

ideas and display our knowledge primarily to other medieval feminists, all we're really doing is playing a game whose rules have been set by the universities and the professional organizations, in order to regulate the distribution of academic wealth and power, while maintaining the equilibrium of an oppressive system.

If we play the game well and have a little luck, we get to keep our jobs (or get jobs in the first place). And that is important, of course. Having an academic job gives us the status and resources to act politically in other ways: by teaching in a feminist manner, by organizing and protesting, by performing the unexpected and unacceptable in our daily lives. Best of all, it may allow us to create other kinds of work (novels? popular history? computer work? screenplays?) for a wider audience, using our specialized knowledge. This kind of work does not currently confer much status in the academy, but I believe it provides us with our greatest opportunity to further the feminist transformation of modern society and culture. Should this be where we go from here?

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RETHINKING MEDIEVAL FRENCH GRADUATE STUDIES/ SYLLABUSES IN LIGHT OF GENDER ISSUES

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Over the past five years, new theoretical and historical perspectives on the status of gender (tied both to my own scholarly interests and to those of my graduate students) have changed in important ways how medieval French literature is taught at the University of Pennsylvania. When Jane Burns first invited me to contribute to this issue of *MFN*, I decided that I wanted to respond in a “personal” manner, i.e. that I wanted to explain in quite specific terms how my and my students’ awareness of gender issues within the context of medieval French literature has resulted in newly conceived graduate seminars. I therefore beg the indulgence of *MFN*’s readers for the specificity of what follows.

The four base texts I use for my introductory seminar are now configured in such a way as to allow gender to emerge as one of the focal points of the seminar. During the fall semester, these were *La Chanson de Roland*, Chrétien de Troyes’s *Chevalier de la Charrette*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and Christine de Pizan’s *Cent Ballades d’amant et de dame*. The seminar, of course, has several foci: each text is read as a “coherent” literary entity (with discussion of how the notion of literary coherence has changed over time); each text is read in its particular socio-historical context; each text is read in terms of the different “anthropology” that gives rise to it and that it embodies. In addition, the four (or more) texts are sequentially configured in a number of (hopefully) suggestive ways. With regard to gender, this can involve starting with the opposing but complementary depictions of women in “tangential” but essential roles in the *Roland* (Bramimonde and Aude), before moving to the central status of Guenièvre in the *Charrette*, first as simple object of desire, then as complex desiring subject. The *gender reversals* of Godefroy de

Leigni's continuation can serve as (among many other things, of course) a preparation to the central status of gender reversal (including cross-dressing) in *Aucassin et Nicolette* in terms of authorial self-representation. The female hero at the level of plot in the 13th-century *chanteable*, functioning as an icon of the (presumably) male anonymous author figure, can function as "preparation" for the explicitly female author figure who is Christine de Pizan in the early 14th-century *Cent Ballades d'amant et de dame*, where the key question is that of the complex relation between the first-person women author and first-person woman protagonist. By the year 1410, then, gender questions have moved to center stage, and have thus acquired a new kind of explicitness. At the same time, in Christine's text, generic cross-dressing has changed direction (vis-à-vis Chrétien and *Aucassin et Nicolette*) as the male protagonist and desiring subject (and also object of desire) is now explicitly presented as the ventriloquized creation of Christine qua new female author figure. Other 13th-century texts that I have found particularly stimulating in this context are Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose* and Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de Robin et de Marion*.

From time to time, I also vary the fall semester reading list in order to interrogate the notion of a medieval French canon in terms of gender. Thus, during the fall semester of 1993, rather than teaching some version of "Classics of the French Middle Ages," I attempted a "cross-reading" of two texts only: Jean d'Arras's *Roman de Mélusine* (1393) and Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la cité des dames* (1405), under the rubric "Genealogy, Authority, History, Authorship." The seminar viewed these two nearly contemporary texts as contrasting attempts to create genealogies in order to legitimize power—political for Jean and intellectual for Christine. In both cases,—the first, male-authored; the second female-authored—the figure of the founding mother predominates, and the problematic status of gender looms. The seminar focused on how disparate strategies for establishing the authority of both author and patron are inscribed into the two texts. In addition, the seminar investigated how Jean creates a francophonic cultural space (in political and geographic terms); and how Christine creates a gendered space of female authority (in chronological and intellectual terms). The seminar also studied how contemporary history is differently incorporated into these two political fictions, as well as how they represent physical deformity as a mark of power.

I hope that the seminars sketched out above give some indication of how issues of gender studies have helped reformulate (as one key element among many) the graduate curriculum in medieval French (with complementary effects on medieval Comparative Literature and medieval Italian) at the University of Pennsylvania over the last five years. My personal experience both as teacher and as thesis advisor is that feminist studies (plural) and gender consideration (from a heterogeneous set of perspectives) have infinitely enriched medieval literary studies in French, Comparative Literature and Italian. I thus find myself in the somewhat awkward position of being on balance very optimistic about the near-term future of our discipline of medieval studies as stimulated and redefined by feminist and gender approaches. I do not consider the "mix of feminism with Medieval Studies more generally" as "vexed," but rather as deeply rejuvenating for our discipline.

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