul Oskar Kristeller, comp. *Iter Italicum Accedunt Alia Itinera: A Finding List of Uncatalogued or Incompletely Catalogued Humanistic Manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and Other Libraries*, vol. 4 (London: Warburg Institute; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), p. 108, my translation ignores the minims (iii), which might be rendered "tria."

MATERNAL REFLECTIONS ON GENDER AND MEDIEVALISM

As Karma Lochrie, Gillian Overing, and Clare Lees argued in Issue 22 of MFN, feminists practicing medieval studies must continually reach out of our discipline as well as out of the academy to engage a feminist dialogue that cultivates "a recreation of a sense of community that has characterized feminist endeavor and debate."¹ While the collaborative authors focused most of their attention on expanding feminist dialogue within the academy, I would like to offer the following reflections about the possible effects of our work outside the academy.

I produced my completed dissertation and my second child almost simultaneously. My dissertation reads psychoanalytic and gender theory against Anglo-Saxon poetic and visual texts to show that the maternal provides an initial point from which to depart the hierarchical and limiting opposition of masculine/feminine. I read maternal performances within the Anglo-Saxon poetic and visual texts to reveal not only their own disruptive possibilities but the possibility of reading other genders, as yet undescribed and untheorized, into these and other texts.

As I wrote about maternal performances in Anglo-Saxon art and poetry, I engaged in my own maternal performance of concluding a pregnancy and nurturing my older daughter, and I often found the connections and collisions between my academic work and my parenting work to be jarring and disconcerting. My husband and I are raising our family in a country plagued

with violence, crime, racism, illiteracy, drugs, poverty, and hunger—and that country is generally acknowledged to be the most prosperous and most powerful in the world. As I grappled with gender theory, developed a theory of maternal performance, examined manuscript facsimiles, and counted variants and usages of Anglo-Saxon words describing sexuality and motherhood, I frequently asked myself, as a feminist and as a mother, how the production of a scholarly work on thousand-year-old texts could possibly improve the society in which I live and in which my children will grow up.

Yet I believe that the somewhat arcane project of my dissertation and other projects like it are part of an academic feminist practice that, taken in its entirety, can eventually help to make contemporary American culture a better environment than it is now, for my own and others' children.

In this belief I rely upon the process of feminist theory working its way gradually from academic to mainstream circulation. What was yesterday's academic radicalism (from a mainstream point of view) is today's accepted issue; the most obvious example is daycare for children of working parents. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminists who called for high-quality, affordable, and accessible daycare for young children were called communists. In 1997, the daycare debate still rages, but the focus has definitively changed. The existence and acceptability of the issue of daycare are no longer debated in mainstream politics, though solutions to the problems within the issue are by no means agreed upon.

I hope that some of the ideas Lochrie, Overing, and Lees raise—what they term “recent feminist inquiry into representation, ideology, and social construction”²—as well as my own and others' re-examination of the maternal as a viable, empowering subject position for women (and men) will likewise move from academic theorizing to actual political practice in the same way that daycare is no longer a topic for the radical fringe but rather for the political center. Most people living in America today do not know or care about performative gender theory, French feminism, *béguines*, or sisterbooks, to name but a few of the interesting subjects under discussion in medieval feminist practice in the past few years. But through our teaching, through “crossover” books that are sold in Barnes and Noble as well as at the book stalls at Kalamazoo, and through accurate representations of medieval culture in popular culture, academic medieval feminist practice will reach the political center as well. It will be both depreciated and changed as well as challenged and enriched in the process. We in the academy must accept those changes with equanimity if our work is to reach a more varied audience.

Our general rather than our academic society limits itself to two genders, masculine and feminine, assigned respectively to the male and female sex. But

such stringent patrol of gender roles has resulted in the loss of infinite opportunity in our country, most obviously in the loss of involved parenting by men, which is still considered a topic more for the comics page and slapstick movies than for real life. As an outgrowth of my own academic work on motherhood, I envision a society where the maternal is enacted by both women and men, where it is respected but not worshipped (and thus neutralized). In that society the term “working mother” has become obsolete because all its members recognize that all mothers work, usually 12- to 14-hour unpaid days. In that society the politics of maternity, complicated as they are by race and class, are not just “women’s issues” but issues acknowledged to affect all facets of society. The maternal, embraced and accepted along with other gender performances that reach beyond traditional paradigms of masculinity and femininity, can become an example of nonhierarchical, nurturant, and empowering performance for women and men.

At a 1995 conference on gender and medieval studies,³ a session was devoted to the interrogation of single (i.e. never-married) women as a separate gender; during the closing roundtable at that same conference, “the chaste” was suggested as another possible gender. Suggestions for other possibilities of gender performance raise a variety of questions: if the maternal can be a gender, can the paternal be as well? How would “the paternal” be different from “the patriarchal”? Is there a performance of androgyny or asexuality? Are different types of homosexual performance actually different gender performances? For that matter, is there not a range of viable performances within that seemingly monolithic construct, heterosexual masculinity?

Acceptance of multiple genders will not solve all of our late twentieth-century problems, but it could set in place a process of analysis that is not bound by predetermined, gendered expectations. Such a process would enable more creative problem solving, respect for varietal gender differences, and a greater range of activities and performances by men and women as we work toward a society free of violence and poverty. I propose that our academic, feminist, medievalist exercise, obscure as it may sometimes seem to even its own practitioners, ultimately operates in a spirit of feminism that is working towards long-term change in our conceptual models that will ultimately benefit our entire culture.

Mary Dockray-Miller
College of Advancing Studies
Boston College
Chestnut Hill MA 02167
E-mail: dockraym@bcaxp1.bc.edu

1 Lochrie, Lees, and Overing, "Feminism Within And Without The Academy," *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* no.22 (Fall, 1996), 31.

2 *Ibid.*, 27.

3 "Studying the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: What Difference Does Gender Make?" held at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, October 27-29, 1995.

MOTHERS AND FATHERS IN THE EARLY FRENCH FARCE

Generally speaking, the farce's mothers and fathers are a breath of fresh, loving air in a dramatic corpus better known for its vindictively self-serving characters. Rather than focusing exclusively on their own needs and desires, as do most of the characters in this play type, farce parents tend to put their children first. They help them out of difficult situations not only because doing so will protect their own financial security, good name, and peace of mind, but also because it is in their child's best interest. In fact, most farce parents worry incessantly about the well-being of their *rejetons*, showering them with love, attention, and approval even when the object of their affection is an undeserving fool. And, fortunately for their offspring, the farce's mothers and fathers are usually resourceful and determined individuals who are more than willing to lend a hand in times of need. However, while parents of both sexes help their progeny and show them affection, mothers and fathers in general relate to their children and defend their interests in vastly different, gender-specific ways. Accordingly, this (necessarily brief) essay will provide a rough sketch of the temperament, *modus operandi*, and inter-familial bonds which farce playwrights normally attributed to each of these parental character types.

Mothers and fathers appear with their children in slightly less than two dozen¹ of the approximately two hundred farces which have come down to us, most of which date from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries. The majority of these plays include only one parent, usually a mother, in their cast of characters: less than a quarter of all parent/child farces involve a father.² Although mothers and fathers appear together only rarely on the early farce stage, when they do so their relationship is usually an amicable and cooperative one—a marked contrast to that of the typical (i.e., childless) farce husband and wife. What is more, in farces which include both parents of a third character, the two are usually married to each other and their child is therefore legitimate: only in *Jenin, fils de rien* does a child appear on stage with a mother and father who are not husband and wife (Jenin's putative father is the local priest).

Although farce playwrights indiscriminately paired their fathers with a child of either sex, their mothers usually appear with a *son* in tow: of the sixteen parent/child farces in which a mother appears, twelve portray a mother and her son³