

Even if we can admit that the authors really intended their texts to be used by women (and in some instances I think we can), we are still forced to assess how serious their expectations could have been. Was there any sizable audience of women who could read texts? This, of course, opens up the can of worms of women's literacy, a topic which has yet to gain the historical attention it merits. While nuns are ritually trotted out as archetypal female literates of the Middle Ages (at least in Latin), does this readership really make sense for texts on women's diseases (many of them consequent on childbirth, which should not be a concern to nuns) and cosmetics (which should equally be of little interest within the cloister walls)? How do we assess women's "quasi-literacy," the dependence on literate texts but the inability to read them oneself? Although these issues in some sense become more simplified when the texts are translated into the vernaculars, in other respects they become more historically complex, since *men's* access to the texts has also increased with the transition to the common tongue.

Literary scholars who are interested in women as readers will already see the relevance of gynecological texts to their interests. Others may be drawn to the texts to learn about medical images of women's bodies, or perhaps the social structures of medical practice. But nobody will be able to do anything with these texts until they are critically edited. Philology seems to have become a dirty word among literary folk, but there is a pressing need for scholars with (old-fashioned?) linguistic and philological skills to attend to the many texts of *Fachliteratur* that are still sitting unknown and unstudied in manuscript rooms all over Europe.

I would like to close with a caution for literary scholars, though it is surely one that we all must heed as we venture into interdisciplinary waters and therefore lose our comfortable command of our own discipline's critical standards, methodologies and bibliographies: that is, we need to understand how large are the gaps of our historical knowledge and, consequently, how cautious we must be in drawing connections, given that so little of the available material has been published or, sadly, been published in error-ridden form. For instance, of the 16 different vernacular translations of the Trotula treatises (and there may be more that I haven't seen yet), only two have been published (the Flemish and the Irish), both of them in distressingly flawed editions that cannot be relied upon.

The best hope for filling the many lacunae in published materials and in assuring the highest standards of quality in future studies is, in my opinion, precisely the kind of interdisciplinary cooperation and dissemination of ideas to which the *MFN* is dedicated. Even within history, there are too many subfields for any individual to stay on top of more than a few bibliographic areas. Formal collaboration may not always be feasible because of logistical constraints or tenure demands, but surely we will all benefit from interdisciplinary dialogue, even in such humble forms as the sharing of bibliography and information about works-in-progress.

Monica H. Green, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

## COLLABORATIVE WRITING: HISTORY AND ART HISTORY

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PAMELA SHEINGORN and I recently co-edited a book entitled *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: St. Anne in Late Medieval Society* (Georgia, 1990) and, because we enjoyed working together so much, we have embarked on another collaborative project — a two-

volume study of the cult of St. Foy during the high and late Middle Ages. Although co-edited books are not uncommon in academe, co-authored books are. When friends learn that we plan to write two books together, the first question is always “how do you write with another person?” Most of us associate our hardest and best work with solitary hours in the library or the archives or at our computer. The norms of the humanities validate single-authored work while rendering joint authorship anomalous; it does not fit the profession’s categories of evaluation and reward. All of these cultural practices and expectations are based on the idea of authorship going back at least to the Romantic period that celebrates the individual thinker and writer.

As part of their attack on the ideologies of bourgeois individualism, Marxist and feminist scholars have been exploring forms of research and publication that do not privilege one author. While Pam and I did not consciously make a decision in 1988 to become co-editors because we were feminists and wanted alternatives to traditional scholarly processes, our experiences of the past three years might be read as part of an incipient historical shift within the academy toward joint work. For those contemplating collaboration, I therefore offer a narrative and an analysis.

## NARRATIVE

In 1982 on my way to a conference in Germany, I visited museums in Munich and Cologne where I saw many magnificent paintings of the Holy Kinship Group (St. Anne, her daughters, and her grandchildren). St. Anne had never occupied a significant place in my mental landscape of the Middle Ages, but the exuberance of these images suggested that she had indeed been important in the fifteenth century. Five years later, a casual conversation with Pam Sheingorn (then merely an acquaintance) revealed that she too was intrigued with the figure of St. Anne and, as an art historian, she knew considerably more about her than I did.

We decided to pursue our mutual interests by proposing two sessions on St. Anne at the 1988 Kalamazoo Medieval Congress. The results of our call for papers were so good, and the sessions so well attended, that after Kalamazoo Pam and I began to put together an interdisciplinary collection of essays on St. Anne in late medieval culture. Most significantly, we also decided that such a volume deserved more than a cursory descriptive introduction, and began to plan a substantial joint essay on the development of the cult of St. Anne that would address contemporary issues in feminist and cultural studies.

We worked on this introduction during the summer and fall of 1988, meeting three times for a few days at a time to brainstorm ideas and select which topics to develop in what order. Each person took sections to write up, then drafts were exchanged and edited. In January 1989, the complete manuscript was submitted to the press for consideration. After acceptance, some revisions on the joint essay were made, always after discussion and agreement on the changes. Since Pam lives in New York City and I live in Maine, most of our collaboration involved phone calls and mailed drafts.

As the manuscript of the St. Anne book neared completion, Pam and I began to experience withdrawal symptoms. The collaboration had been so rewarding that we felt we wanted to do more work together. Another chance conversation raised the possibility of doing a cultural analysis of St. Foy at Conques, an idea that was instantly attractive to both of us. Pam had been translating the *Liber miraculorum* of St. Foy from Latin for five years but had not dared tackle a full study on her own. My interest in the

intersection of high and popular cultures made the miracles of St. Foy an irresistible narrative lure.

Over the past year we have worked together on the first stages of this new project, producing a proposal to the NEH and a paper given at the College Art Association meeting. Our collaborative writing has taken a significant step beyond that of the St. Anne book. On both the NEH proposal and the CAA paper, we found that if we had discussed our ideas in some depth in advance we could actually sit down together in front of a word processor and generate sentences and paragraphs. The 15-page CAA paper was written in approximately 12 hours of joint composition (in a New Haven motel room) following separate preparation of outlines. We now find that by the time we are finished with a piece of writing it is impossible, even for us, to say who wrote what: it is a collaborative work.

## ANALYSIS

As the foregoing narrative shows, our collaboration developed not from a deliberate original plan but from an almost fortuitous series of encounters and conversations, whose potential we seized upon. In retrospect, however, it is possible to perceive some conditions favorable to a collaborative writing project.

First, a subtle balance between similarity and difference in intellectual background appears to be necessary. Pam and I are in different disciplines with divergent training and professional experiences, yet both of us have always preferred interdisciplinary research combining visual images and verbal texts within a historical frame. We share interests in St. Anne or St. Foy, but bring expertise in different languages, in different types of data, and in different theoretical approaches. We are similar enough to share a conception of our project and a set of criteria for quality, but different enough that the combination of our strengths produces a measurably richer piece of research and writing than either of us could produce alone.

Second, our harmonious and efficient working relationship is enhanced by, and perhaps even dependent upon, our favorable professional and personal circumstances. We are both tenured senior faculty members with the luxury of being able to pursue projects that interest us without worrying about external time constraints. Neither of us has children at home, so concentrated work sessions can be conducted for several days at a time at either house. We are the same age and the same sex, which in subtle ways mitigates the disparity of differing personalities. These coincidences simply reduce the number of factors that might interfere with the long-term working relationship. I became especially aware of their importance when I began a joint editing project with several junior colleagues in my department. Disparities in age, sex, parental obligation, status, seniority, and so on all contributed to a much more problematic and hence stressful collaborative process.

Third, we have similar work habits and attitudes toward our mutually agreed-upon deadlines. The success of any collaborative project depends fundamentally upon the participants' mutual respect and trust as well as the perception that the work is being fairly divided and responsibly completed. I have found that joint work of this kind reduces my natural procrastination and compels me to be prompter than I would be with work I am doing alone! We anticipate that the advent of E-mail will facilitate communications and the exchange of information or drafts of the book.

Collaborative writing seems to require equal amounts of pure luck, ideological

commitment, and organized procedure. For those who, like Pam and me, find themselves with that mysterious combination, scholarly collaboration offers some of the greatest pleasures in our profession.

Kathleen Ashley, University of Southern Maine

## HISTORY AND LITERATURE :THREE MEDIEVAL VIEWS



THE BEGINNINGS of *Three Medieval Views of Women* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) were in 1982 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where I presented a paper on medieval costume, using the late thirteenth-century *Contenance des femmes* as my source. Gloria Fiero (U. of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette) was in the audience and talked to me about making the information from the text more available, particularly by means of a translation. I hesitated, thinking more of a scholarly than a student audience. Several months later, I gave another paper on the *Contenance des femmes* at a conference in Dallas, Texas. Again, Gloria was in the audience, and this time she was successful in convincing me that there was a large audience for the material I was working with.

In Dallas, the two of us put together a project that would involve the edition of several texts, in favor of and against the female sex, all in Old French from roughly the same period (1275-1325). The audience for our work would be university students in French, history, or women's studies. Gloria would take care of finding a publisher, in exchange for which she would get top billing. She also wanted to try her hand at translating the texts, attempting to convey in English the meter and tone of the poems. I would provide her with rough but accurate translations of the Old French texts, and she would go to work. It was agreed that the texts would be accompanied by essays; I would write on the texts themselves (their language, genre, on edition of texts in general), Gloria on the historical situation of women at the turn of the fourteenth century. We exchanged phone numbers and parted company. Over the next few years, my phone bills would increase, and Gloria would become very familiar with her school's policies on long-distance dialing.

As Gloria worked on the translations, she discovered that she needed additional help, for her training is in medieval history, not in French. She asked one of her colleagues in Lafayette, Mathé Allain, for assistance. Rough drafts of the translations were sent back and forth between Louisville and Lafayette. Decisions were made about which texts to include in the project. At the same time, Gloria was busily contacting publishers regarding our efforts. We spent Labor Day weekend (1985) in Lafayette, the three of us laboring over details in the translations and notes to the texts.

Early in December 1986, I received an almost panicky phone call from Gloria: Yale UP had accepted our proposal, but wanted to see a complete rough draft by the end of January. Could I have my essay ready by then? I made glorious promises and set to work. By the end of February, Gloria was able to send to Yale our essays in rough form and the three Old French texts we had selected, along with accompanying translations.

Yale was happy, and we had a book to finish. Still to be completed were notes to the texts, final versions of the essays, selection of illustrations, and a host of small details. Gloria and I roomed together during a meeting of the Southeastern Medieval Association (October 1987), where we read papers at the conference and put the finishing touches on our translations and essays. At every stage, we sent copies of our work back and forth