

NEXT ISSUE

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For the next issue of MFN, subscribers agreed that they would like to have another issue devoted to teaching. Therefore, we would like to ask you to write to us about a specific work you have taught or feminist approaches you have used in the classroom. You needn't describe a whole course. Rather, we would appreciate it if you would provide specific information on specific books you have taught from a feminist perspective. For example, you might explain which passages you chose to discuss and why, what issues came to the surface for discussion, what outside sources you brought to bear, etc. All contributions must reach Elizabeth Robertson at the University of Colorado, Department of English, Box 226, Boulder, Colorado 80309 by FEBRUARY 15th. Thank you for your contributions.

COMMENTARY

Feminism and Medieval Studies: A Report from Chapel Hill
Submitted by Merrimon Crawford and Alison Smith

The classroom was completely silent. Today was a special day because an eminent professor of Aristotelian political theory was coming to speak to an undergraduate philosophy class as part of a forum on the American political system. In the audience sat a young woman who was later to become something as yet totally unknown: a feminist medievalist. As a freshman, she was a bit overwhelmed by theory, but enjoyed listening to her philosophy professor. She was impressed with his knowledge. And now she would have the opportunity to listen to one of the top scholars in the field!

But as the visitor began to speak of the Aristotelian polity, something went wrong. The young woman heard this respected scholar saying, "As far as women are concerned, we must consider that Aristotle was right: men should rule over women just as the superior mind rules over the inferior body." She looked around, thinking that this must be some kind of joke. No one was reacting to that statement, not even her professor who was seated in the front row with a look of reverent deference on his face. The young woman's ears burned as the great man droned on, "to date there have been no females who have significantly contributed to the making of politics. There are no historical examples of women who had political power in their own right." At the reception following the talk (for which she had been asked to help serve the punch) her professor explained frankly that no female scholars had been invited to participate in the forum because there were no prominent women in the field.

So she went to graduate school and entered a program of Medieval Studies hoping thereby to circumvent the anti-feminism of Aristotle and his academic followers. Only to discover that the institutional configuration of her graduate program closely paralleled the Aristotelian model.

On the first day of the semester the classroom was completely silent. New students eagerly awaited the arrival of the eminent professor. His specialty