

feminist theory and medieval texts is a key place to ask these questions about history, and it is the site of those questions I asked in graduate school which still remain unresolved. I have watched many students struggle to apply feminist literary theory—created in the twentieth century, often about nineteenth-century texts—to medieval texts. And this is the place where, as a student, I received the least guidance. I think it is right that my questions are unresolved. I think they are the kind of questions I should ask again and again throughout my career. But I also think that those who teach graduate students need to urge students to ask these questions and at least some publications need to analyze varying models of constructing relationships between past and present texts. To some extent, the New Philology issue of *Speculum* and a number of other works by medievalists have dealt with questions of past and present, medieval texts and contemporary theory, but I needed more models of how study of the past can change “our culture” and more explicitly feminist examples.

So, I look to gender and sexuality studies to explore the past and to change the present. One thing that seems to need changing is the relationship between graduate study and the job market. I urge readers to talk to each other and to write to *MFN* with their ideas about how “intellectual excellence” and “job markets” do currently relate to each other; about what kinds of changes need to be made regarding this relationship, if any; and about what role gender, sexuality, and other cross- or anti-disciplinary studies should play in such changes.

Kari Kalve, English Department, Earlham College

1. In thinking about “intellectual excellence,” I have found that intellectual pleasure is part of my definition of “excellence.” Yet not all aspects of scholarship and teaching, “excellent” or not, are pleasurable. I also need to note that the “job market” is not the same as the job; the dichotomy I am analyzing is not identical to the traditional “research vs. teaching” dichotomy. I also question this latter opposition.

WORK CITED

Halperin, David M. One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love. New York: Routledge, 1990.

AN ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH TO THE JOB MARKET*

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Job-Seeking 101:

It's never too early to begin thinking about life after graduate school. From your very first semester, begin to view yourself as a developing professional, an engaged colleague, an informed participant in academic discourse. This involves some self-reflection and experimentation. What kind of scholar do you want to be? Do you enjoy having a voice in departmental affairs? Do you have a talent for initiating scholarly, social, or political events? Are you at ease giving papers at conferences? Are you willing to invest the time

and energy to revise your research in courses for publication? Graduate school is the time to begin exploring your options. The stakes are low and you'll have plenty of opportunities. Try out all of the roles available to you until you find the ones that fit. A distinctive professional identity is one of the strongest assets you'll have on the job market.

Some More Advanced Strategies:

On marketing yourself: cultivate your ability to teach a diverse assortment of courses. Suppose a department is torn between hiring an eighteenth-century specialist and a medievalist and decides to go for the medievalist. If you have experience teaching some eighteenth-century texts, you'll automatically have an advantage.

On Publishing:

Try and try again! Use graduate seminar papers as drafts for conference papers, and then turn these conference papers into articles, even dissertation chapters. Write everything as if it were for publication.

On Timing:

Be finished with the dissertation before you go on the job market. If you have the money and inclination, a trial run—when you have the dissertation about half finished—can be a good idea. Writing dissertation abstracts, learning to describe your research in pithy, memorable statements, and thinking about your plans for the future will give you a better perspective on your work and help you as a job candidate in the future. However, if you're serious about getting a job, try to defend before the big job-hunting conferences. Search committees are skeptical. They want to hear that you're ready to go to work NOW. A committee that hears "February" as a defense date may believe that you'll defend by May. But when it hears "August" (about the time classes will begin), it may well think "never."

On the Job Application Letter:

Read the ad carefully. If it calls for medieval poetry, mention your expertise in medieval poetry in your very first paragraph. Your letter must present you as the appropriate candidate for the position advertised. Tailor your letter to the type of school to which you're applying. At the very least, reorganize the order of the paragraphs to emphasize your teaching, research, or service. But for any type of school, make your work sound accessible and engaging. Avoid generalities, overly-technical language, and trendy clichés. Be able to assess accurately your dissertation's contribution to the field. It helps to discuss job application letters and *vitae* with other candidates, preferably people not in your specialty. You may be so involved in your work that you have trouble seeing and describing The Big Picture, especially to the non-medievalist.

Other Preparations:

Buy and read all job-hunting handbooks you can afford—*The Academic Job Search Handbook* (ed. Mary Morris Heiberger and Julia Miller Vick; Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 1992) is helpful, as is the standard MLA guide for jobseekers. But don't

overlook texts oriented toward the business community. Some provide lists of standard interview questions and answers that are extremely useful.

On Timing (again):

Ask for recommendations as early as possible. Provide your referees with a schedule of your application deadlines, copies of your *vita*, job letters, transcripts, and dissertation abstract. Ask their advice about the schools to which you plan to apply. Perhaps there are phone calls they can make or letters they can write.

A Somewhat Controversial Suggestion:

You may want to have your placement center mail a copy of your dossier to a colleague at another school (either for her to read and comment on, or for her to pass along to you). This will alert you to any potential problems, but more importantly, it will help you see how you're being characterized for a search committee. Knowing what specific things recommenders have mentioned about you in their letters will help you anticipate interview questions. A caveat: if you decide to pursue this option, don't mention it to your referees. Many will understand your motives (some will give you copies of their letters anyway), but others will not.

On Mock Interviews:

Do as many of them as possible, both as interviewer and interviewee. First try this with your graduate colleagues (optimally guided by an experienced faculty member). Your colleagues are likely to be tougher interviewers than faculty committee members are. Next, do mock interviews with faculty members from your department, but not necessarily from your area of specialization. Chances are, at a real interview, most of the committee will not work in your field. Get lots of feedback from these mock interviewers and listen to it. Videotape yourself if you can stand it. Keep your answers to questions short, informed, and thought-provoking.

On Convention Interviews:

Prepare, prepare, and prepare! Find out in advance who will be on the interview committee. When called for an interview, phrase this tactfully, as in: "who will I have the chance to meet?" Write down these names and research them. Find out their specialties and publications, the institutions where they received their degrees, what courses they teach—anything that will put a human face on them before the interview and then help you make conversation with them at the interview. Research the school thoroughly. Read the school's mission statement and show that you're aware of/compatible with this mission. Find out what courses are currently offered in your specialty, and look for opportunities to create new courses. Let your guiding principle be: "what would students gain from taking this course?" "How could I organize it so that these objectives can be achieved?" Be ready to be specific about textbooks, assignments, and teaching methods. Bring along extra writing samples, syllabi of courses you have taught and courses you'd like to teach. Don't disparage anything you may consider menial work (e.g. service courses; be prepared to say how you'd make them interesting and useful for students).

Finally, be empathetic. The interviewing committee has been cooped up in their suite for what seems to them like months. Keep your sense of humor. At the interview (and particularly at an on-campus interview), committee members will be asking themselves: “Would I like to have an office next to this person?” “Could I serve on a committee with this person?” Collegiality is the key. If a department has asked you for an interview, you can assume that they’re confident in your intellectual abilities. In other words, this is not a dissertation defense. Convey in the interview what you (and only you) can offer the department. For example, your answer to the infamous “what do you see yourself doing in five years” question should include activities such as mentoring and advising students (notoriously thankless tasks) and developing courses that you feel students need (be prepared to explain why), as well as publishing. Ideally, you will leave the interview having communicated your enthusiasm for your work, your compatibility with the needs of this particular department, and your confidence in the unique combination of skills that your time in graduate school has shown that you possess.

Anne Clark Bartlett, English Department, De Paul University

*This essay expands a presentation given during the 29th International Congress on Medieval Studies, at a TEAMS session entitled “Is There a Future to Medieval Studies?” For the wise and tireless advice on job-hunting that I received as a graduate student at the University of Iowa, I am grateful to Teresa Mangum.

“WHY DID WE HAVE TO WRITE A PAPER ABOUT GIRLS?”



Perhaps the most telling comment I received on a student evaluation form after my first semester as a teaching fellow was “She sometimes allows feminism to overshadow the learning material.” So much is bound up in that one sentence. In my own defense, I teach a course on the development of modern Europe and in only two instances do I specifically deal with feminism. I give one lecture on the women’s suffrage movement in Britain and I assign Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. (The latter is what prompted one student to write on an evaluation “Why did we have to write a paper about girls?”) I do, however, attempt to integrate the study of women’s thoughts and actions into the entire course. But, obviously, somewhere I had missed the boat. In attempting to educate and enlighten I had, at worst, alienated and, at best, failed to make the study of women intrinsic to history. To the students who took the time to write the above observations, women are still ancillary to history. They are a distraction from the events of true import. I had not accomplished what I had set out to do.

When I made the decision to go to graduate school I was already a committed feminist. Unlike feminism, which is an intrinsic part of being for me, becoming a medievalist was a choice. It was a choice to do something that still seems almost frivolous to friends and family outside academia. But studying and especially teaching history allows me to have a direct influence on how people think. That is why I went to graduate school. It is amazing to know that I can change the way people view both