

defames women for several serious vices, claiming that their morals are full of perversity..."; in order to make a connection with the Genius passage "spoken" by the ghost of Jean de Meun, we went to the beginning of the second paragraph: "He is so insistent about not telling a secret to a woman, who is so bereft of discretion as he recalls, and I can't imagine where in the devil he found so much nonsense and so many futile words as are hurled at them throughout that long trial, but I beg all those who consider this quite authentic and put so much faith in it to tell me how many men they have known to be accused, killed, hanged, or even reproached in the street because of the denunciation of their wives; I think they will find them very thinly scattered" (342); next I excerpted those lines from the third paragraph that mention "the ugly way" that Jean speaks of married women who deceive their husbands (343) and the script speech concludes with Christine's direct attack on Jean: "In spite of the fact that my judgment tells me that Master Jean de Meung was a very learned man and eloquent and would have been capable of writing a much better work ... I suppose that the great lechery which obsessed him perhaps made him more prejudiced than profitable, as by our actions our inclinations commonly reveal themselves" (344-5).

⁷ Richards, 3-4, beginning with the opening lines, "One day as I was sitting alone in my study...," and, omitting several lines, continuing through to the passage on Christine's dismay at reading Matheolus, as demonstrated in the following speech from our "script":

"Because the subject seemed to me not very pleasant for people who do not enjoy lies, and of no use in developing virtue or manners, given its lack of integrity in diction and theme...[.] I put it down in order to turn my attention to more elevated and useful study. But just the sight of this book ... made me wonder how it happened that so many different men—and learned men among them—have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior...They all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice. Thinking deeply about these matters, I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes...To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women."

⁸ The conference, "Enhancing Undergraduate Instruction," was funded by a grant from the Bush Foundation and was held on October 17-19, 1990 at the Northland Inn in Brooklyn Park, a Minneapolis suburb.

⁹ While at Leeds, Gina Fink also published "Christine de Pizan: Questioning the Litaney," in the graduate student publication, *Serius Intendere: A Collection of Essays Celebrating the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Centre for Medieval Studies*, Leeds (1994): 23-32.

CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF MEDIEVAL WOMEN AND THEIR LEGACY: USING FILM, TEXT, AND THEORY TO TEACH MEDIEVAL WOMEN'S CULTURE

*Actually, I really did catch on fire, but Mr. Preminger just kept on rolling
He used that tape in the film because it was authentic.*

—From the Journals of Jean Seberg

I. 1. Introduction

"Cinematic Representations of Medieval Women and Their Legacy: Using Film, Text, and Theory to Teach Medieval Women" is being taught at Wake Forest University, a private liberal arts university, and at West Chester University, a state university where the course is cross-listed in literature, comparative literature, women's studies, and film. Pairings and modifications of texts and films can be used in introductory courses as well as in more specialized ones. For example, at West Chester, it is taught as a lower-division interdisciplinary course for nonmajors, as an upper-division seminar for literature majors, and at the graduate level.

The course focuses on the ways in which modern film has represented gender, space, and constructions of the body as major categories for understanding aspects of medieval women's culture. In broad terms, the purpose of the course is twofold: (1) to introduce students to medieval women's culture through writings by and about medieval women and (2) to study these writings in the context of one of the major forms of cultural discourse today, film. Important readings in feminist and film theory are used to help contextualize connections between literary and cinematic representations and articulate questions for further inquiry, analysis, and interpretation.

2. Why Film?

A course studying medieval women's culture is particularly suited to an approach that integrates the disciplines of history, literature, philosophy, art history, music history, and science. Students now live among and often receive formal education in new electronic media and technologies which encourage the simultaneous use of visual, verbal, written, and acoustic forms. The disciplinary categories of medieval literature, film studies, and feminist theory share an interest in the politics of images and representation: literature and film help to project a constructed world wherein the intersections of visual and literary gendered representations can be studied, while feminist literary and film theory prevent images of medieval women from becoming fixed as a certain "type" or coherent "subject" positioned in a narrowly defined historical space.

Film brings visibility, embodiment, and historical presence to medieval women, whose exclusion from disciplinary regimes and scholarship has long provided the rationale for thinking that medieval women's culture is a "no culture." Film can dramatically illustrate narrative movement and provide a context for vicarious participation in configurations of sexuality, gendered space, boundaries, and social codes. This course uses three categories of film: historical films; modern films in which medieval themes and experiences as they have been documented by medieval women continue to influence women's lives; and documentaries that examine medieval legacies in the modern world.

3. Course Divisions

The course is organized into four sections: Construction of Medieval Patriarchy; Space as Punishment and Resistance; Care of the Body; and Exploring the Imaginary. The first section also serves as an introduction to the course and, as such, focuses on the two most important cultural institutions influencing how we think about medieval women's lives, church and court. This section concludes with a special focus on one woman, Joan of Arc. More than any other medieval woman, Joan of Arc has been the subject of numerous twentieth-century films, from Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) to Matthew Robbins' contemporary setting in *The Legend of Billie Jean* (1985) to Jacques

Rivette's two-part epic, *Les Batailles* and *Les Prisons* (1993). In addition, a recent documentary called *From the Journals of Jean Seberg* (dir. Mark Rappaport, 1995) shows in concrete detail the dangers that continue to threaten contemporary women who act in the tradition of Joan of Arc. (Tellingly, the film includes a quotation from Jean-Luc Godard, who was very influenced by Seberg's performance as Joan in Otto Preminger's 1957 *Saint Joan*: "Cinema history is the history of boys photographing girls.")

The second section of the course, Space as Punishment and Resistance, explores cultural functions of female monastic enclosures as sites of protective space, social exclusion, or utopian possibilities. The third section, Care of the Body, focuses on women's healing, witchcraft, and self-immolation. The fourth section, Exploring the Imaginary, investigates the fate of female authors vis-à-vis censorship and other patriarchal strategies to conceal women's voices and the extent to which medieval women writers developed an *écriture féminine*.

4. Pedagogy

This course offers a highly interactive and process-oriented pedagogy that relies heavily on weekly essay writing, in-class roundtable and out-of-class electronic discussions, and independent and group research projects that students develop throughout the semester. Our pedagogical goals are as follows: (1) to stimulate and encourage critical and independent thinking; (2) to foster an appreciation of the complex dynamics of cultural productivity and creativity; (3) to familiarize students with current scholarship on film theory, medieval studies, and women's studies; (4) to train students in basic research methods and critical writing within the context of the humanities; and (5) to develop students' "visual literacy" and historical perspective in an increasingly visual rather than text-based culture.

5. Format

One option for balancing class discussion and film screenings is to meet once a week for class discussion followed by a laboratory session during which the class views one or two films for the following class discussion (pizza optional...). We hand out a questionnaire for each film to solicit reflections on the film as well as discussion questions for the class. For each class session, students prepare responses to the discussion questions and assigned reading. We provide introductory lectures as necessary; the main focus is on discussing, comparing, and contrasting film and written materials. Students are encouraged and are graded on keeping the discussions alive by using E-mail or a class listserv between class sessions.

II. Syllabus

Part I: The Construction of Medieval Patriarchy

Week 1: Medieval Military Masculinities: Religious, Courtly, and Literary

Readings: Jerome, "Against Jovinian," "Letter to Eustochium," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1979); Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John J. Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); Malory, *King Arthur and his Knights*, ed. Eugene Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

Films: Cecil B. DeMille, *The Crusades* (1935); John Boorman, *Excalibur* (1981); George Romero, *Knightriders* (1981).

Week 2: Constructions of the Feminine in Medieval Patriarchy

Readings: Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue* (New York: Norton, 1989), "The Wife of Bath," "The Clerk's Tale," "The Pardoner's Tale"; Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books/Labyrinth Press, 1982), "Guigemar," "Bisclavret," "Lanval," "Eliduc."

Theory: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (1975): 6–18.

Film: Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Canterbury Tales* (1971).

Week 3: Transgressing Gender Boundaries and Its Consequences

Readings: Régine Pernoud, *The Retrial of Joan of Arc*, trans. J.M. Cohen (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955); Christine de Pizan, "The Tale of Joan of Arc," in *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee (New York: Norton, 1997).

Theory: Roland Barthes, "The Face of Garbo," *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1990).

Film: Carl Dreyer, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928); Matthew Robbins, *The Legend of Billie Jean* (1985); Mark Rappaport, *From the Journals of Jean Seberg* (1995).

Week 4: Contemporary Examples of Female Transgression

Readings: Ruth First, *117 Days* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989); Frances Baard, *My Spirit Is Not Banned* (Zimbabwe Publications, n.d.).

Theory: Margaret Miles, "What You See Is What You Get" in *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

Film: Chris Menges, *A World Apart* (1988).

Part II: Space as Punishment and Resistance

Week 5: Negotiating Enclosure

Readings: Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum* and Abelard and Heloise, *Letters in The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin, 1974).

Theory: Roberta Gilchrist, "Nunneries in the Medieval Landscape" and "Symbolism and Seclusion" in *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Film: Clive Donner, *Stealing Heaven*.

Week 6: Disciplinary Discourses of Enclosure and Rebellion

Readings: *Ancrene Wisse, Hali Meidhad in Medieval English Prose for Women: From the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) (selections).

Theory: Mary Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus" and "External Boundaries" in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

Film: Franco Zeffirelli, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* (1973).

Week 7: Enclosures as Punishment or Escape

Readings: Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, *Dulcinius, Mary and Abraham, Thais* in *The Plays of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, trans. Katharina Wilson (New York: Garland, 1989).

Theory: Carol Christ, "The Meaning of the Goddess" in *Why Women Need the Goddess*; Pamela Berger, "Metamorphosis: From Goddess to Saint" in *Transformation of the Grain Protectress from Goddess to Saint* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

Film: Chris Newby, *Anchoress* (1993); Margaret Wescott, *Behind the Veil* (1984).

Week 8: Utopian Space/Dream Sequence

Readings: *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*; *The Life of Christina of Markyate*; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (selections).

Theory: Elizabeth Grosz, "Space, Time, and Bodies" in *Space, Time, and Perversion* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

Films: Ridley Scott, *Thelma and Louise* (1991); Volker Schlöndorff, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990).

Part III: Care of the Body

Week 9: Healing and Bewitching

Readings: Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae, Secrets of God*, trans. Sabina Flanagan (Boston: Shambhala, 1996); Pseudo-Albertus, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (New York: SUNY Press, 1992); *Malleus Maleficarum* (selections).

Theory: Elizabeth Grosz, "Body Images: Neurophysiology and Corporeal Mappings" in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

Film: Suzanne Schiffman, *The Sorceress (Le Moine et la Sorcière)*, 1987.

Week 10: Self-Immolation

Readings: Jacques de Vitry, *Life of Marie d'Oignies*; Angela of Foligno, *The Book of the Experience of the Truly Faithful* (selections), in *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

Theory: Kathleen Zuanich Young, "The Imperishable Virginity of St. Maria Goretti," in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), 279–82; Mary Potter Engel, "Historical Theology and Violence Against Women: Unearthing a Popular Tradition of Just Battery."

Film: Norman Jewison, *Agnes of God* (1985).

Part IV: Exploring the Imaginary

Week 11: Speaking the Body

Readings: Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996).

Theory: Hélène Cixous, "Sorceress and Hysteric" in *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Luce Irigaray, "La Mystérique," in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 195–202.

Film: Lars von Trier, *Breaking the Waves* (1996)

Week 12: Silencing the Female Author

Readings: Margarete Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*; Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *The Answer/La Respuesta*, trans. Electa Arendal and Amanda Powell (New York: Feminist Press, 1994).

Film: Maria Luisa Bemberg, *I, the Worst of All* (1990) ; Michael Tolkin, *The Rapture* (1993).

Theory: Laurie Finke, "The Grotesque Mystical Body: Representing the Woman Writer" in *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Weeks 13–14: Class Presentations

Week 15: Conclusions; Research Paper Due

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GENDER ISSUES IN THE ART OF THE MIDDLE AGES

In the spring of 1997 I designed and taught a class entitled "Gender Issues in the Art of the Middle Ages" for the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program at New York University. Although much of the class was devoted to examining images of women in medieval art and the social and ideological implications of such images, the focus was on "gender" as opposed to "women." As I have heard others say, it is difficult to study women without also studying men, and I wanted to examine gender as a cultural construct and not as a biological given.

Through a study of manuscripts, ivories, sculpture and stained glass mostly from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, we examined the way medieval art both reflects and helps construct ideologies of gender. Rather than using chronology or media as a method of organization, I focused on a theme for each class. These