

## **TEACHING ABOUT WOMEN WITH MULTIMEDIA**

### **Introduction**

This is a brief description of the several formats of multimedia which we are finding extraordinarily successful in the classroom. They include: a multimedia study program about medieval women designed for students by Martha Driver at Pace University, NY, a website constructed for student use by Deborah McGrady at UC-Santa Barbara, and student-created multimedia assignments published on a website, used in a sophomore literature survey by Martha Driver and Jeanine Meyer, a colleague in Information Systems at Pace University. We encourage development of these kinds of programs at other institutions and welcome inquiries about our classes.

### **The Medieval Woman at Work and at Play**

This multimedia program, designed with the help of Denise Cox, a graduate student in the computer science department at Pace University, was originally used by students in my senior seminar, *Images of Women in the Middle Ages* in 1993, and again in 1995, placed in the computer lab where students could consult the program at their convenience. The Medieval Woman multimedia program has also been shown in varying stages of development at Brown University, at Rhode Island College, and at the Women and the Book conference, held in 1994 at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, as well as at technology conferences, at George Mason University, at the Folger Shakespeare Institute in Washington, DC, before a panel of scholars discussing relationships between text and image in a variety of works, and most recently, at Randolph-Macon Woman's College in conjunction with a discussion of teaching with multimedia.

My initial intention in creating the program was to record slide lectures for student review, so students could visit the lab and review slides and lecture materials for their exams. But, as I spent more time in the lab, the program expanded, and I built in some student assignments and reading lists pertinent to specific lectures which students could then print out from the computer. We also added medieval music and some voice-overs, with readings of poetry in modern and medieval languages. Currently, *The Medieval Woman at Work and at Play* program is about 70 pages long and presents approximately 70 images, and can be used for self-study and enrichment in history, art history, literature and women's studies courses. I expect to continue developing this particular program for use in similar senior seminars and also in required sophomore-level courses focusing more generally on women in literature.

Most of the pictures in the Medieval Woman program are taken from manuscripts produced in the later Middle Ages, from around 1350 through the late fifteenth century. Many illustrations have been drawn from the pages of Books of Hours, prayerbooks for private devotion used primarily by the laity,

often specifically made for laywomen. Other sources include illuminated manuscripts of medieval romance, allegories, and mythologies, which, though fictional, reveal a great deal about women's occupations and reading material. Images of tapestries and sculpture have also been scanned into the program. Texts accompanying the illustrations draw on contemporary sources, especially works of literature, to illuminate the historical contexts. The Medieval Woman program remains fluid, recorded on disks, and may be emended and expanded for particular courses. This flexibility is not as yet available in a CD-ROM format on which programs are fixed, locked into place. Ideally, a finished program would have a variety of options, course assignments, for example, or specific readings, which could be combined appropriately for specific course requirements.

In addition to completing the reading and assignments contained in the Medieval Woman program, students were asked to evaluate the experience, using a simple questionnaire. When asked, for example, how the computer-learning experience differed from studying a text or hearing a lecture, students remarked: "It was like teaching myself." "I could learn at my own pace; it was helpful to have the option to go back if necessary." "It was a holistic learning experience." When asked, "What will you remember about using this program?", students commented: "The pictures triggered my memory." "The pictures were very effective, helping me to remember dates, details, texts." Another student said, "[The program] was well put-together, helpful and fun," while one newly-minted feminist exclaimed the program had taught her "That women are superior" (not precisely my initial intention). One prescient student predicted that "In the future, we will probably use this method of learning a lot more."

### **Medieval Woman Website**

The Women in the Middle Ages website was created for a class at UC-Santa Barbara with two specific goals in mind: to provide students with easy and immediate access to a "virtual museum" of the images to be shown in class and to encourage students to interact with class material via electronic discussion. In addition to the virtual museum and links to a class discussion list, the site provides a detailed syllabus with focus questions to orient students in their reading, links to important medieval websites and a bibliography of related material. I also have incorporated online material, specifically from ORB, the Medieval Sourcebook, as required reading. The immediate response of students has been very positive. They have extensively used the discussion list (their online participation is 10% of their final grade) to continue class discussion among themselves. Several students also used the web sources and images from

the site's virtual museum in their midterms. The address is <http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/depts/french/medwom/womlink.htm>

### **Student-Created Projects: The Grendel Site**

In a sophomore literature course team-taught at Pace University this year (and scheduled again for next), students created a number of projects in multimedia formats as well as mastering the production of Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) documents, composition of E-mail, and Internet research. The purpose of this traditional core course is for students to develop understanding and appreciation of British literary classics in their historical context, though the same multimedia approaches might be readily applied to women's history and literature courses. Pace students of many nationalities, most of them recent immigrants, worked together on a number of multimedia projects as well as engaging in more traditional studies. Through classroom analysis and written exercises, students increased their skills in analytical and critical reading, leading to the ability to understand and interpret texts. Through utilizing multimedia, students further exercised and sharpened their ability to communicate in verbal expression, writing, organization of ideas and connection with their audience. For the syllabus and assignments used in fall 1996 and spring 1997, we refer readers to the class website (<http://csis.pace.edu/grendel>) for both instructional materials and samples of student work. Some posted essays discuss the Wife of Bath, Griselda, and Grendel's Mother, for example, and all four multimedia assignments listed there could be easily adapted to classes in women's studies.

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