

of medieval scholarship by feminists. One questioner, for example, asked me to work through Carolyn Dinshaw's exploration of the ways E. Talbot Donaldson and D.W. Robertson exemplify "reading like a man" in their respective analyses of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Answering the question was made both easier and more complex by my knowledge of the examiner's feminism. I knew we wouldn't become embroiled in an argument over the presence of sexism in patristic and humanist criticism. But because the examiner regarded feminist concerns as something more than reductive conclusions, he posited Dinshaw's argument as a feminist reading rather than the feminist reading. The question construed Dinshaw's work not as dogma to be accepted uncritically, but as an influential voice with whom I should enter into dialogue.

"Dialogue," no doubt, entails disagreement as well as concord; indeed, there was plenty of debate about critics and texts during the exam. The committee granted me nothing more (and nothing less) than the opportunity to work through gender inequality's manifestations within medieval texts and medievalist scholarship. The "feminist approach" practiced by my examiners was just that—a means of access not just into medieval literature, but into academic conversation in general.

*Moira Fitzgibbons, Rutgers University*

## PAST WATCHFUL DRAGONS?: THOUGHTS ON THE MED-FEM JOB MARKET

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In the Fall issue of the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*, Norris Lacy described, with a certain sympathy, what he termed the "real difficulty" for those combining training in Medieval Studies with any secondary specialization like feminist theory. He wrote, "It is hard enough just to become a good medievalist, and far harder to combine medieval studies with any other specialization" (10). His words chilled me as I prepared for my first try at the Medieval Studies job market. As a doctoral candidate in English literature with a certificate of emphasis from our program in Women's Studies, and a methodological sub-specialization in Cultural Studies, I worried that the strange combination of my credentials might appear before a search committee as a compromise to my "excellence." Yet, as I scanned the MLA Job List, I was heartened by a number of positions advertised in "medieval cultural studies" or that indicated a preference for medievalists with specialization in gender and sexuality or critical theory.

And now on the heels of a successful job search, I can happily report that my credentials proved to be an asset rather than a liability "on the market." A good number of institutions pursued my candidacy not despite but because of my particular combination of interests. In a number of interviews and campus visits, I found not suspicion so much as interest in and curiosity about my work; scholars working in a variety of periods engaged me in conversation about my methodological concerns and the ways I worked to combine the historical particularities of my period with insights from critical theory. The job search confirmed my sense that Medieval Studies and feminist

analysis do not work at cross purposes. Indeed, it reminded me that the long tradition of interdisciplinarity and historicism of Medieval Studies—and the crucial work of medieval scholars working on gender and culture—means that our discipline is poised to offer Cultural Studies, a field which likewise combines critical theory with an analysis of historical and sociological particularities, a series of useful methodologies. And this, I think, points to the strengths medievalists doing Cultural Studies and gender analysis offer to their potential students as well as their future colleagues.

I would agree, moreover, with David Aers' recent assertion that "the absence of attention to gender can actually distort even the most committedly historicist...investigation" (x). The analytical technologies which propel gender analysis can produce more complicated and satisfying accounts of medieval culture. From this view, skills in the analysis of gender constitute not an ancillary specialization, or an inessential addition to a "core list" of skills required of medieval scholars, but a crucially useful instrument in our historicist repertoire.

Any opposition between "theory" and "medievalist method" does not, thus, do justice to the productive ways theory has invigorated philological, textual, or historicist work; nor does it account for the incisive particularities historical analysis can bring to theoretical debates. And these skills, from my admittedly limited experience, are valued by certain search committees. My training in gender analysis provided me with a way to describe the epistemological presuppositions of my work. It enabled productive conversations about method and its consequences; it provided me with a way to think about categories of "difference" and "sameness," or "core" and "periphery," categories which pertain to current debates about Medieval Studies itself. My developing skills in gender analysis also helped me aim at crafting a methodological mutuality: I am as interested in how theoretical texts can enliven my study of medieval culture as I am in what medieval texts can offer to feminist analysis. Just as gender theory continues to help us analyze the stakes in medieval representations of masculinities and feminities, for example, scholarly accounts of women in the Middle Ages can offer a caution to Women's Studies programs which sometimes forget that gender and power had a history (one of resistances as well as oppressions) long before feminism's "first wave."

Graduate student medievalists in the humanities do not fail to develop their skills in paleography or codicology or even philology because of an inherent lack of desire or because they spend too much time engaged in "other" preoccupations. My interest in feminist analysis has fueled a desire to gain facility with more languages, and access to archives, manuscripts and codices. Yet my efforts have been thwarted, at times by my graduate student status and at others by financial difficulties. So I must conclude that questions of economy and access are implicated in any apparent lack of graduate student proficiency in philology, languages, paleography, codicology. For as much as those "core" skills might still be said to constitute the "watchful dragons" of medieval studies (separating, as it were, the "men" from the "boys") they also involve what Pierre Bourdieu called cultural capital. Those skills, those archives, and those manuscripts are thus important to my work in feminist Medieval Studies not because mastering them testifies to my "excellence" as a medievalist, but because the kind of revisionary work to which I am committed requires them.

Finally, I think there may well be a danger in overemphasizing the risks of employability for graduate students working in medieval feminist studies. To view

feminist concerns as only a liability on the job market is to forget (or, at least, I think, to underestimate) the decades of work done by medieval feminist scholars in various academic departments and on various search committees. We would be better served, I think, by taking our hope and our inspiration from their efforts. And to give up our feminist studies until we have “mastered” all the skills we need (when, after all, will that day arrive?) means our relation to the past comes at a cost to our critical acuity, exchanging the politics of our modernity for what comes to stand for a scholarly heroism. And of course, as feminist Medieval Studies has shown us, heroism itself has long been a gendered category.

*Patricia C. Ingham, University of California, Santa Barbara*

ON FEMINISM AND MEDIEVALISM:  
MUSINGS FROM A PRONE POSITION

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I don't have much opportunity for reflection in the ordinary way of things. Usually I'm too busy fulfilling other obligations to concentrate on this—arguably most important—one. So I suppose I'm grateful, in a way, for my recent enforced leisure. I've been slowly recuperating from a neck injury I suffered last summer, unable to read or use the computer for more than a few hours a day. In fact, most of my time for the last ten months has been spent lying flat on my back, staring at the ceiling, and thinking. And one of the things I've been thinking about is a set of problems that used to trouble me deeply when I was in graduate school, but which I've been too preoccupied to consider since I finished my Ph.D. and began teaching.

How can we, as feminists, justify our medievalism? Why, exactly, are we so preoccupied with medieval mystics, romances, and manuscript illumination? Does our poking around in the minutiae of medieval life and culture do anything to alleviate oppression and improve the situation of women in the modern world? Could it actually be making the situation worse, by draining energy from other activities? And finally, even if we can justify devoting our time and energy and love to the study of the Middle Ages, how should we—as feminists—be going about it?

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There are many sound intellectual reasons for studying the Middle Ages, but personally, I don't believe that anyone devotes her life to such a peculiar career as that of medievalist solely out of rational concerns. So let me speculate, in a ridiculously superficial manner, about the emotional underpinnings of medievalism—at least as it exists in North America in the late twentieth century. I seem to detect in myself and many of my colleagues, as well as in the more eager undergraduates in my classes (the medievalists of the future), a kind of complex nostalgia for the Middle Ages—a romantic attachment to certain aspects of medieval life combined with a fascinated horror of other aspects of that life. What lies behind this nostalgia, I suspect, is the perception (probably