

defined by the more than century-long international history of the feminist movement.
I haven't changed my mind.

Sincerely,
Sheila Delany

Works referred to

Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (eds). *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994. Reviewed by Ruth Evans in *MFN* 18 (Fall, 1994), 28-31.

Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (eds). *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: the Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Sheila Delany. *Writing Woman: Women Writers and Women in Literature, Medieval to Modern*. New York: Schocken, 1983. Chapter 1.

Letter to *MFN*

Men's Place in Women's Studies?

The fall 1994 issue of *MFN* carries a note from Elaine Tuttle Hansen announcing that all four of the sessions proposed by the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship had been accepted for the 1995 Kalamazoo program. Clearly, good news. And yet, news with a possibly disquieting aspect. The four panels involved 18 participants; of these only one (Glenn Burger, on the roundtable, "Feminists in Dialogue") was a man.¹

The heavily skewed gender composition of the 1995 *MFN* panels lead me to raise the question of what role men have played, are now playing and will (continue to?) play in the future of medieval women's studies. I raise these questions, and offer my observations, as a social historian and presumably as a friend of women's studies. If my primary concern centers on my own discipline, I would like to extend my suggestions, along with the data presented below, in a wider arc so that my comments extend beyond history to other fields within women's studies and medieval studies and to the current and growing range of scholarly orientations regarding gender, sexuality, and feminism.

I presented a short paper on these questions at a SUNY Binghamton conference in 1993. For that I did a quick analysis of some WMU (Kalamazoo Conference) programs since 1980. I looked at the composition of panels that clearly touched some aspect of women's (or feminist) studies and at the individual papers on women's studies or feminist topics that were included in non-specific or general sessions. My findings revealed that since 1980 (the first conference for which I tallied the data) men have played a very reasonable role in the "foregrounding" of medieval women's studies. My tally also indicated that the supposed prominence or even domination of women's studies—as is often alleged by those unsympathetic to the field and concerned to boost a contrary political agenda—is hardly supported by simple counting.

Table I shows the number of panels that focused on women's studies in 1980, 1986,

1993, and 1995, as well as the female/male composition of the panels. The panels I considered relevant turned out to represent but 13% of those offered at the 1995 conference and 14% of those from 1993; they had been a much smaller proportion of the smaller conferences of 1980 and 1986. Furthermore—and of particular interest here—we see that most of the panels of interest were “integrated” in terms of the gender of the participants. Women-only panels comprised around one-fourth of those that I have included in this count, though for the 1995 conference they seem to make about half the total—the highest figure yet attained.

Nor does the picture change dramatically when the tally switches to that of single papers (Table II) presented at the conferences but not in sessions focused primarily on women’s studies. Not such a huge number of papers at that, and with men offering almost half of the women’s history and/or women’s studies papers, though here too the male contribution in these “bullet” talks was diminishing a good bit by 1993 and has declined almost to invisibility by 1995. So in crude quantitative terms the growing prominence of women’s history and women’s studies, at the major annual gathering of our profession, has rested to a noticeable degree on the work of men. Granted, the counting of papers offers but limited insight, and the tally has skirted questions about topics, fields and even (because of the use of initials and the vagaries of first names) individuals. In addition, a mere counting of sessions and of participants says nothing of the dynamics behind the growth of a field; of intellectual discourse, of mentoring and role modeling, or of changes within the disciplines from socially-and empirically-based work to the growing emphasis on theory, gender studies, or the march of textuality and linguistic analysis from its first home in literature towards the realms of history, religion, art, and philosophy.

Also omitted from my considerations (and not readily knowable, for the most part) is whether the panels were sponsored ones or whether they came about by virtue of scholarly or WMU administrative clustering. Panels offered by the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship and by TEAMS often arise out of suggestions—made through the mails or on the floor (in the previous year)—regarding what might be of interest the next year. Accordingly, panels and panelists presented in year X-plus-one rests to a considerable extent upon the contributions of those who chose to speak up in year X. Attending a session and volunteering for a future one are among the critical factors in determining who talks about what. This key factor is not reflected in a statistical approach to the presentation of scholarship. Consequently the apparent if not drastic diminution of male roles at Kalamazoo may reflect less vocal male participation from the floor, rather than the emergence of any policy that militates for the exclusion or the limitations of men’s roles, or of a self-fulfilling argument that holds that men are not (any longer?) concerned with such areas of research.

This question of who sets the panels leads us to take a comparative look at the most recent Berkshire Conference. At the 1993 Berks six of the ten medieval panels were composed solely of women. This proportion is much in line with Kalamazoo, and though we must worry about the relative decline in medieval panels in overall terms (perhaps because JoAnn McNamara has left the program committee), at least the gender composition has not altered very much for those who were scheduled. However, the three medieval workshops or roundtables at the Berks were composed solely of women. And since these are likely to be the sessions at which the future of the field is discussed,

new kinds of work enjoined, new syntheses suggested, political guidelines (and battle lines) drawn, and future panels broached and organized, the absence of men on such sessions is something we should take note of. Judith Bennett has told me that previous guidelines for the Berks had urged male participation in the panels, but in 1993 the decision was simply to go with the best presentations, regardless of gender of presenter.

Beyond drawing attention to the data and to the recent but hardly alarming or dramatic drift away from male involvement, I have no simple advice to offer regarding the future of medieval women's studies or of men's roles in that future. This is an unsolicited letter, not a keynote address. Obviously a man working in women's social history is likely to favor an integrationist approach; affirmative action and equal opportunity seem to offer comfortable parallels. This man (such as myself) is also likely to favor mainstreaming women's studies, just as he should be ready to remind skeptical colleagues (mostly but not exclusively male) of how quickly ground once deemed to be safely won now turns out to be in need of constant defense. The elections of November 1994 warn us that if the NEA and the NEH and *Roe vs. Wade* are vulnerable, how precarious must be the state of women's history and women's studies. We have little reason to be confident that the presence and promotion of an increasing number of women in the academy are phenomena (or institutions) we can take for granted.

Within that part of the academic space that we do control, is there to be a search for common ground regarding feminist and gender scholarship, and if so, where will we find it? Are different approaches to gender, to theory, and to such questions as "how to teach" women's studies, likely to open a divide within as well as between the disciplines? And to what extent will such gaps and divergences be along sex/gender lines? After all, they can just as well run along old/young and left/right and various dichotomies and fault lines. I imagine that more women than men will find gender and gender theory a congenial field to teach and to research, but this will probably be a matter of degree, not of categorical segregation. Is teaching "the history of western misogyny"—as I suspect I do to a considerable extent—going to be a man's middle ground, or perhaps just that of an aging social historian? In a search for a way of presenting varieties of "lived experience" to my students I know that I am always likely to devote more time to wills and testaments, to marriage vows and the liturgy, and to documents of economic exchange and contract than I do to spirituality and the eccentric voices of the mystics, be they male or female. But how much of this is a disciplinary and political choice, and how much a personal choice? In many ways it is an extension of choices I made years ago regarding voice and varieties of experience, choices made at a time when our courses tended to accept the male voice as the norm.

I think it is difficult to dispute the proposition that men and women see the world differently, even when they struggle to formulate and to share a common political imperative. Judith Bennett says that even the most sympathetic men seem to drift, in their historical analysis, more toward "an ameliorating view of patriarchal dominance" than do (some) women who study the same social and behavioral framework. Again, I see little in this reflection with which I would quarrel, and I think we can take this comment and enlarge it to cover a great many aspects of our interpretative frameworks. Perhaps this is just the friendly and familiar face of diversity. But our own answer, merely to bring such knotty issues into the light of day, is part of the good fight. Whether our differences of interpretation and intellectual inclination are essentialist, or culturally

implanted, or status-defensive, they are likely to persist. On the other hand we should not make too much of them; they are only some among many. At least we should try to weigh them against the many other differences and distinctions that we either take for granted or that we are reluctant to bring into our academic dialogue; differences of regionalism, of disciplinary loyalty and training, of personal life choices that affect our teaching and our research, of class and race and ethnicity, among others. It is hardly a radical conclusion to say that women and men should keep talking to each other about the future of women's studies. This future may or may not be uncertain. Regardless, the cooperation of and the discourse between allies is one step that can build a united front.

Joel T. Rosenthal, State University of New York at Stony Brook

1. In preparing these comments I receive helpful suggestions from Judith Bennett and E. Jane Burns and I acknowledge their encouragement. Needless to say, they are in no way responsible for the opinions offered here.

Table I: Kalamazoo Sessions/Panels in Women's History and Women's Studies - by

Sex of Panel Participants

Conference (and sessions)	Women-only panels	Women & men on panel	Total
1980 (205)	3	3	6
1986 (297)	6	12	18
1993 (391)	15	40	55
1995 (447)	28	29	57
Totals	52	83	135

Table II: Single Papers (Within General Sessions) relating to Women's History and Women's Studies, by Sex of Presenter

Conference	Papers by women	Papers by men	Total
1980	6	4	10
1986	12	6	18
1993	28	11	39
1995	30	5	35
Totals	76	26	102