

Introduction to Tributes to Joan Cadden

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IN 2006, I had the great privilege and honor to write a review of *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, Jane Chance's amazing (and massive) collection of biographies of women who had contributed to medieval studies since the eighteenth century.¹ It was an equally great privilege and honor to be asked to organize a Medieval Foremothers Society tribute for Joan Cadden at the Kalamazoo meetings in 2009. But what made those two experiences so very different was that whereas the former assignment involved the bittersweet task of acknowledging achievement while bemoaning discrimination and restraint, invisibility and neglect, the latter was sheer celebration. Joan received her graduate training in the 1970s at Indiana, held a postdoctoral position at Harvard for three years, served on the faculty at the elite Midwestern private school, Kenyon College, for twenty-odd years. She then finished her teaching career as Professor of History at the University of California at Davis. During that time, she won fellowships from the National Science Foundation, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Most importantly, her breakthrough 1993 book, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge University Press), won the highest book prize offered by the History of Science Society, the Pfizer Award. *Meanings* was not only the first book on medieval studies to win that award in thirty years, but it was also the first book ever on gender studies to crack through the glass ceiling of recognition in a field especially heavily dominated by "great men and their books."

I won't pretend that Joan did not have her struggles against sexism or challenges as a parent. But Joan's career—and her life story—present us with a new chapter in the Medieval Foremothers story: success! And

success that spills over into the next generation. For Joan's story (and this is where her story intersects with my own) has been about "paying it forward." In my comments at the luncheon honoring Joan at Kalamazoo, I suggested that Joan's distinctive contribution has been in changing the way academia works. Joan embodies an ethos of generosity, pure and simple. Stuffed somewhere in my old paper files—untouched for years since I've been moving into the digital age—are typed and even handwritten notes to and from Joan. I first met her, I think, in 1980 or 1981. I can't reconstruct the circumstances, but even though she had no official responsibility for my training, Joan was for many years my single most important guide into the labyrinth of medieval studies. Was it Joan who introduced me to the late, great historian of Heloise, Mary Martin McLaughlin, who encouraged my work on the *Trotula*? Probably. Was it Joan who first told me how to navigate the Byzantine rituals at the Salle de manuscrits at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris? No doubt. It was surely Joan who shared with me years' worth of notes on various unstudied texts on women's medicine, which introduced me to materials I probably never would have found on my own and showed me, by letting me see the "guts" of scholarly work, how the hard labor of manuscript work is actually done.

The papers in this special section give testimony to all the levels of Joan's impact. Joan's work laying out an unexpectedly rich dossier of thinking about the nature of sex difference has been a never-ending mine of information for nearly every study done on sex and gender in the Middle Ages for the past three decades. Likewise, her pioneering work on medical understandings of male same-sex relations has shown us how much intellectual energy has been devoted to such questions in the past. Herself discovering feminist work only after her graduate work was completed (the contribution by Joan Ferrante reminds us palpably how radical that initial work of "recovery" was—and still is), Joan went on to nurture students at her own institution (Clouse and Turning) and those elsewhere (Truitt); and to inspire work of rigorous excellence and analytical brilliance that pushes the history of sex difference not simply deeper into medicine's and science's past (Park) but also into the fields of theology and canon law (van der Lugt). She has created a "history written at the seams," as Puff calls it, making the history of sexuality

not simply important to the history of science and medicine, but making the history of science and medicine critical to the history of gender and sexuality.

Michele Clouse evocatively notes that “What Joan’s work suggests to me is that there is something inherently important in our choices to hear or silence [the cacophony of] voices [from the past] and our willingness to allow for dissonance even when we prefer harmony.” At the time of her retirement in 2008, I wrote that “Joan has, in every way, been my role model: a scholar and a feminist, with never a moment’s doubt that there was potential conflict between the two.” That is her great achievement: by listening to multiple voices and embodying synthesis in her own life and career, Joan has allowed us to see a Middle Ages that was always there but was waiting for a skilled interpreter to reveal it. And she has taught us to be equally “skilled interpreters” in our own right. Please join me in celebrating Joan’s induction into the halls of fame of our Medieval Foremothers. This is a wonderful moment for us all.

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 END NOTES

1. Monica H. Green, review of Jane Chance, ed., *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, *The Medieval Review*, June 2006, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.baj9928.0606.001>.