

address or addresses. For example, my address on BITNET is RKARRAS@PENNSAS; on INTERNET it is RKARRAS@PENNSAS.UPENN.EDU. If you tried one and it didn't work, the other might. Then when I log onto my account your message would be waiting for me. If the recipient doesn't log on, of course, s/he will never get the message.

In addition to individual messages, there is another important use for E-Mail: discussion groups. These are usually run using LISTSERV software. Whenever anyone sends a message it automatically goes to everyone on the list. There are hundreds of these electronic discussion groups. Some have very few messages, some have a dozen a day. Some that are of special interest to medievalists include Chaucernet (contact Tom Bestul, TBESTU@CRCMVS.UNL.EDU) and Ansaxnet (contact Pat Conner, U47C2@WVNVN). Jennifer Rondeau is currently attempting to set one up for the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*. This would be a forum for queries, comments, whatever you wish to share. If you are interested, and have or can get an E-Mail account, send a message to JRONDEAU@IUBACS, or if you can't get through to her, send one to me at one of the above addresses. Even if you signed the list of E-Mail addresses circulated at the *MFN* meeting at Kalamazoo, you might drop her a note to make sure that your address and hers can communicate.

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COLLABORATION: WHEN MORE IS LESS

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ALTHOUGH feminists in the humanities have brought about important changes in curricula, I wonder whether we have had an equal impact on the exclusionary practices that often determine our promotions and tenure (and therefore our salaries). We may find ourselves facing a reward system that depends on certain very narrow assumptions about intellectual process. The structure's linchpin is the single-authored work, particularly a book or monograph, that seeks "the true nature of things,"¹ in solitary demonstration of the writer's mastery and authority. But what of the many collaborative research and

informational projects that make their contribution to human knowledge? These co- or multi-authored books and essays can turn out to be handicaps when the individual's work is evaluated by her/his department.

Integral to the celebration of single authorship is the belief that knowledge comes entirely from within a contained self, the concept of "originary authorship" that, in its turn, is often attributed to Descartes.² As applied by some academics to what they do, the process of writing is a struggle to release knowledge and cast it in communicable form; the labor of "getting it out" and at the same time "putting yourself into it" (as a male colleague once remarked to me) is what creates a scholarly author; the lonely wait for a publisher to accept, print, and distribute the work serves further to legitimate the writer's pride of ownership. Belief in the unity of the self and in its closed nature separates the author-subject from the book-object, and the discreteness of selves separates the author from other authors. The "new" knowledge can thus be neatly segmented from the "old;" the author need not feel or acknowledge a debt to the past — on the contrary, if we are to believe in the "anxiety of influence," the past must be repudiated. Romantic notions of originality and of the researcher as a daring, rugged individualist who "breaks new ground" where he "sows the seed of his ideas" join with the "right to" private property, producing a fiercely proprietary authorial stance.

Yet in spite of some humanities departments' rejection of difference in scholarly process, human knowledge has been and remains collaborative. That view has been emphasized in some influential contemporary criticism. Bakhtinian *heteroglossia*, for example (the concept of utterances as concrete instances of speech that also articulate forces outside the speaker³), affords some salutary distance on authority claims. Raymond Williams has argued that as a "physical individual" a man is "of course specific," but as a writer he participates in "a continuing process in which not only the focus but the contents of consciousness are socially produced."⁴ Oddly, the diachronic and synchronic exchange that occurs in the production of literary history and criticism, of historical, linguistic, philosophical, and theological discourse, is ignored by many academic committees, who do not credit the woven and textured quality of human thought. Shotter and Logan comment that a "particular pattern of social relations constructs a form of inner experience in individuals that is then attributed solely to them as individuals, with the still present pattern of social relations constructing it rendered rationally invisible."⁵

By casting single authorship as a monumental struggle, the way is paved for the tautologous argument that only a few can do it, and thus for its corollary, the "reward for rarity." Yet, as we know, the academic community depends on a variety of scholarly products including anthologies, collected essays, editions of works and translations (these last representing "collaborations" between the original author and the editor/translator), and textbooks, which are often co-authored. We could ask whether the "contribution to knowledge" of the authority type has been greater than that made by multiple voices: those of the Bible or of epic literature, to mention just a couple. What is understood as a contribution to knowledge should be susceptible of several definitions, not just one, and it should be periodically thought out anew. As existing hierarchies of value have been constructed, so they can be reconstructed.

In the meantime, must collaboration be done only at our peril? (Is the peril equally great for men and women?) How can our colleagues who themselves prefer to be single authors learn to accept collaborative work from others? Is teamwork so radical an idea

that it can be approached only by crediting fractions of books, dividing the whole by the number of authors, or by trying to figure out how many articles a given part of a book equals? Must decision-making bodies try to determine who “really” did the work? When women publish equally with men, is it nevertheless assumed that the men headed the project? For my part, when I hear committees claim they can’t tell who did what in collaborations, I think I detect the final, dull scrunch of heels digging in. In fact, co-authored books and essays can and frequently do explain with care how tasks were distributed, but many departments remain hopelessly flummoxed. They regard with suspicion those grey areas where boundaries between selves are effaced, where authors have failed at self-containment.

Nor can feminists particularly look to science or engineering for models of teamwork successfully rewarded. Though much scientific research requires teams of people with different specialties who work together in laboratories, and/or on funded collaborative projects, when the research is published, credit is hierarchical. First or second authorship is coveted, other positions being thought far less important.

Medievalists, by training and practice, may be more sympathetic to the concept of literature as community property than scholars in other fields. We also tend to participate in more interdisciplinary types of activities, and we may teach in broad medieval studies programs. (Sometimes interdisciplinary collaboration is even recognized by our peers, perhaps because it allows “selves” to remain relatively distinct.) Perhaps, then, we are specifically well-positioned to argue for a more open approach to the ways human knowledge earns its status as knowledge.

Collaboration has the benefit of shifting emphasis from the writer to the work, from the researcher to the research. It calls for a new approach on the part of evaluating committees, who will have to consider the value of the work done, not the reputation of its author. For some undertakings collaboration is in fact preferable to any other approach; it is not just a way to remedy one author’s lack of breadth or depth. Projects like the NEH-funded translation of the 13th-century Vulgate cycle, edited by Norris J. Lacy, which will have a team of translators, provide a way of accomplishing work that would overwhelm the single scholar. But, more to the point, collaboration is practiced as a matter of principle, as a number of feminist medievalists have done: see, for example, the review essay by Bennett, Overing, and Lees in *MFN* 10, which deliberately avoids suggesting mastery on the part of any one author, or the essay by Burns, Kay, Krueger, and Solterer⁶ on the state of feminist medieval studies in French, which directly addresses the problematic intersection of mastery and feminism. These should not be regarded merely as more efficient ways of approaching publishing tasks but rather as attempts to represent the polyphony of human intellectual life. They and others of their kind should receive their due as the innovatory practices they are.

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NOTES

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- 1 John Shotter and Josephine Logan, “The Pervasiveness of Patriarchy: Finding a Different Voice,” in *Feminist Thought and the Structure of Knowledge*, ed. Mary McCannery Gergen (New York, London: NYU Press, 1988), p. 71
- 2 In “The Pervasiveness of Patriarchy,” Shotter and Logan warn against attributing “single

authorship" of this view entirely to Descartes, as if he had had no antecedents or contemporaries they cite Peter Ramus—for one (p.73).

This paragraph and the next touch upon points made in a larger synoptic discussion of authorship in Andrea Lundsford and Lisa Ede, *Singular Texts: Plural Authors' Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*, (Edwardsville, Ill: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 72-102.

3 See Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1984), esp. p. 291.

4 *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), cited in Lundsford and Ede, p. 90.

5 "The Pervasiveness of Patriarchy," p. 80

6 "Feminism and the Discipline of Old French Studies: *une bele disjointure*," forthcoming in *The Discipline of the Discipline*, R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols, Jr., eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

BOOK REVIEWS



Jane Chance, *Christine de Pizan's "Letter of Othea to Hector"*. The Focus Library on Medieval Women. Newburyport, Mass: Focus Information Group, 1990.

Jane Chance is Series Editor of the Focus Library of Medieval Women, a series of very reasonably-priced translations dedicated to making available important works about and by medieval women. Another title published by Focus, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's work on Margaret of Oingt, was reviewed in *MFN* No. 10 (Fall 1990), and the cover of Chance's book promises forthcoming volumes on St. Bridget of Sweden, 14th-century German convent literature, and Hrotsvit of Gandersheim.

Medievalists of all stripes will be pleased to have access to another of Christine de Pizan's works in English, given the large amount of critical attention she has garnered in recent years. While editions and translations are steadily appearing, only a small number of Christine's texts are available in English at the moment (among them Earl Jeffrey Richards' *Book of the City of Ladies* [New York: Persea, 1982], Charity Cannon Willard's *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies* [New York: Persea/Bard Hall, 1989], and Thelma Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler's *Poems of Cupid, God of Love* [Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990]).

The *Letter of Othea to Hector* is the first of Christine's very learned texts. Intended as a book of instruction for a young man about to begin training as a knight, it consists of one hundred short chapters, each of which contains a short verse passage describing a mythological figure, a gloss elucidating the social lesson to be learned from the text, and an allegory explaining its spiritual lesson. It was an important and very popular work in its day, but the same dense freight of mythology, philosophy, scripture, and Church Fathers that gives it its appeal can also make it heavy going for students no longer acquainted with all the source material to which Christine refers.

The strength of Chance's book lies in the considerable supporting material provided for the text, in which her interest in mythography is put to excellent use. The *Letter of Othea* itself occupies only a little more than half the volume; the rest is commentary that will make this difficult text much more accessible to the students whom she intends as her audience. The introduction consists of four parts: I. "The Life and Works of Christine de Pizan;" II. "The Origins of Christine's Gynocentric Mythography: The