

MFN 22: GENDER AND MEDIEVALISM



Ann Marie Rasmussen, General Editor for 1996-97, will feature the topic "Gender and Medievalism Inside and Outside the Academy" in the fall issue. This subject grows out of Megan McLaughlin's "musings" in *MFN* 19 on our "complex nostalgia for the Middle Ages." We ask for contributions on this topic, including but not limited to such topics as: gender in popular representations of medieval culture; popular medievalisms in teaching; how we address our students' preconceptions about gender and medieval culture; the success, failure, advantages, disadvantages of using popularizations in teaching; more 'musings' on how we recognize and channel our own nostalgia into scholarly discourse. We hope to receive as well contributions from novelists on what kinds of medieval scholarship they read and how they use what we write.

Please send contributions, questions, or proposals to Ann Marie Rasmussen, Dept. of German, Duke University, Box 90256, Durham, NC 27708-0256 or post to: amras@acpub.duke.edu.

MEDIEVAL STUDIES AND MENTORING



Who Do We Turn To? Perspectives on Women and Mentoring culled from the Round Table sponsored by TEAMS and the Society of Medieval Feminists at the 30th International Congress of Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo 1995

Organized and edited by Bonnie Wheeler, Medieval Studies, Southern Methodist University (bwheeler@mail.smu.edu)

The Committee on Teaching the Middle Ages (TEAMS) and Society of Medieval Feminists co-sponsored a session on Women and Mentoring at the Kalamazoo medieval conference in May 1995. The topic for this panel on professional roles was chosen precisely because it opens up sensitive (and sometimes raw) issues about correlations between gender/age/status and attitudes/behaviors in the academy. Do women faculty, for instance, "mentor" students as well, better, or differently than male colleagues?

Do our women students think they are mentored in the same fashion, to the same degree, and with the same results as their male colleagues? What follows are several frank reflections on the mentoring process from woman faculty at various stages of their professional careers. The forum fomented lively discussion with the audience of faculty and student colleagues about some merits and deficits of our modes of professional induction. Topics of harassment and various other forms of inappropriate domination or adulation seemed to be leading participants to views which drained mentoring relations of all emotion. The conversation concluded on a powerful note with an intervention by Judith Ferster, who reminded us that at their best these intense intellectual relations inspire not only admiration, but also love, and these emotions are part of our educational energies.

I want to raise a voice of dissent, or more accurately stated, cautionary voice of resistance to the very terms that define our session today, namely “women” and “mentorship.” “Women” is a term that has typically served as an unquestioned foundational premise: it is both an authorizing and motivating force for much feminist work. And yet, if we accept Judith Butler’s observation that foundations are always constituted through theoretical moves and power plays that entail exclusions, the feminist foundational category of “women” necessarily becomes a subject of closer critical scrutiny. In speaking as we do of “women,” who exactly are we designating as the bodies that matter? To what extent does the category “women” function in a productive and regulatory manner, marking off in advance those who will and will not qualify as subjects of feminism? What exactly are the ruses of authority that govern these processes of demarcation, and what “others,” then, are produced as a result, “others” who necessarily become defined as such in relation to an uncontested foundational category of “women?” Considered collectively, these questions seem to bring us around full circle: why in the first place should we install the category of “women” as the *sine qua non* of feminism?

Similar questions might be asked of the other key word of our session, “mentoring,” for it too serves as foundation or authorizing activity within the context of the academy. Although academic mentoring can admittedly take on many different forms, the one that concerns me here -- and the one that I take to be foundational to academic practices in general -- is the one in which the actors in question play out their parts in a classically Oedipal drama: mentors are typically father figures and mentees are typically sons eager to do in paternal authority so as to establish their own in its place. Why, though, has this form of mentorship been produced as foundational behavior within the space of the academy? What sorts of power relations are consolidated and concealed in these sorts of mentoring practices? More importantly still, how and why have such practices come to achieve normative status, and what other patterns of professional relations have been excluded as a result?

How are foundational terms established in the first place? Can these terms be recognized as contested and contingent? Recognizing foundations as contested leaves them open to change, leaves them open, that is, to possibilities of discursive resignification. Such resignification can be readily observed, I would argue, in another context altogether, namely in the scene in the Iliad in which Andromache pleads with Hector not to go off to fight in the Trojan War (VI.406-39). As the scene as a whole makes clear, Andromache’s subject position is determined in relation to the authorizing grounds of the *oikos*, the hegemonic social structure of a household that is dominated by a great man. And yet as the scene also makes clear, the words that Andromache speaks to Hector serve to destabilize and resignify this foundational family structure. By saying to Hector as she does, “...you are father to me, and my honoured mother,/you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband” (429-30), Andromache simultaneously invokes and upsets dominant structures of kinship and identity. The gender and familial identity of a Hector who is at once mother, brother, father and husband can no longer be apprehended in any sort of simple or straightforward manner. Likewise, Andromache’s own sexed identity is equally unmoored insofar as it can no longer base itself on or

←measure itself against the fixity and certainty of Hector's position as husband. Although Andromache's words explicitly draw on the terms of dominant familial relations, and hence do not merely dispense altogether with the foundational structure of the *oikos*, they nonetheless repeat these foundational terms with a difference, thereby orchestrating a foundering of contestation of the *oikos* in its status as the authorizing grounds of kinship relations. In the space of Andromache's speech to Hector, in other words, the *oikos* becomes resignified.

Might we not, then, contemplate similar situations of resignification in relation to the paired foundational categories of "women" and "mentoring?" Let us recall a particular kind of instability already at work within the foundational category of mentoring: mentoring typically requires that mentees repeat the work and practices of the mentor, thereby opening up the possibility for situations of subversive repetition, situations, that is, of repetition with a difference. In this regard, the mentee has the ability to produce anew and resignify that which "belongs to" the mentor, at the same time that the mentee's own identity is itself rendered volatile and subject to change in this very process. Amidst this kind of resignification, moreover, gender does not remain a stable or constant source of identity. Indeed, practices of academic mentoring routinely make clear the fact that the phallus belongs to no one, neither "woman" nor "man," for very long, and that it indeed has the potential to be possessed, however provisionally, by anyone, regardless of gender or anatomical attributes.

Thus, the work that remains for feminists, it seems to me, is not to propose a new set of more "woman-friendly" mentoring foundations, but rather to engage in the explicitly political project of investigating foundation production itself. By inquiring into the ways in which foundations get installed and exclusions thereby enacted, we would be asking ourselves why and how certain identities and relational structures have achieved foundational status within the academy, and what the costs, effects, and benefits of rethinking these foundations might be.

Judith Butler. "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'." In Feminists Theorize the Political. Eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Homer. The Iliad. Trans. Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Elizabeth D. Kirk, English, Brown University
Elizabeth_Kirk@Brown.edu

I come to this question from a completely fortunate experience of mentoring, largely from men as a student and later from women as well. How rare this is even now I have only gradually realized, and it was scarce as hen's teeth then; I teach in a department that is now 50-50 but had only one woman when I was hired in 1967. One of the most formative experiences for my idea of mentoring was the experience of being in turn mentored by my students, who have given me the careful and demanding readings of manuscripts that are a gift beyond price, and done many of the other things traditionally considered the older party's responsibility toward the younger.

This issue of women and mentoring raises three questions. First, are women getting access to the mentoring men get? Often, not. There is a lot of truth to the formula that women need what men need, they're just not getting it. The male mentor may not realize that he is not communicating as many dimensions of professional training to his women students, by not being as pro-active in suggesting or creating professional opportunities, not including them in the same events, not informing himself as much about them—not necessarily out of conscious misogyny. He may become paternal and start making decisions for the woman in ways that he would never do with a male student. He may be so anxious to be supportive that he doesn't demand professionalism. Self-consciousness about separating erotic advances from professional bonding, or obliviousness to the boundary between them, may prevent his doing the one without the other. This may lead him to avoid the erotic potential of familiarity by distancing himself professionally. Or he may submerge an intellectual relationship in an erotic one, which he may perceive as spontaneous and voluntary on both sides, even though the notion of consensual relationship becomes increasingly problematic in proportion to the power differential between the parties, and there are few power differentials greater than that between a developing professional and the mentor on whom so much of one's future advancement depends.

Second, do women have gender-specific needs which mentors fail to address? In the "real world" of our historical present, at least, many women continue to have career trajectories which, in a man, have been traditionally associated with lack of serious professional commitment, and which present distinctive difficulties. Even when women are involved in relationships and child-rearing based on more collaborative models than the traditional marriage, and even if they are not dealing with the commuting problems that are increasingly part of the lives of academic couples, women are likely to be juggling lives that are demanding on many different fronts at once. Can the mentor help women prepare for this triple or quadruple jeopardy? Here a mentor who is or has been actively engaged in living out some solutions to these problems and who understands them from experience can be an enormous help. There used to be at least anecdotal evidence that more women than men suffer from writer's block at the dissertation or publication stage. If so, why? And can anything be done to help with writer's block without further infantilizing the sufferer? Do women have a harder time, or experience a different dynamic, in making the transition between relationships of docility to relationships of collaborative autonomy with their dissertation directors, and are there things to do to facilitate this? The need for more women mentors and more consciousness-raising for men is obvious.

But the limitations women encounter in the traditional model of mentoring bring out, or make visible, something fundamentally wrong with it, not just with its application to them. Substituting a certain number of Frau Professor Doctor-Mothers for Herr Professor Doctor-Fathers, and socializing the Herr Doctor-Fathers better, essential as that obviously is, merely treats symptoms. Women's experience of mentoring calls into question, for men as well as for women, the traditional assumption that truly excellent professional formation is necessarily conveyed through a relationship that is by its very nature hierarchical, possessive, asymmetrical, self-perpetuating, and prescriptive, in however civilized a manner. Bad pedagogy, bad collegueship. We need models of mentorship that are more reciprocal and collaborative, more enabling to the emerging

professional autonomy and distinctiveness of the junior partner, equally rigorous intellectually but in a mode marked by sharing rather than giving; its dynamic is not simply a matter of (at best) generosity or (at worst) self-aggrandizement on one side and gratitude (or sycophancy) on the other. A symbiotic professional relationship, by being more exploratory and symmetrical, becomes more enabling for the mentor's development as teacher and scholar as well as the mentee's as an apprentice. The older model is safer and clearer; the other is risky because, as T.S. Eliot said of writing poetry, it makes "every moment...a new and shocking/ Valuation of all we have been" (East Coker II) for both parties. But such mutual mentoring combats the burnout and rigidity which afflict the later stages of a professional career, which is an at least equally important issue in professional formation, at the same time as it addresses the perils and opportunities of the earlier ones. As William Langland says in his picture of the ideal school, we can find there "great love and liking, for each bows low to the other" (B X 310).

Catherine Brown, Romance Languages & Comparative Literature, University of Michigan
mcbrown@umich.edu

A fourth-year assistant professor, learning to mentor while in need of mentoring myself, I can better question than answer. When I've asked people about mentoring, I've been struck — almost embarrassed, to tell the truth — by the emotional density of the responses. When we talk about mentoring, we reveal, perhaps unconsciously, our deepest emotional structuring of and around intellectual work. These relations are highly charged, for we make ourselves as intellectuals in an anti-intellectual national culture. We make ourselves as academics in an institutional culture in which many of us (women, people of color, first-generation academics, gay men and lesbians, etc.) are still interlopers. Many of us probably feel the robe of Mentor as a kind of drag. I know I do.

How am I learning to mentor? First, from my own experience, and from the stories I tell myself about it. One story: my dissertation director taught me what has since become a mantra of my academic life. I repeat it to students now, always telling them that at the time, what I wanted most was to throttle him. Mired in the First Chapter from Hell, I told him, "I can't go on. I'll never have another idea in my life." He looked at me, as if from very far away, and replied, "Catherine, don't personalize it." Now, so much of what makes our work mean anything comes precisely from the personal. But the personal does blind us sometimes, as I remind myself when I feel picked on by people who are confusing me with some old grudge, or when students wrestle with despair after doing poorly on an exam.

Stories like this have structured my approach to mentoring for some time. Now, however, I am learning to mentor less from models than from my own need to be mentored. That need has taught me that just "being" an ethical scholar or administrator is not enough: the background noise of stress and fear is too deafening for such passive modeling to work. But, on the other hand, active intervention — behavior too strongly marked as "mentoring" — can be too much. Active mentoring goes in one ear and out the other unless one is ready for it and needs it. These days, in the classroom and in my office, I (try to) treat the academic life pragmatically (as a profession, not a sacred order)

and, well, spiritually, as service to that thing in us that makes something from nothing, what in Flamenco music is called the *duende*, the daemon of human creativity. I don't want to forget that, as the poet Federico Garcia Lorca said, "The true struggle is with the *duende*." That is, the true struggle of mentoring is not with me, or with a fantasy of me, or with my colleagues, or a fantasy of them, or with the student, or with a fantasy of him/her. The true struggle is with the *duende*, I think, and that struggle is at once utterly impersonal and the most personal thing I can imagine.

Anne Clark Bartlett, English, DePaul University
abartlet@condor.depaul.edu

As a woman pursuing a PhD at a large state university, where medieval studies was not a curricular priority, I had to take a particularly active role in my own mentoring. At first, I found what I saw as a lack of institutional support as a problem, but over time, I began to see it as an opportunity, even as an advantage. It's only a slight exaggeration to say that I designed my own doctoral coursework. This is not to say that I had no mentoring. Far from it. As a student, and now as an assistant professor, I've had absolutely superb mentors and colleagues. My mentors were people whom I was able to choose and pursue, because I respected their judgment, their values, and their knowledge. This, I understand in hindsight, is something of a reversal of the old-school, old-boy tradition, in which the student (*tabula rasa*) is to mentor (Authority On Life and Scholarship) as disciples are to messiahs. This old-style mentoring (which is still the norm at many institutions) can prove particularly disabling for women scholars. For example, I know of many more women than men who were asked -- and felt obligated -- to perform various services for their mentors: to proofread or index books for only a token payment, or just "for the experience." When freelance editors earn a healthy sum for this sort of work, asking mentees to perform it (usually an offer they dare not refuse) is nothing short of exploitation. Women scholars can be particularly vulnerable. Many of us were raised to defer to — or be intimidated by — authority figures; or to be helpful, and to say "yes," even if the request comes at the expense of our own work. Feeling marginalized in a program or in an academic setting only intensifies the pressure to submit.

What do I consider to be the most valuable things I learned from my graduate school mentors? First, the ability to accept criticism of my work. As an example, one of my dissertation committee members regularly gave me what I initially considered totally ridiculous and incomprehensible feedback. He would tell me things like "you're making a mountain out of a molehill," or, after he'd read a chapter of my dissertation: "So where's *your* position in all this?" Of course to me it was crystal clear *to me* what my position was: I agreed with X; disagreed with Y, and Z; modified a theoretical frame from Q, and so on. It took me longer than I care to admit to understand what I now consider one of the most important things this mentor taught me about scholarship: that compiling allegiances does not constitute a position. I had to abandon that rhetorical mode that we all learn in graduate school, that we are only dwarves perched on the shoulders of giants. This mentor urged me to stake out my own territory, to develop my own perspective. That's one of the most precious gifts a mentor can give.

Paradoxically, the second thing I learned was how to resist criticism of my work. Some of my most stimulating and productive times in graduate school involved passionately defending my methods and conclusions. My favorite memories are of afternoons spent at my dissertation director's house, where we debated feminism and devotional literature until we wore each other out, and neither one of us had been able to complete a full sentence for hours.

I always remind the graduate students I know now, whether as mentees, students: Don't take advice at face value; find out the context behind the comment. Get second opinions. Develop communities of peers who will discuss your work honestly with you and help you get some distance from it. Finally, as women scholars — at every career level — we must never underestimate our value as mentors — or mentrices. If we've had difficult experiences, we can teach our younger colleagues how to avoid them. In closing, I return to, and pluralize, the question that's the title of this panel, "Who do we turn to?" — and my answer is ultimately "ourselves."

E. Jane Burns, Women's Studies, UNC, Chapel Hill
ejburns@email.unc.edu

The character Mentor, at least as he appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, was of course a man: the sage advisor who counsels Odysseus's son Telemachos in his father's absence. Although it is true that the Goddess Athena often appears to Telemachos "in the form of Mentor," she never advises the youth directly. It seems rather that this mythological woman can only "mentor" Odysseus's son through the guise of another man.

Until recently, a similarly exclusive, one-to-one model of male mentoring has dominated the academy, attested perhaps most visibly and publicly in book dedications. A brief survey of dedicatory remarks made by male medievalists over the years reveals two common types: 1) "I dedicate this book to my wife," who generally goes unnamed or becomes allegorized beneath a pseudonym borrowed from Latin, Italian or Old French or 2) "I dedicate this book to my mentor—substitute the name of a well-established scholar— without whose guidance and insight my work would not have been possible."

I have always been struck by the stark contrast between these formulas and the words of a woman scholar who dedicated her book to her two young children "Mark and Jennifer, without whose help this book would have been finished five years ago." This woman's career had not followed a predictable straight line from exams to mentor to thesis to book. Although her work did lead to publication, it followed a number of less conventional paths along the way.

If mentoring is to be useful to this kind of student and others, men and women alike, who find themselves pursuing diverse and circuitous routes toward an academic career, it must derive from something other than the traditional model of master and disciple. What we need instead is a more flexible system of informational exchange and support based on networking. All of the women I surveyed informally at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill agreed that what women faculty and graduate students want, more than the one-on-one "guidance" of an individual mentor, is multiple avenues of access: potential points of contact with many colleagues, networks within which

individual women can establish a range of professional relationships, sometimes one-on-one, sometimes through collaborative efforts and in a number of other ways that we (or they) could never predict.

Graduate students insisted as well on the importance of hearing our stories: hearing about the different strategies we have devised for balancing career and personal lives, about the difficulties of commuting relationships, caring for children, dealing with sexual harassment and the chilly climate in the workplace. Many of us have already invented alternative frameworks for mentoring ourselves in the absence of a single bona fide mentor and we should not underestimate the importance of sharing that information with those coming along behind us. Keeping in mind that today's female graduate students are probably not looking for a straight path that involves finding the right mentor, following in her footsteps, replicating her work and dedicating a book to her, we can provide a sense that faculty women have struggled and continue to struggle, but that there are many avenues to becoming an established scholar, many that we probably haven't yet imagined, many that the next generation can invent with our support.

Sarah Stanbury, English, College of the Holy Cross
stanbury@hccad.holycross.edu

There are some curious parallels and mirrorings between mentoring and the practice of historical scholarship. Like the mentor, the historian assumes a naive subject – the past, unconscious of its own motivations, often innocent, always on its way to a greater sophistication, on the eve of the Reformation or the Age of Discovery. And like the mentor, the historian – not innocent and perhaps even jaded – is wise about the motivations of the past, giving facts, the clay of history, linear shape, placing them in a progress, even patronizing the past that he/she has shaped and claimed. The historian gives the past a career – making it public, putting it on the syllabus, getting it a university job.

These parallels have had, I think, a particular resonance for medieval studies, which carries with it, as recent scholars have pointed out,¹ an unusual burden of pastness – a sense of its enchantment, its religiosity, its undefinable and quixotic difference from modernity: the Age of Chivalry, as in the Age of Innocence. This pastness, this historicity, seems sometimes to be like a wall, the whole structure of “the Middle Ages” like a fortified castle. Even as literary critics we have to be ethnographers. Before we write about a text we first need somehow to scale the ramparts and find local informants. “Pastness” holds up new critical paradigms at the borders, as if feminism, psychoanalysis, cultural theory had to stop and show identification papers to get in: what right do we have to apply discourses about identity developed by a bourgeois Jew in 19th century Vienna to Christian Europe in the Middle Ages? How can the insights of film theory, emerging in 20th century Hollywood, be said to speak for structures of visibility in 14th century England?

I mention these examples, which are relevant to my own work, not because I would simply detonate the wall posed by the historicity of the Middle Ages, for in my own work I have always felt the seductions of this pastness. I admit to always being up against it.

Nevertheless, historical methodologies, which have a long tradition in the field of medieval literary studies, from philology to exegetical criticism to the new philology, seem relentlessly to privilege traditional male interests and to make visible the narratives and lives of men. It is certainly not a chance event that the issues with the greatest *panache* in English literary studies today claim politics as a base – the study of heterodoxies, of Lollardy, of Lancastrian politics and the rise of vernacular languages.

That ways in which “pastness” fixes a colonial relationship between the historian and his/her subject have traditionally set, I suspect, some of the rules governing mentoring in our field. My own mentoring in an exegetical/Robertsonian school of historicist criticism certainly fit a tightly paternalistic model – one that gets played out again and again in our culture in ways that confirm that male-male mentoring holds a deeply hallowed and even mythic status, replaying a passionate, even Christian narrative of sacrifice. We don’t have to look far in Hollywood’s mass productions to find *The Karate Kid*, with Mr. Miagi showing the kid how to wash the car; *Searching for Bobby Fisher*, with its adoration of the male *enfance*; *Dead Poet’s Society*, with “Carpe Diem” really saying that the only poem worth reading is the “Song of Myself.” Although all these films on some level celebrate rebellion, the struggle of the creative self against conformist norms, they really bow to a common authority; before the mentor, however disappearing, eccentric, or even self-effacing, there really is no dissent.

What these few films, drawn from a hat, also reveal is the explicit gendering of the myth: where are the mentoring films about women? Perhaps women slip out of the box, unwilling or unable to stay put in the mandorla. When I read about a successful or interesting woman, I always want to know about her life: what about family, children, who cooks. I’ve always felt this was a somewhat shameful impulse – but I think it represents in part a need or a desire for categories that are mixed, fluid, relational. A feminist history is less likely to stay put, the past to stay securely in its enchantment; with feminism the past is always imbricated with the present. Feminism is never just *about* politics; it is politics. A feminist model of mentoring might even make some inroads on the enchanting of the past. Perhaps with a radically realigned model of authority we might finally decolonize the Middle Ages, even free it from its sobriquet “medieval”; could finally say, “the Middle Ages is history.”

1. See Louise O. Fradenburg, “Be not far from me”: Psychoanalysis, Medieval Studies and the Subject of Religion,” *Exemplaria* 7.1 (1995): 41-54; Gayle Margherita, “Originary Fantasies and Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*,” in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 116-120; and Elizabeth Scala, “Historicism and the Resistance to Theory,” paper delivered at the International Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo, 1994.

Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, History, Georgetown University
hoepfnej@guvax.georgetown.edu

Women, now a more substantial presence among senior academics, are increasingly involved in mentoring junior scholars and teachers. They themselves have benefited from and sometimes struggled with being mentored. Given the problematics and promise

of mentoring relationships (which might more helpfully be redefined as selecting and supporting potential professional colleagues), it is of some interest to examine perceptions of the relationship among faculty and students when more women are in the mix.

Between 1991-1993, Georgetown conducted studies of its women faculty and of graduate student perceptions of the female graduate student experience. I chaired this last effort and also a Middle States review of the graduate program with particular attention to the women in the program.

The information we collected derived from interviews with 56 graduate students in 23 programs, from 310 surveys (1400 were sent out), from 109 longer written responses,¹ from extended meetings with a sub-committee of students, and from a limited variety of institutional statistical data. The gathering of information was, in itself, instructive. Statistical information of any kind relating to graduate education was minimal: gender breakdown per department was available and not much more. Efforts to hold town meetings with female graduate students failed, highlighting problems of communication and networking and the position of isolation experienced by most graduate women. And mentoring (one of the factors we were investigating) is not institutionally well documented.

Yet, in the questionnaire responses, in the interviews and in the sub-committee meetings, mentoring was the most persistent, most present concern. Most often mentioned, and no great surprise, was the lack of women faculty to serve as mentors. While the percentage of female faculty in History, Philosophy and English was 23, 16 and 44% respectively, the percentage of female graduate students was 40, 50 and 72% respectively. Since both male and female students ranked the assistance received from female advisors twice as high as the assistance from male advisors, it is not surprising that the number of female faculty was perceived as a problem. On the other hand, most students had multiple mentors. Of those graduate students with female mentors 85% were likely to have additional mentors; of those whose advisors were male, 73% had additional mentors.

A second, substantive worry was concern over the availability and professional strength of female mentors. Both male and female graduate students worried that female mentors were not as available or not as likely to teach graduate courses. Twenty percent of the students said that women faculty were overburdened relative to the departmental and administrative loads their male counterparts were carrying. There were significant concerns (15% of the responses) that women faculty were not taken seriously because they were women. One student complained, "even her research was seen as less important."² The fact that only nine out of 115 full professors were women was perceived as a problem—so much so that the sub-committee of women graduate students seriously offered to pitch in and help female mentors/ faculty with their research or with the tasks that fill up their time and divert them from attaining full professor. Finally, women faculty were perceived as less powerful and less able to protect their advisees in an environment of competition and against aggressive male counterparts.

With regard to the relative success of female graduate students in areas where mentors might help, there was no statistically apparent gender discrimination with regard to grants and loans at the university. But twice as many women (20%) as men (10%) reported obstacles relating to thesis research, writing and the approval process. This may

help account for the higher proportion of women seeking multiple advisors.³

This is only one study at one university. It is flawed due to difficulties in gathering the data, and it was not primarily meant as a study of mentoring. But it does highlight the intense concern of graduate students with mentoring, some worry over the professional strength of female mentors, and a tendency among the students to invest in more than one mentoring relationship.

1. Interviews were held with both male and female students. The questionnaires were sent to the entire body of students, and the responses were fairly representative of the gender balance in the student population. The sub-committee of 12 students consisted of women.
2. Numerous studies have established that identical accomplishments attributed to a man and to a woman will be viewed as less impressive when they are presented as the achievements of a woman. See Titia J. Top, "Sex Bias in the evaluation of Performance in the Scientific, Artistic and Literary Professions: A Review," *Sex Roles* 24 (1991): 73-106
3. In the survey of female faculty at Georgetown, done in 1991-92, the women reported receiving more mentoring than did the men; it would be interesting to investigate whether this is more generally true.

GENDER AND VIOLENCE: A SPECIAL FORUM



This forum features current work and bibliography on the forms and functions of violence in medieval society as it subtends and is informed by gender roles. Domestic violence, rape, self-violence, violence in religious contexts, and literary representation of aggression are increasingly the focus of feminist and historical scholarship. The subject is an elusive one even in the twentieth-century and is even more so in the Middle Ages. We hope that this exchange of ideas, current projects, and bibliography will be useful to scholars working on these and related questions. Please send your comments or additional bibliography for inclusion in the next issue to Ann Marie Rasmussen, Dept. of German, Duke University, Box 90256, Durham, N.C. 27708-0256 or post to amras@acpub.duke.edu.

COMPREHENDING RAPE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND



I am in the process of completing a book on female consent in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer that began as a study of Chaucer's representations of rape. Along with a number of scholars (Gayle Margherita, Carolyn Dinshaw, Marta Powell Harley, Christopher Cannon, for example), I was initially intrigued by the enigmatic historical document that tells us only that Chaucer was released from the charge of rape by Cecily Champaigne in 1380; and like others I have also been fascinated by the continuing attempts of Chaucer's biographers to transform the possibility that Chaucer might have raped someone into something else (see for example, Derek Pearsall's most recent argument