

47. The curious character of Galehaut in the prose *Lancelot*, friend and erotic mediator, is here noteworthy. Christiane Marchello-Nizia, "Amour courtois, société masculine et figures du pouvoir," *Annales ESC* 36 (1981): 969-82, reveals Galehaut to be a central participant in the homosocial triangulation of desire recounted in the prose *Lancelot* by virtue of his ambiguous friendship with Lancelot. He is also one of the major elements used by Gaston Paris in order to demonstrate the prose work's derivative status. The effacement of a character revealing the true nature of triangulated courtly desire would, it seems, be necessary for the articulation of it as an idealizing passion.

48. Cf. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987).

Medievalism and the Modernist Temper.  
Ed. R. Howard Bloch; Stephen G. Nichols;  
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

## EIGHT

### Feminism and the Discipline of Old French Studies: *Une Bele Disjointure*

E. Jane Burns, Sarah Kay, Roberta L. Krueger,  
and Helen Solterer

In raising the question of the gender of the producers of knowledge, women's studies always involves a radical questioning of the conditions of the production and dissemination of knowledge, of the constitution of the disciplines, of the hierarchical ordering of the faculties within the institution.

—Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism Which Is Not One"

FEMINIST CRITICISM as it is practiced in our current moment entails more than the empirical study of "women" or even of *woman*. It involves calling into question one's own critical practice, one's sexual and gender identity, one's relationship to authority and to mastery, as we shall discuss in the last section of this essay. Feminist studies entail, today as much as ever, taking the risk of bringing together both the personal and the professional.

For the medievalist, this involves a radical critical investigation of both the object of study in the past and of the critic's textual and professional enterprise. The gesture is a vertiginous one: the feminist writes from a destabilized position in the present to confront a *differ-*ent form of instability and *mouvance* in the past. Not wanting to lose sight of the women whose bodies, experiences, and actions were the sites of a historical difference, yet wary of essentializing that experi-

ence, the feminist medievalist does not abandon history but problematizes it, as she does her own moment in the present.

This collaborative study was prompted by an invitation from the editors to one of us to contribute a piece on feminism and medieval literature to a volume that would fill the need for a "sustained external history of the various disciplines of medieval studies." It evolved into a project by four of us corresponding between the United States and Europe on questions raised by the intersection of feminism and Old French studies. In so responding to the project of this volume, we have confronted several paradoxes and problems whose contours have shaped our enterprise. The first is the paradox of collaborative writing, a process where personal voices overlap and sometimes conflict to form a collective statement. The four sections that follow reflect individual differences in specialization, background, academic culture, and generation, but they also reflect the communal nature of our task.<sup>1</sup> We have written this essay together and in different voices.

The second problem we encountered was in responding to a call for an "external" history of feminism and medieval studies. The fields of women's studies and of feminist criticism have evolved in such a variety of directions, and with such amplitude, that it would be impossible to offer a full account of them. Suffice it to say that there is not one feminist "theory," but a plurality of feminist theories, wherein the politics of subject and gender identity, race, class, sexuality, and the body are hotly contested.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps more important, our position as critics who are engaged in an ongoing dialogue between feminism and medieval studies has made it difficult for us to perceive their history from outside the field. No history can ever be "external" in the sense of being "objective," and we are wary of the seemingly disengaged stance that a synthetic "survey" of the field of medieval women's studies could imply. Nor do we wish to reify the boundaries of an interrogatory, interdisciplinary discipline. Rather than attempt a definitive "external history," we offer a provisional and engaged account of recent queries and of our ongoing investigation.

Finally, in writing this chapter we have confronted the contradictions of our own position as feminist medievalist scholars.<sup>3</sup> The medieval feminist critic finds herself in a position like that of the feminist reader described by Diana Fuss who reads from a multiplicity of unstable subject-positions.<sup>4</sup> We encounter not only the shifting positions of our contemporary subjectivities, but also the elusiveness of

textuality and identity in the past. When we turn to feminist criticism, we find intense disagreement over the notion of female difference and the category of "woman."<sup>5</sup> When we investigate the medieval text, we find not the stable presence of fixed documents but a textual tradition characterized by variants and *mouvance*.<sup>6</sup> The search for "medieval women" turns out to be a tricky enterprise, plagued by the perils of essentializing "woman" and of idealizing our foremothers as powerful or of portraying them as victims.<sup>7</sup> We also face resistance within the institution of medieval studies, as traditionally constituted, where any avowedly contemporary theoretical or political position embraced by the critic is frequently rejected as "anachronistic."<sup>8</sup> From this last perspective, the feminist medievalist is something of an oxymoron, a scholar at odds with her discipline.

Viewed from the more open perspective of interdisciplinary women's studies, the feminist medievalist moves continually *between* instabilities in the past and present, working against traditional categories of knowledge even as she employs her disciplinary training.<sup>9</sup> Ideally, the enterprise involves a creative questioning of the ways in which gender structures not only medieval thought in the past but also the discipline of medieval studies in the present. As feminist medievalists, we begin by acknowledging the divided nature of our critical identities and our conflicted, yet willingly embraced relationships to critical enterprises such as the one taken up by this volume.

The issue of feminism and Old French studies has shaped itself in our discussions as questions rather than answers, and it is around those questions that we have chosen to construct our collaborative work. We begin by attempting to situate medieval women's studies in the current critical moment, showing how the history of women in Old French studies is a history of presence through absence, of standing between different literary modes and categories of academic discourse. Emphasizing the ambiguous position of the feminist medievalist, this section will raise the question, "What is the place of women in the discipline of Old French studies?"

Then, taking epic and lyric texts as examples, the next two sections will reconceptualize the problem of woman as a sign and as a textual voice within the *chanson de geste* and the *chanson de femme*. They will emphasize how traditional genre studies have either marginalized women's concerns, as in the epic, or misapprehended the textual feminine, as in the lyric. Stressing the complex interrelation between feminine representation and female identity, these sections

will ask in a variety of ways, "where is the female subject in Old French studies?"

Finally, returning to a self-critical mode, we shall reflect on what is at stake in the mastery of medieval studies for the female critic and will raise the inevitable question of how essays like this one can avoid imposing authority even as they engage in scholarly debate.

#### WOMEN AND THE DISCIPLINE OF OLD FRENCH STUDIES

In choosing not to privilege the "objective history" of feminism and medieval studies, we by no means imply that women have no history in the discipline. Women have a history first of all as scholars who have made substantial contributions to the field from the beginning of the century. Not surprisingly, even before women's studies militated for researching women's history and literary roles, many early works on Old French literature were devoted to women's issues. Such studies fueled a dialogue about authors like Christine de Pisan, and provided precious documentation about women in literary history.<sup>10</sup>

More recently female scholars in the United States, Britain, and France whose work has been influential in their respective fields have served as important professional examples to younger scholars. While many of these women may not tag their critical approach as feminist (though some indeed do), they have extended to the upcoming generation an intellectual generosity as impressive as their scholarship, sharing linguistic skills, erudition, and tactical support.

It would be dangerous, however, to paint too rosy a picture of a "female medievalist network" and its status within medieval studies, for indeed each of us has a more or less extensive anecdotal history of isolation, marginalization, or trivialization of our concerns, and in extreme cases, even harassment within the academy.<sup>11</sup> The editorial boards of the major medieval journals in France, Britain, and the United States are still predominantly in male hands.<sup>12</sup> Although these journals now publish an increasing number of studies by and about women, their philological and historical bias often precludes theoretical feminist approaches.<sup>13</sup>

Journals most receptive to publishing medieval feminist research over the last ten years have remained, generally, outside the medieval pale.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, American university presses, realizing the audience that exists for feminist scholarship in all fields of the humanities and social sciences, have been quicker than specialized journals to

promote the work of feminist medievalists.<sup>15</sup> Some of the most exciting recent work has emerged at conferences and in special sessions devoted to the topic of women in the Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup> An informal newsletter exchanged among medieval colleagues to share feminist research interests has an extensive membership of women and men who debate gender issues.<sup>17</sup>

As more female medievalists are hired, promoted, and tenured, and as they assume increased responsibility for personnel and curricular policy, as well as for publishing, feminists will be challenged to maintain the edge of marginality and nonauthoritarianism that has sparked feminist research from the beginning. There is also the danger that a field defined primarily by white, middle-class academic women to reflect their interest will overlook the differences between women, and neglect the issues of race and class (more on this later).<sup>18</sup> Medieval feminism is not immune to the elitism of medieval studies. As this thumbnail sketch suggests, the history of women in medieval studies cannot be divorced from the problems of feminist identity, which are the chief concerns of this chapter.

Women also have a history in medievalism in the sense that the "woman question" has been at the center of the debate about courtly literature and misogyny ever since Gaston Paris first defined the notion of *amour courtois* in 1883. Reading courtly narrative as a refined idealization of the lady, he saw her empowered with a moral and sexual superiority over the knight.<sup>19</sup> Paris's notion of female empowerment through love represents a late-nineteenth-century ideal of femininity rather than the historical reality of women in either the twelfth or the nineteenth century. In both periods, an ideal of female superiority obscures a profound cultural controversy about woman's social place. For example, Paris's formulations offer striking parallels with Freud's fears about the decline of the feminine ideal in the wake of social legislation for women, reservations expressed in the same year (1883) in a letter to his fiancée, Martha Bernays. As Sarah Kofman has shown, Freud accepts reform as inevitable, yet wants to maintain, as she translates, "la chose la plus délicieuse que le monde ait à nous offrir, notre idéal de la féminité."<sup>20</sup> Freud's justification for the legal status quo for women reads like a portrait of the courtly couple as envisaged by Paris: "Bien qu'elle ne puisse voter et n'ait pas de capacité juridique, toute jeune fille dont un homme baise la main et pour l'amour de qui il est prêt à tous les risques, aurait pu lui en remontrer" (268). If "courtly love" as a concept was invented in the

late nineteenth century, it was, at least in part, because the notion of a disenfranchised woman empowered by male mystification corresponded so well to the desires of modern men.

This is not to say that women were not an important concern of early scholarship in romance, epic, lyric, and didactic literature, for they often were.<sup>21</sup> But studies in the first half of this century rarely criticized the courtly ideal as it applied to women by revealing the strategies of containment that were at play.<sup>22</sup> The unquestioned acceptance of a late-nineteenth-century masculine definition of "feminine nature" in scholarship by both men and women has been, until very recently, a powerful impediment to the understanding of the historical role of women in the Middle Ages.

With the advent of women's studies in the 1970s, there has been a gradual but significant reconceptualization of the "woman question." Beginning with the ideas that textual inscription in the Middle Ages have more to do with the masculine consciousness that produced them than with the female reality they purport to describe, scholars began to read "woman" in the text as a textual sign rather than a historical entity.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, there developed a marked, if largely unarticulated, division about what the relation of woman as sign might be to the "real" women who would have read, commissioned, and in some cases written those texts. Some scholars persisted in reading women's roles or feminine voices as reflections, however refracted or attenuated, of historical reality.<sup>24</sup> With the appearance of historical studies about women of different periods, classes, and geographic regions, however, our sense of *who* "medieval women" were has become infinitely more complex and nuanced.<sup>25</sup>

At the other extreme from historical work are studies of Lacanian or poststructuralist bent which would read the "textual feminine" as a space within language unrelated to the biological sex of the author.<sup>26</sup> Those adopting a more avowedly feminist methodology struggle to reconcile the constructed nature of gender identities in texts with the material realities of female experience, as evidenced by the female body<sup>27</sup> or the historical female audience.<sup>28</sup> Tracking a course between, on the one side, naive historicism and essentialism that would reify either "women" or "woman" and, on the other, a masculine psychocriticism that erases historical women from the picture altogether, these scholars pursue the elusive question of the female subject, to which we shall return below. For feminists, the "woman question" has become a crisis of identities in which both critic and text are implicated.

Finally, women have played a role in medieval literary history as authors whose contributions to canonical and noncanonical genres have at last been given their due, in some cases after centuries of benign or disdainful neglect. Editions, critical monographs, and anthologies of women writers continue to emerge.<sup>29</sup> Recent interest in Marie de France or the *trobairitz* rivals that of Chrétien de Troyes for the twelfth century;<sup>30</sup> Christine de Pisan has achieved a stature as poet moralist that far exceeds that of her male contemporaries.<sup>31</sup> But no less the object of scrutiny are noncanonical writers such as mystics and letter writers, and the more elusive voices of other "women's poems," which we will examine in a moment.<sup>32</sup> At the current stage of feminist investigation, however, the "recanonization" of women writers who have suffered neglect is not, in itself, enough. With each woman writer who is resurrected as an *object* of study, female subjectivity, femininity, and the subject's relationship to history and class must be problematized.<sup>33</sup>

As the once marginalized question of "la femme médiévale" becomes a surprisingly fashionable topic, feminist academics who once fought to gain acceptance for their approach in a more hostile climate, and for whom women's studies is a vocation reflecting personal and political struggle, find themselves in the company of male scholars who eagerly pursue what is for them a "new" subject, often without the self-questioning and sense of struggle that accompanies feminist research. There is inevitable tension over the question of men's place in the feminist arena, arising in part from the suspicion that male scholarship on the "woman question," despite its interest or validity, might represent male academic appropriation in another guise.<sup>34</sup> The act of reading for the textual feminine, for example, can be taken up more readily and less problematically by male critics who do not experience the world through a female body. The question that emerges from such a conflict is not whether men can or should study women in the Middle Ages—surely no one would lament valid contributions to a field so long overlooked—but "what constitutes feminist research?"

Up until now, the study of women in the Middle Ages has borrowed much from feminist theory but given little of *theoretical* novelty in return. What medievalists can contribute to feminist studies is perhaps not a theory but a *practice*: a historical and material feminism grounded in the differences of the past as well as the uncertainties of the present. Let us offer by way of example two strategies, among many possible ones, of reading "for the feminine" in Old French

literature. We have chosen the highly male-centered *chanson de geste* and the reputedly female-centered *chanson de femme* as two potentially fruitful arenas for investigating the problems of representation and interpretation that confront the medieval feminist *lectrice*.<sup>35</sup> Both readings address, if in very different ways, the issue of female subjectivity in its broadest sense, asking how the female subject has been constructed both by the texts that medievalists read and the politics of the profession. How, historically, have female critics, whether feminist or not, tended to read epic narrative differently from their male counterparts, thereby creating a kind of subculture of epic studies, a discipline within the officially recognized "discipline?" For the Old French *chanson de femme* we ask where one can reasonably locate the thirteenth-century woman—whether historical or literary—in songs traditionally attributed to female singers/composers.

#### NOT MUCH OF A SUBJECT: WOMEN IN THE CHANSON DE GESTE

Car au bien et au mal doit on son pere amer

—*Les Quatre Fils Aymon*, ed. F. Castets, v. 3540

Entendez que le moi idéal lui-même n'est pas exempt d'ambivalence, mais que celle-ci doit viser à "reproduire et conserver le caractère du père"; elle lui aurait d'ailleurs emprunté sa "force."

Voilà encore des modalités d'élaboration du surmoi peu adéquates à la formation de la "féminité."

—Luce Irigaray, *Spéculum de l'autre femme*

Chansons de geste often tell of the success and longevity of fathers, and the suffering and sacrifices of sons; perhaps that is why they enjoyed the highest prestige among the founding fathers of medieval studies, who all contributed substantial volumes elucidating the origins, and thereby (in their terms) the significance, of these powerful and violent poems.<sup>36</sup> Today *chanson de geste* studies remain a largely male preserve. It is very striking to what extent many *Roland* specialists in particular identify with the figures in the texts they study.<sup>37</sup> A position of implicit *parti pris* in favor of epic values is perceptible even in the most sophisticated writing on the *Roland* by male critics.<sup>38</sup> When they write about society, these men mean Frankish, aristocratic, male society. A recent book on the William cycle treats women characters quite separately from the depiction of "society," under the heading of "romance influence."<sup>39</sup> With certain notable exceptions,<sup>40</sup>

the ideas of "history," "ideology," and "representation" are generally unsophisticated in epic scholarship. The question of origins may have dropped from the agenda, but the sense of a transparent relation between textual representation and historical "original" is often perceptible. To this extent, epic studies, though less authoritative than in the days of the founding fathers, are still patriarchal in their inspiration.

Nevertheless, the contribution of women scholars has been distinguished. It is significant that women have often chosen to devote themselves not to the *Roland*, where masculine ideology tends to predominate, but to the texts where it is more obviously in trouble, notably the epics of revolt. Rita Lejeune has studied the legends of Ogier the Dane; Mary Hackett devoted her life to *Girart de Roussillon*, which also forms the object of the longest and best essay in Micheline de Combarieu's *thèse d'état*; Jessie Crosland translated the first part of *Raoul de Cambrai*, and Pauline Matarasso wrote a book about it; scholarship on the Loheren cycle is dominated by women, both as editors and critics.<sup>41</sup>

These women might not all call themselves feminists, yet their work has kept alive alternatives to a univocal heroic ideal, and has drawn critical attention to the violence and disruptiveness of these poems. In the introduction to her translation of *Raoul*, for example, Jessie Crosland comments on the "gentler character" of Bernier and the "ideal of restraint" with which, through him, the poet counters the "brutality and lawlessness of the times" (viii-ix). In *The Old French Epic*,<sup>42</sup> Crosland links Bernier's greater reasonableness with his outrage at the death of his mother, Marsent, and his defense of her against Raoul's vilification (119). Such outrage at the treatment of women characters expressed by epic "heroes" can provide women readers with a useful point of leverage against the purported univocality of epic representation.

Marsent is a case in point. The text is explicit about her subjection, as a woman, to the degradation of powerful men:

"Sire R[aous], a celer nel vos qier,  
ma mere fu fille a un chevalier—  
toute Baviere avoit a justicier.  
Preé[e] en fu par son grant destorbier;  
en cele terre ot un noble guerier,  
qi l'espousa a honor de mostier.  
Devant le roi qi France a a baillier  
ocist deus princes a l'espee d'acier:

grant fu la guere, si ne pot apaissier.  
 En Espolice s'en ala a Gaifier,  
 vit le pseudoume, cel retint volentier;  
 en ceste terre ne vost puis repair[i]e[r],  
 toi ne autrui ne daigna ainc proier.

LXXXII

"Dont fu ma mere soufraitouse d'amis.  
 Il n'ot si bele en quarante païs—  
 Y[bers] mes peres qi molt par est gentix  
 la prist par force, si con je ai apris;  
 n'en fist pas nocés, itant vos en devis.

LXXXIII

"Sire R[aous]," l'enfes B[erniers] dist,  
 "Y[bers] mes peres par sa force la prist  
 Je ne dis pas qe nocés en feïst.  
 Par sa richese dedens son lit la mist,  
 toz ses talans et ces voloïrs en fist—  
 et qant il vost autre feme reïst.  
 Doner li vost Joïfroi, mais ne li sist;  
 nonne devint, le millor en eslist.

LXXXIV

"Sir R[aous], a tort faites et pechié.  
 Ma mere as arce dont j'a[i] le quer irié—  
 Dex me laïst vivre tant q'en soie vengiés!"

["My lord Raoul, these are the facts; my mother was the daughter of a knight who ruled the whole of Bavaria, [but] she was snatched away from there, to her own lasting harm. There was a well-born knight in the region who married her with full religious honours. In the presence of the king of France he killed two princes with his steel sword: terrible warfare resulted which could not be stilled. He went off to Gaifier in Spoleto who recognized him as a valiant man and was glad to retain him; after that, he had no desire to come back to our country, he never condescended to beg favors of you or anyone.

"Thereafter my mother was friendless. She was the loveliest woman for forty countries—Ybert my father, who is a man of position, took her by force, so I learned; he didn't marry her, this much I grant you. "My lord Raoul," said young Bernier, "My father Ybert took her forcibly—I cannot say that he married her. Because of his powerful

position he got her into his bed and did all he wanted with her—then, when he chose, he took another wife. He wanted to make Geoffrey her husband, but that didn't suit her; she chose the better part and became a nun.

"My lord Raoul, what you are doing is wrong and sinful. You have burned my mother, at which my heart is sore—may God let me live long enough to get my revenge!"<sup>43</sup>

Pauline Matarasso's views on women characters do not always coincide with modern feminist thought, as when she remarks that Aalais, Raoul's mother, "est féminine encore par son manque de logique. Chez elle la logique est subordonnée aux sentiments" (235). Yet she responds at some length to the character of Marsent, commenting in terms similar to Crosland's on the narrative alignment of Marsent and Bernier (238–39). For both Crosland and Matarasso, the dominant values of aggression and acquisitiveness to which the text, despite the ambiguity attaching to Raoul's behavior, at least partially subscribes,<sup>44</sup> are undermined by a counterforce of restraint and gentleness displayed by Marsent and the son who defends her.

These women scholars are the mothers of more recent feminist work on the *chanson de geste*, although the scope of such work is limited by the prevailing tendencies of the discipline over the last decades. These have tended to fall into three main areas, of which the first two offer at best an unpropitious environment to feminist inquiry. Manuscript transmission and textual criticism is a domain largely ruled by "facts" that have little bearing on gender. A second area, interest in which was fueled by Rychner's epoch-making monograph,<sup>45</sup> is comprised of studies analyzing the formal properties of epic literature, in particular its adaptation to oral performance and recomposition. This field too has a strong commitment to the factual, often equated with the computable. Emphasis on the formula as the basic unit of epic composition has distracted attention from other features of rhetoric and has generally discouraged close reading, always such a powerful tool of feminist criticism.<sup>46</sup> A third group of critics has read the *chansons de geste* as fictional or historical representations. This third field is most amenable to feminist studies, as witness, for example, the pioneering monograph of Ellen Woods on *Aye d'Avignon*.<sup>47</sup>

In a striking revision of Crosland and Matarasso, Patricia Ståblein sees the plot of *Raoul* as caught between two "behavioral/emotional complexes: (1) violence and anger are consistently associated with

high energy activity, maleness, and violation of cultural rules . . . and are consistently opposed to (2) peace and love, linked in their turn with the acknowledgement of cultural rules, with passivity, and femaleness. . . . Women can and do act in the behavioral mode associated with maleness . . . but this occasional crossing over serves only to underline the division in the cultural system.<sup>48</sup> Her article goes on to chart the structure of the entire epic in terms of this opposition. Stäblein's formulation is more "feminist" than that of her predecessors, in that it explicitly genders the ideological tension exhibited by the poem, while simultaneously releasing gender from the anatomical sex of the characters.

It is possible to expand on Stäblein's analysis of dual narrativity in *Raoul* by seeing the text as a meeting place of many competing stories.<sup>49</sup> When a character (such as Marsent) is killed, she is eliminated from the story but not from the text because the shock of the violence done to her is remembered by other characters, or by the narrator/audience. Outrages committed are stored up as a source of potential narrative renewal. Because there is so much violence, and so many outrages, this store of latent counternarratives is enormously rich. The most obvious examples are provided by Raoul himself. The energy with which he abuses, injures, and slaughters creates a shadow world of potential textual material. His insults to his mother and Marsent, and his burning of the latter, exhibit a violent repression; and that which is repressed returns in a variety of forms. Alais's curse contributes to Raoul's death; the burning of Marsent leads to Bernier's reiterated calls for revenge, and eventual achievement of it; and Beatrice, Raoul's cousin whom Bernier marries, succeeds in evading successive attempts by men to coerce and oppress her, thus retrospectively vindicating her female predecessors whose attempts at self-determination exposed them to men's aggression.

Reading the chansons de geste as containing latent narratives that conduce to the undermining of a univocal, masculine ideology involves most obviously the third of the three areas of epic studies detailed above: that concerned with historical or fictional representation. But textual criticism and formal organization also have a part to play in this approach. In *Raoul de Cambrai*, the practice of self-commentary and self-ironization to which counternarrativity gives rise is inextricably bound up with the practice of continuation. This is particularly evident in the theme of the two companions: Raoul and Bernier are more strongly differentiated from each other as the poem progresses through its successive continuations, Bernier being used in

part as a site from which to criticize Raoul, and the delimitation of these continuations involves painstaking recourse to textual analysis.

A fine example of this kind of work is provided by the late Alison Goddard Elliott's study of *Girart de Vienne*<sup>50</sup>—itself an epic which, although carefully maintaining a foot in each of the three *gestes* that it is famous for delineating, devotes much of its plot to the revolt of the eponymous hero against his sovereign (as in the cognate *Girart de Roussillon*). Her article, drawing on a computerized concordance, analyzes the formulae and lexicon of the three parts that can be discerned in it and that apparently result from the addition, by Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, of an introductory (Part I) and a concluding section (Part III) to an older narrative (Part II), which he also to some extent reworked. Noting the greater frequency of formulae about concealment in I than in II, Goddard demonstrates that "Part I is a narrative of subterfuge and symbolic actions," whereas "Part II depicts the world of action in which physical prowess and valor are effective and respected. Values are black and white" (154–155). The third and concluding part, like Part I ascribed to Bertrand, is "closer to the ethos of I" and closes with the foreboding that "in the end, treachery and deceit will triumph" (155–156). The "monologism" associated with epic writing from the time the word was coined emerges from this study as characterizing the older part of the work alone; the late-twelfth-century continuations at either side of it are marked by the duality to which deceit gives rise. The martial is subordinated to the verbal, and a tissue of language replaces direct action. Whereas Aude, the chief feminine protagonist of Part II, is able to act alongside Roland, Charlemagne's queen, instigator of much of the plot of Part I, behaves as though deeds had no reality until clothed in language and assumes the primacy of calculation and deception (155).

Women characters in the later epic, such as Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube's continuations, or *Raoul de Cambrai*, tend, therefore, to be a source of narrative plurality for one of two reasons. Either they instigate deception, or more commonly they found a critique of violence and abuse through their role as victims. They may therefore be seen as analogous to authors in their ability to devise stratagems, and as analogous to readers in their capacity to be exposed to, and eventually criticize, the narrative.<sup>51</sup> Either way they rarely enjoy narrative dominance for long. Women's marginality to the masculine world of the chanson de geste means that they are not fully empowered as subjects. What of the status, by comparison, of the women's voices that hold sway in the chanson de femme?

SUBJECT TO DEBATE: WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE  
CHANSON DE FEMME

Dex, tant est douz li nons d'amors:  
[ja n'en cuidai sentir dolors].

A ces paroles et a ceste raison,  
li siens amis entra en la maison.  
Cele lo vit, si bassa lo menton:  
Ne pot parler, ne li dist o ne non.

Dex, tant est douz li nons d'amors  
[ja n'en cuidai sentir dolors].

—Bele Yolanz en ses chambres seoit, vv. 11–18

[God, how sweet the name of love is. / [I never thought I would feel pain from it].

With these words and this thought (When these words were uttered and this thought formulated), / her lover entered the room. She saw him and kissed his chin. / Unable to speak, she did not say yes or no to him:

God, how sweet the name of love is; / [I never thought I would feel pain from it].<sup>52</sup>

This stanza and the refrain appearing on either side of it form part of what has traditionally been called “woman’s song”<sup>53</sup> in Old French lyric. Taken from the *chanson de toile* “Bele Yolanz en ses chambres seoit,” this excerpt falls into the wide-ranging category of *chanson de femme* that comprises, in Pierre Bec’s definition, anonymous songs ranging from the lament for a lost lover in the *chanson d’ami*, the complaint against an unjust husband in the *chanson de malmariée*, the denunciation of a dawning day that separates adulterous lovers in the *aube*, and the tale of a longed-for lover in the *chanson de toile*. Bec draws together this vast corpus of varied poetic genres under the sign of “woman’s song” because each contains “un monologue lyrique, à connotation douloureuse, placé dans la bouche d’une femme.” The unique defining feature of these women’s songs in Bec’s schema is that they are spoken by women, not men, in contradistinction to the standard *canço* of the Occitanian troubadour or *grand chant courtois* of the Northern French *trouvère* which rarely admit women as the “centre subjectif de la pièce chantée”

But in what sense can female characters be considered speaking subjects in the *chanson de femme* or any other Old French literary work? To what extent does the heroine of “Bele Yolanz” speak in the excerpt quoted above? If the poem’s opening stanza attributes the refrain unequivocally to its heroine, stating that “she sang this song: ‘God, how sweet the name of love is; I never thought I would feel pain from it,’”<sup>54</sup> stanza two problematizes such a clear-cut attribution by inserting the narrator’s descriptive commentary within the woman’s supposed speech:

Bels douz amis, or vos voil envoier  
une robe par mout grant amistie.  
Por Diu vos [pri], de moi aiez pitie.  
Non pot ester, a la terre s’assiet.

Dex, tant est douz li nons d'amors:  
[ja n'en cuidai sentir dolors]. (vv. 7–12)

[Sweet love, I want to send you / a cloak as a token of my love. / I pray  
God you will take pity on me. / Unable to stand, she sits down.]

When Bele Yolanz’s words are interrupted by the narrator’s description of her physical condition (“Non pot ester, a la terre assiet”), the refrain that follows hovers uncertainly between two speakers; does it issue from the mouth of the heroine or from that of the poem’s narrator?<sup>55</sup> The highly equivocal “A ces paroles et a ceste raison” of the third stanza (quoted above) suggests alternately that this same refrain may have been uttered by the newly arrived lover. Certainly someone other than the heroine is responsible for articulating the purportedly feminine words at the end of stanza three where Bele Yolanz is said to be mute and incapable of speech: “ne li dist o ne non, ne pot parler.”<sup>56</sup>

These lyric moments, among many others in the *chanson de toile*, remind us that the dolorous voices sounded in medieval “woman’s song,” though emitted from the “mouths of women” as Bec describes them, issue from the rhetorical bodies of fictive protagonists situated at a far remove from the mouths of real historical women. If the women’s voices we hear in the *chanson de femme* have been placed in female mouths, as Bec assents obliquely, they have been placed there by someone else. By a male author who has constructed and created female voices as products of his own literary imagination?<sup>57</sup> In which



case these women's songs would really be men's songs in disguise. Are they then examples of men singing in drag? Of men speaking for women, that is to say, "in their place," literally displacing women from the stage of creative inspiration and literary production?<sup>58</sup> Or are we to assume, conversely, that these diverse women's songs have been gathered together by a manuscript compiler who has taken them from another source, perhaps from the dictated accounts of oral performance, once intoned by living women and reshaped by years of manuscript copying until they became contextualized within a literary narrator's voice? In both scenarios the status granted to the female speaking subject—whether as a mask for a male poetic voice or as real women whose voices have been appropriated into a written tradition—is more problematic than the notion of "women's song" would suggest. Rather than operating unproblematically as speaking subjects, the women's voices in the *chanson de femme* remain clearly *subject to* different forms of male subjective hegemony. But does this mean we should abandon the search for a female speaking subject in Old French lyric? Are there other ways of reading that could better address the paradox of the constructed female subject in the *chanson de femme*?

Feminist criticism of the past decade has shown us how complex the question of female subjectivity can be; how we must struggle to make distinctions between female authorship and the voices of female protagonists; how female agency in speech does not exist unproblematically for either real women or fictive constructions of them; and how individualized expression is a cultural construction conditioned by factors of class, family, patriarchy, and language as well as gender. The ground-breaking dialogue launched by Nancy Miller and Peggy Kamuf over "who is speaking" in literary texts written by female authors has played itself out over nearly a decade with no clear resolution.<sup>59</sup> The original debate, structured around the proper place of feminist critical practice in the university, found Miller committed to rectifying women's exclusion from the literary canon by insisting on the importance of female authorship, while Kamuf warned against the epistemological dangers of recentring feminist inquiry within a patriarchal, humanist tradition that privileges authorship.<sup>60</sup> The pitfall to be carefully negotiated by practitioners of the first approach is that of a possible "essentialism": the tendency to suggest, however indirectly, that women might speak naturally, biologically as women, and the corollary belief that an unbroken continuity exists between the lives of real, historical women and the depiction of them in literary texts.<sup>61</sup>

The danger facing those who want feminist criticism to address all literary productions that put the "feminine" into play without regard for the biological sex of the author is the risk of effacing the historical woman and issues of gender altogether. Calling into question the very identity of the speaking subject, or displacing it onto an intersubjective dialogue as in Lacanian criticism, can lead, in the worst case scenario, to obscuring the *sexual* identity of that speaking subject as well. This is but one example of the process Alice Jardine has termed gynesis, a kind of reading that puts woman into discourse while reducing her to a sign for something else.<sup>62</sup>

How, then, can we acknowledge a specifically female contribution to literary creation without essentializing historical women into the mythic category of woman? And how, on the other hand, can we locate woman in the literary text while remaining sensitive to the subtleties of the poststructuralist critique of subjectivity?<sup>63</sup> Or in Nancy Miller's more recent formulation, how can we get beyond the original terms of the debate that pit empiricism against theory, authorial identity against indifference to gender?<sup>64</sup>

Old French studies have not made this crucial leap beyond the binary impasse. Whereas Pierre Bec, following Alfred Jeanroy and Gaston Paris before him, pursues an essentialist search for a concerted *lyrisme féminin*, a truly autonomous poetic register that presumes the originary presence of historical women composer/singers,<sup>65</sup> Michel Zink's work on the *chanson de toile* provides a striking example of Jardine's gynesis. Arguing against the representational fallacy that has led critics to claim that the *chanson de toile* evolved from women's work songs simply because they depict women singing and working,<sup>66</sup> Zink reads the *chanson de toile* as a rhetorical device used by the male poet to seduce a male reader: "les chansons de toile ont pu plaire aux uns par les artifices qui veulent cacher leur rugosité, aux autres par leur rugosité perçant sous les artifices, comme une très jeune fille séduit le collégien par l'habileté de son maquillage et l'homme mûr par sa gaucherie" (2). The poem, then, is a flirtatious young girl defined in relation to the male reader's desire and seducibility. As the femaleness of woman's song is displaced onto the function of the text, woman as a historical personage or inscribed voice disappears altogether.<sup>67</sup>

However different they may be in other respects, the readings of woman's song offered by Bec and Zink come together in the binarism that conditions the initial question each poses. In asking "who's speaking?" in woman's song they lead us inevitably to discover a

feminine or a masculine poetics, establishing either how the woman's lyric voice is distinctly different from the well-established tradition of male poetic expression or how the apparently female voice speaking to us from these poems is actually male.

Taking our cue from the ambiguous voice of "Bele Yolanz," could we try instead to move beyond this kind of polarization and read the female subject as she exists in a partial and fragmentary way within the medieval textual tradition? This is indeed a most difficult and vexing task: to imagine a kind of female subjectivity that might exist outside the obvious binary opposition of masculine and feminine. Western culture and convention have trained us to think subjectivity within that binary opposition. From the Stoics to Descartes, the status of the speaking subject in western philosophical and literary discourse has been defined as *homo loquens*, he whose identity derives from his activity as a thinking speaker.<sup>68</sup> Woman in this scenario functions often as the object of the male speaker's discourse, the listener or receiver of his words, the object of the desire articulated in his speech. This objectified female other moves with great difficulty into the position of speaking subject traditionally reserved for the male, whether she is a real-live woman or fictional creation.<sup>69</sup>

Rereading the *chanson de toile* in light of feminist arguments about subjectivity suggests that the inscribed woman's voice typically found there exists in a complex relational dynamic to the voices of both the narrator and the male protagonists figured in the song. The ostensibly female voice of the refrain is a floating voice. Not always contextualized or directly attributed to a specific speaker, it can hover between various actors in the lyric scenario, passing from male to female with relative ease.<sup>70</sup> If at times the voice of the refrain in the "Bele Yolanz" reads as distinctly female because articulated unequivocally by a female protagonist, at others it seems dislocated by the narrator's descriptive voice. To speak of a woman's voice in this and other "women's songs" is then to describe voices that occupy an unstable and shifting place, voices that defy absolute categorization as either masculine or feminine.

By thinking in terms of this *mouvance* of gender identity—something akin to the well-known *mouvance* of the manuscript tradition that structures medieval literary production<sup>71</sup>—we might begin to shift the emphasis in our approach from "who is speaking?" in Old French literature to a more complex and intriguing question: "How do women speak from the pages of Old French literary works?" In what varied, muted, and partial ways do their voices enter into the

relational dynamic that structures subjectivity in medieval literary texts? We might ask who can occupy the different subject positions, under what circumstances and to what effect? Or consider how the female voices inscribed in the written text change in relation to different reader/performers (male and female). In these ways we could begin to conceive of "voice" neither as an embodied essence that communicates the personalized and individual identity of a historical female nor as the depersonalized voice of literature or poetic craft. Why not look instead for a range of voices emerging from fictive female bodies in varying degrees and different ways across literary genres? Remembering how Bele Yolanz can speak to us despite her ostensible silence, could we search out a female subjectivity that comes to us through a literary tradition that neither reifies nor ventriloquizes it? Old French chansons de femme provide an especially cogent reminder that if there can be no totalizing or coherent woman's voice in medieval French literature (or elsewhere), neither can the dominant male voice—whether of literature or culture—dominate totally or unproblematically.

It is at this point that our study of female subjectivity in Old French texts overlaps with our own subjectivity as speakers and writers in a patriarchal institution, specifically one that authorizes and delimits speaking and writing.<sup>72</sup> When the question of female subjectivity posed by traditional studies of the *chanson de femme* is reopened by feminist medievalists of the twentieth century, how does that investigation call into question the role, function, and status of our own voices in the academy in general and within the discipline of medieval studies in particular?

#### TOWARD A FEMINIST MASTERY: WHEN THE DISCIPLINE MEETS DIFFERENCE

The manner in which you have made m<sup>e</sup> your "confrère" I value as much as the membership itself. Thank you very much. I only wish you might have as good reason to think well of your "Soeur Brun de la Montagne" as I am proud of my "confrérie" I see I seem to have.

I am delighted to be able to teach you a French word, you may call me a *consoeur* or *confrère* even (but I think this last is ugly), I find these two names for the sistern of the old guild of Culveriniens et Arquebusiers de Gand—only I do not aspire to be military.

—Lucy Toulmin Smith to Paul Meyer, January 29, 1877;  
February 12, 1877

For Lucy Toulmin Smith, a pioneer in medieval studies and one of the first women to collaborate with her male peers, the question of her own mastery was double-edged.<sup>73</sup> Considering herself on a par with Paul Meyer, a leading medievalist in late-nineteenth-century France, indeed naming herself his *confrère*, did not insure parity and mutual respect. Her claims to mastery bespeak a concern that Meyer did not necessarily view her expertise in the same manner. Even her delight in choosing the medieval title *consoeur* somehow betrays her query as to whether it would be reciprocated. In letters to the master himself, Toulmin Smith speculates circumspectly about her standing in the male bastion of academia.

Such musings give us a glimpse into the dynamic between male scholars and women entering the discipline in the "early days." It is a complex dynamic: whereas women were being trained and began pursuing research themselves, their skills did not qualify them for a commanding position. Mastery, as the measure of competence, did not automatically translate into mastery as a form of recognized authority.

For many of us today, this *double* aspect of mastery continues to mark our intellectual lives. Whereas the numbers of women medievalists have certainly diversified since Toulmin Smith's generation, the stature of the female master is still very much at issue. If we consider our formation, the habitual pattern of our public activities, all these experiences are influenced by the institution of mastery, itself of medieval origin.<sup>74</sup> We have been brought up to expect a connection between competence and authority. Yet as faculty, we find that with respect to women the academy does not always make the connection straightforwardly. As teachers as well, we engage with students whose expectations and responses are still affected by the cult of the master—long deemed incompatible with women. The authority that comes with masterful competence is rarely, for women, a given.

It is this discrepancy between the social and intellectual aspects of mastery that we want to consider here. How does mastery function as a set of social relations long inflected by gender? In our academic setting, we work with an ever-shifting body of knowledge, a *gnosos*, shared between two principal groups: those who relay it and those to whom it is imparted. This exchange depends as a rule upon a differential relation linking a higher expert group to a lower one of apprentices. Whether we situate this exchange in the classroom, or in the encounters between colleagues, the relation typically involves an imbalance. The mechanism of mastery operates so as to redress an

epistemological imbalance, but in so doing it often creates and exacerbates a social one. The process of passing on even a protean body of knowledge can serve to establish a social hierarchy, one that elevates the master to a place of utter superiority, while it puts the other in an inferior, lesser position. By virtue of knowing more, the master has sovereignty; knowing less means occupying a lower station socially. "The *more* there is of mine, the *less* there is of yours," as two feminist critics put it.<sup>75</sup>

Although this model of relations endemic to mastery need not be enacted socially, the history of intellectual life in the West from the medieval founding of the university onwards, shows just how common a structure it had become. If we consider the etymology and normative definition of mastery, it becomes all the more apparent that this principle of unevenness is predicated upon gender difference. The usual dictionary entry reads: "Master," from medieval Latin *magister*, based on the root *magis*—meaning more. The official master at the thirteenth-century University of Paris, for instance, possessed a certain something that his underlings did not—something that he was licensed to pronounce.<sup>76</sup> The *magister* stands over the *discipulus*, who will follow and revere his superior knowledge through the joint practice of their teaching profession (*disciplina*).<sup>77</sup> Tracing further the etymology of "master," we find his intellectual edge reformulated in the following modern definition: a man having control or authority, a teacher, a specific title held by such a man. In other words, the issue of the master's extra erudition and preeminence is collapsed into one of gender.

Thus it proves very difficult to distinguish between the identity of authority, the teacherly role, and a masculine stance. The social conditioning implicit to mastery has evaluated women as insufficient, and thereby found her ineligible to graduate to the status of master herself. She thus appears forever needful of the additive of masterful knowledge, always in someone else's hands. In the words of a medievalist from an earlier generation: "how strongly I appreciate the studious young girl who has replaced the innocent young thing of yesteryear. Instead of living in the skirts of her mother, she shares the studious work of her brothers, far superior in industry and perseverance, no less so in intelligence and knowledge."<sup>78</sup> Gustave Cohen's praise, expressed in the ambiguous terms of a double negative (*nullement inférieure*), qualifies his women students' capacity to attain mastery. Yet even in a contemporary context, where women rank among the most original critics and pedagogues, the paradox of the female mas-

ter remains. No matter how women's intellectual achievements are perceived, no matter what prominence they gain, they risk being trapped in a hierarchy that refuses them the most powerful role. Opening up the preserve of knowledge to women has not dismantled completely its restrictive social caste. The master/disciple relation does not easily admit otherness.<sup>79</sup> In the past, its relations bound the woman academic to the inferior role, ever dependent upon the *magis* of other authorities. Even more recently, "more" intellectually has not necessarily signified, for women, "more" in the realm of social interaction.

However forceful the more/less dynamic may appear, we do not mean to suggest that we are governed by it. Far from it. Rather it accentuates the *symbolic* configuration of mastery that may still impinge upon intellectual women and men, and shape their professional choices.<sup>80</sup> And it thus leads us to examine the functioning of mastery in our own circumstances. More important, it underscores the critical importance of envisaging another concept of mastery that is not defined by the imbalances typical of our institutions. The problem of intellectual *magis* for the feminist medievalist thus takes this form: what would an authoritative stance entail that would neither impose a *magis* upon others nor use it to blur the register of difference?

Traditionally our discipline has proceeded in a manner that does not distinguish rigorously enough between the authoritative and what verges on the authoritarian; between the intellectual who explores knowledge in a commanding and liberating way, and the one who uses it to control. The fine line separating the teacher/scholar whose power is enabling from the one who wields knowledge manipulatively needs to be plotted out again and again. Because, as Carolyn Heilbrun reminds us, "power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter."<sup>81</sup> For the feminist medievalist, the terms of that ability are constantly to be negotiated if we are to answer fully the questions: how to reckon with the effects of mastery's symbolic structures, how to create a truly feminist mastery?

Two medieval texts will help us to clarify the double edge of mastery's symbolic structures. The first, suitably enough, represents these structures in terms of the exemplary master: the *Lai d'Aristote*.<sup>82</sup> Its incongruous title highlights the upending of the *doctor doctissimus* by the quintessential heroine of *lai*, a fantastical, foreign woman. The sage pedagogue Aristotle reprimands his student, the emperor Alexander, for abandoning his Latin books in favor of a woman. It is, of

course, the woman who brings the master down in a version of the nature/culture confrontation. Luring him away from his studies, she seduces him and rides him back triumphantly before Alexander. The audience can laugh richly, not only at the successful ploy of the woman, but at the very expense of Aristotle. The master who does not abide by his own lessons is the butt of the most satisfying joke.

The *Lai* exposes playfully just how precarious the social structure of mastery really is; the philosopher who occupies so disdainfully the position of more is turned on his head, demoted to the base position his teaching reserves for women.<sup>83</sup> However persuasive Aristotelian learning may be, the edifice of its authority is shown here to be easily undermined. Even more shockingly, the woman is seen to rise to the top, astride the figurehead of mastery. A sheer reversal of terms results in a sort of female *magis*, which the heroine turns against the bamboozled master. Her *magis*, however, looks to be completely vacuous. The joke lies less in the fact that the woman might exercise the prerogative of mastery than in her preposterous overtaking of the master's place. What is most amusing in this scenario is the prospect that a woman pretends to position herself authoritatively.

Cast as a *fabliau*, this text transforms the unnerving incident into a comic plot. The stunt of a woman displacing the most revered master is contained within the harmless frame of burlesque. Yet even as this text channels anxiety into laughter, it reveals a primordial danger. It sets into relief the threat represented by the woman who mimics the practice of what we might call one-upmanship: for, in the end, far worse than the destruction of the more/less social hierarchy of mastery is the possibility that it be turned completely around, used against its intended beneficiaries.

Taking this threat still further, the fifteenth-century farce *Les femmes qui se font maistresses* stages the occasion when several women aspire to the insignia of mastery.<sup>84</sup> A papal envoy arrives to sanction their ambition, bestowing upon them the University of Paris bonnet. Disreputable husbands intervene; yet their resistance only facilitates the way women come to dominate in all arenas. Not only can the women throw the book at their men, outwitting them in every scholastic disputation, but they rule them domestically and sexually as well. The fact that women enter the world of higher learning paves the way for their dominion.

At stake here is an instance of female *magis*—in substance as well as in stance. The women are represented, however comically, on the verge of undertaking a public intellectual life. Given the date of this

text (early fifteenth century), it is hardly surprising that an image of women masters would crystallize in reaction to the larger numbers of educated lay women during the early-modern period.<sup>85</sup> Yet what remains constant is the fear that women can turn the authoritative hierarchy upholding mastery inside out. Like the late-thirteenth-century *Lai*, this text places the order of social relations in jeopardy. Once women gain academe, everything changes: the balance of home life, municipal life, the structure of society as a whole. The terms of that change, however, are always determined by the more/less paradigm. No new conception of mastery is forged: women merely step into the shoes of the former masters, thereby relegating them to the tenuous position of less.

Juxtaposing the *Lai d'Aristote* and *Des femmes qui se font maistresses* sets into relief the implacable quality of mastery's dynamic. On the one hand, the contrast between the two texts reveals that, as far as the technical competence of mastery is concerned, women were not to remain unqualified indefinitely. Moving from the single female figure of a single woman targeting the master to several aiming to be masters themselves, we can chart the positive trajectory of women intellectuals, one that extends into our own day. On the other hand, as far as the social relations of mastery are concerned, there is little sense of movement: two steps forward may well mean one step back.

In the academic community where Theory, today's *Latinitas*, offers a powerful form of mastery, it is the tension between feminists and latter-day Aristotles that merits the closest scrutiny. For this encounter enables us to gauge whether the institution of mastery will entertain a different structure of relation in response to feminism, or whether the power play of one-upmanship will continue to predominate.

Looking back over the history of the liaison between post-structuralist theory and feminism, we can comment on several episodes that stand out particularly. In the late 1970s, as Anglo-American intellectuals witnessed the arrival of the foreign women of feminist theory, the tendency was to make light of them. Elaine Showalter has pointed out wittily Terry Eagleton's cavalier dismissal of them, branding their discourse "theoretically thin," a position he would later nuance.<sup>86</sup> However attractive French feminist arguments appeared, they were deemed a minimal, even frivolous threat to prevailing theoretical models. Aristotle remained more or less unperturbed.

Through the 1980s, we could detect a different approach; the aim being, among leading theorists, to profit from various paradigms of feminist thought. As a result of the increasing notoriety of psychoanalytic and materialist-based feminisms, it appeared shrewd and even titillating to extend some collaborative gesture to several feminist theorists. There was a decided rapprochement initiated by Derrida, among others, which could be described as a kind of romance.<sup>87</sup> As if enacting one of the oldest scenarios around, the deconstructionist camp inched its way closer, seeking points of contact, possible affinities. Aristotle admitted that he let himself be taken, attracted by this other voice.

In the cycle of things, where courtship is followed inevitably by a falling out, this mutual admiration has subsided considerably. The sparring for academic mastery and reputation continues. However much it bemused the gurus of theory to discover the feminist in the latest theoretical vanguard, the stakes in reaffirming preeminence are too high to defer to a group of feminist intellectuals completely.

In the last two years, there have been several incidents that indicate another reaction in the face of what is often deemed feminist mastery. While leaving aside for a moment the imperative of exploring what this mastery entails, it seems clear that the increasing acceptance of feminist theory has given rise to open and stiff opposition. Our own fin de siècle is witnessing a backlash.<sup>88</sup> For example, in the volume *Men in Feminism*, as well as in the virulent exchanges between Frank Lentricchia and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *Critical Inquiry*, we find what some call the "mind police" syndrome.<sup>89</sup> Several male theorists seem to be claiming that there is something coercive about feminist theory. The charge is that critics such as Gilbert and Gubar push notions of phallogocentric authority with such dogmatic force that there is little room for argument. Feminist theorists set themselves up as judges—so the argument goes—who police the discourse of the critical establishment, obliging them to comply.

Well into the 1990s, in the current polemical climate of political correctness, these accusations are gaining a certain credibility before the American public. Feminism has become, in certain circles, a code word for the very social intolerance it had decried.<sup>90</sup> Over a century after Toulmin Smith's cautious advocacy of *consoeurie*, more than fifty years after important numbers of women entered the university as students, a good generation after women began joining the professional ranks, is it two steps back for every two steps forward?

If we take care to examine these various portrayals of dictatorial feminist theory, however, we should recognize in them a backhanded admission of feminism having gained authority. In many ways, the greater the perceived influence of feminism on the general scene, the greater the desire to challenge it; more significantly, the greater the desire to label it in what are the reverse or negative terms of mastery. Where mastery betokens an emancipatory power for male thinkers of whatever stripe, when detected in feminism, it can be taken to signal near-authoritarianism.

What are the ways to respond to the impasse of the mind-police charge, which is itself symptomatic of a belief in a superior/inferior dynamic? Here we are circling back to the unanswered question of the nature of feminist mastery. The test is to conceive of the disposition of knowledge differently—to debate it without enforcing it upon others. The very antithesis of a set of authoritarian strokes, the various feminist versions of theorizing medieval literature elect critical subjects long trivialized, while developing working relations that themselves do not trivialize others.

To draw an analogy from the social sciences, feminist mastery promises a sort of creative destruction of medieval studies as it has long been formulated—destruction because it does destabilize, if not demolish, the very grounds of the field. The textual frames of reference, the pedagogical programs, the way in which our readings are communicated in the academy—changing the basis of all these elements explodes the very notion of the arch, near-authoritarian intellectual. At the same time, this constitutes a properly *creative* destruction in the sense that such a transformation opens up the discipline in unforeseeable ways. Feminist mastery can energize the discipline, animating it to the benefit of its many practitioners: philologists, translators, teachers, literary critics. Rather than imposing the flipside of any number of more/less quarrels, it can project a nonhierarchical model of theory and praxis. In this manner, feminist mastery spurs us not only to envision, but also to conduct our professional lives otherwise.

#### CODA

Theory cannot be useful to anyone interested in resistance and change unless there is a reason to believe that knowing what a theory means and believing it to be true have some connection to resistance and change.

—Marai C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman

Our endeavor to reconfigure mastery brings us to reflect on the privilege inherent in that gesture, one that subtends our very enterprise as medieval feminists. We may be marginalized as female scholars within the high circles of the academy, but our scholarly endeavors are nonetheless those of a cultured elite. Only those who have achieved a modicum of power have the luxury of scrutinizing their practice. Theorizing the female subject in medieval texts, consulting manuscripts that are inaccessible to those without credentials—our critical enterprise might seem as privileged as was reading for the minority of literate woman in the Middle Ages.

If this is so, are our scholarly and pedagogic activities subversive of the patriarchal structures that they seek to critique? Or do we merely reimpose cultural hierarchy by teaching archaic texts at a time when basic literacy is in crisis? Involving as it does years of study to acquire languages, considerable spadework before a text can be “read” in the modern sense of the term, Old French literary studies constitute a labor-intensive discipline that can easily isolate its followers within the confines of comfortable anachronism. The question for feminist medievalists who would seek to apply a “theory . . . useful for resistance and change” is, to put it bluntly, why study this elite and rarefied past? How can fruitful change emerge from the seeming misalliance of philology and feminism?

As this chapter has shown, there is no comfortable *conjointure* between Old French literary studies and the theories of feminism. But the *disjointure* of their intersection generates a tension that can be creative and mutually illuminating. Feminist theory challenges medievalists to move beyond the analytic categories of the discipline as it has been conceived for a century. The attempt to account fully for women’s participation in literary medieval culture—as absences and presences, objects and agents, creators and receivers—not only restores a missing element to literary history; it also effects a major paradigm shift in literary historiography. Reading gender as a category of literary construction and reception goes against the grain of the dominant cultural codes embedded in texts, revealing new patterns, conflicts, and questions. The study of women as an excluded group can lead to consideration of others who have been marginalized or oppressed: children, servants, serfs, the urban poor, non-Christians, people of color. The tricky negotiations of reading “women” in medieval writing brings scholars to the investigation of how subjectivity and sexuality are constructed within language. Finally, the feminist critique of the transmission of

knowledge can lead to a tonic reconsideration of our roles as critics, authors, and teachers.

Now what can medieval studies contribute to feminist theory and to productive social change? The answer is not as evident. Contemporary feminists beckon us urgently to look beyond the problems of white, middle-class women whose interests have been the most visibly represented in theory. As women of color have argued, theorizing by one group of women about female differences can blur other differences between them.<sup>91</sup> Precisely because courses and publications reflecting this pressing need for cultural diversity are beginning to flourish, medievalists need more than ever to rethink their interpretative practice of the past.

Whereas our discipline may look to the lead of contemporary theories, medievalists can contribute substantially to feminist and multicultural studies. Demystifying the cultural constructions of the western European past can enable us to break out of the molds inherited from it. Studying the social relations of the past can reveal patterns of change that empower us to conceptualize change in the future.

Finally, negotiating the complex process of reading medieval women holds lessons for anyone who would theorize how difference is embodied. By a material and historical exploration of the past in all its particularities, medieval studies can enact the *practice* of reading difference. When we theorize how "women" can be read, we confront the problem of where lived experience intersects with social constructions of gender. As medieval literary critics, we are versed in the art of reading differences, variants, palimpsests, *mouvance*. Our training as readers of unstable texts that embody historical shifts, lexical quirks, and diverse generic registers in the past can be brought to bear on a theory of difference as a body whose precise contours can never be *known* but whose material existence should not be forgotten.

#### NOTES

1. Our collaboration is also indebted to the generous contributions of many who have read this chapter at various stages of its development: Marlyse Bach, Danielle Regnier-Bohler, Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, Cynthia J. Brown, Merrimon Crawford, Thelma Fenster, Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Alice Yaeger Kaplan, Linda Lomperis, Heather McLean, Nancy K. Miller, Mary D. Sheriff, Lisa Splittgerber; and, from the North Carolina Research Group on Medieval and Early Modern Women: Sarah Beckwith, Elizabeth

Clark, Michele Farrell, Judith Ferster, Valeria Finucci, Monica Green, Charlotte Gross, Ann-Marie Rasmussen.

2. The terms of the feminist debate have been continually reformulated since the inception of feminist criticism in the 1960s, as evidenced by ongoing discussions of essentialism, subjectivity, theoretical imperialism, race and ethnicity, sexual identity, and class, among other questions, in the journals *Signs*, *differences*, *Feminist Studies*, *Women's Studies*, *m/f*, and *The Women's Review of Books*. For a recent overview of contested areas within the field, see *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox (London: Routledge, 1990). Other anthologies that present a useful spectrum of views are *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), and *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Teresa Brennan (London: Routledge, 1989).

3. For an astute assessment of the contradictions of the medieval feminist as they are experienced by a Chaucer scholar, see Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

4. We employ the category "feminist medievalist" as a strategic term that describes a particular position within disciplines, even as we acknowledge that it cannot define a unified, stable identity or represent the diversity of medieval scholars who are feminists. On the multiplicity of subject-positions that feminist critics perforce adopt, see Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989).

5. The challenge of postmodern theory to a feminist politics of identity has involved a radical questioning of the categories of "woman" and of the notion of the subject. See, most recently, Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of the Woman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

6. See Bernard Cerquiglini, *L'Eloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), and *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990), a special issue edited by Stephen G. Nichols devoted to "The New Philology."

7. For discussion of the elusive female subject in light of poststructuralist and feminist theory, see the editors' introduction in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings*, ed. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989). For a cautionary word on the problem faced by historians, see Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), xv–xxi.

8." Even among women medieval scholars of women, there is a resistance to postmodern theory that challenges the notions of female identity. For

a medievalist's perspective on this problem, see Laurie Finke, "The Rhetoric of Marginality: Why I Do Feminist Theory," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5, no. 2 (1986): 251–72. Within French studies, the medieval period has not yet been reconceptualized by feminist *theorists* in the way that the modern period has by Nancy K. Miller, Naomi Schor, and Alice Jardine, to name a few.

9. On the goal of interdisciplinary scholarship to be *antidisciplinary* and work against traditional structures of knowledge, see Ellen Rooney, "Discipline and Vanish: Feminism, the Resistance to Theory, and the Politics of Cultural Studies," *differences* 2, no. 3 (1990): 14–28.

10. For example, Myrrha Lot-Borodine's early work on romance emphasized women's roles: *La femme et l'amour au XII siècle d'après les poèmes de Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Picard, 1909); Marie Josephe Pinet championed Christine de Pisan against virulent antifeminist attacks: *Christine de Pisan, 1364–1430: Études biographique et littéraire* (Paris: Champion, 1927); Alice Hentsch's *recensement* of didactic literature is a precious resource: *La littérature didactique du moyen âge s'adressant spécialement aux femmes* (Cahors: Coueslant, 1903).

11. See Sarah Kay, "French without Spears," *The Cambridge Review: A Journal of University Life and Thought* 108, no. 2298 (1987): 99–101. Concerning the current place of medieval feminist graduate students, see Merrimon Crawford and Alison Smith.

12. *Romania*, for example, has a lone male editor. *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* has two male directors and three men compose its *comité scientifique*. *Le Moyen Âge* has four men and two women on its editorial board, *Romance Philology* has five males and one female. Of the assistant editors of *Speculum*, six are men and one is a woman. After long male rule, *Medium Aevum* now has two women editors out of three.

13. For example, a special issue of *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 20 (1977) was devoted to "La femme dans les civilisations des Xe–XIIIe siècles." But see the response of female participants in the colloquium at which these articles were first presented and their critique of the sexist and exclusionary biases at work in the choice of subjects surveyed, sources invoked, stereotypes perpetuated, and the generally authoritarian delivery of papers that discouraged debate (262–64). Even the latest linguistic and philological investigations of medieval textuality and manuscript culture, which steer a course away from positivism and toward a radical examination of medieval representation, poetics, and hermeneutics are not necessarily more hospitable to feminist inquiry than were their more traditional predecessors. See, for example, the recent issue of *Speculum* on the "New Philology" which raises, only in passing, the prospect of feminism as a new direction in medieval

studies, in Lee Patterson's article, "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History and Medieval Studies," *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990): 106–7. The discourse of feminism is markedly absent from the list of "discourses of man (*sic*) such as philosophy, anthropology, and the social sciences," which serve to contextualize literature for new philologists. See R. Howard Bloch, "New Philology and Old French," *ibid.*, 39.

14. See, for example, the special issue of *Romance Notes* devoted to *Courtly Ideology and Women's Place in Medieval French Literature* 25, no. 3 (1985), the medieval issue of *Signs* 14, no. 2 (1989), and *Women's Studies* 11 (1984). *Paragraph* 13 (1990) includes feminism among recent theoretical perspectives. One medieval journal that has devoted an issue to "Medieval feminisms" is *Exemplaria*, 4, no. 2 (1992).

15. See, for example, Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin*; Janet Halley and Sheila Fisher, *Seeking the Woman: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988); Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), and others to be mentioned in the course of this chapter.

16. For example, the conferences hosted by the Center for Medieval Studies at Fordham University on "Women and Power" (1985), "Gender and the Moral Order" (1989), and "Men in Feminism" (1990); the King's College, Cambridge symposium on "Gender and Medieval Studies" (December 1988) and a follow-up at Warwick University (September 1989); special sessions organized in recent years by the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* and individual medievalists at the annual Conference on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, along with TEAMS sessions at Kalamazoo devoted to "Teaching about Women in the Middle Ages."

17. *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger, Elizabeth Robertson, Thelma Fenster, and E. Jane Burns.

18. On the exclusionary strategies of feminist theory, see Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

19. Gaston Paris, "Lancelot du Lac: *Le Conte de la Charrette*," *Romania* 12 (1883): 459–534.

19. Gaston Paris, "Lancelot du Lac: *Le Conte de la Charrette*," *Romania* 12 (1883): 459–534.

20. Sarah Kofman, *L'énigme de la femme: La femme dans les textes de Freud* (Paris: Galilee, 1983), 267. Kofman's further quotations from Freud's letter of November 15, 1883 show his fixation on an ideal femininity despite social changes: "La loi et la coutume doivent donner à la femme beaucoup de droits dont elle a été privée. Mais sa situation demeurera ce qu'elle fut



toujours, celle d'une créature adorée dans sa jeunesse et d'une femme aimée dans sa maturité" (268).

21. For a bibliography of work on women in Old French literature current to 1982, see Roberta L. Krueger and E. Jane Burns, "A Selective Bibliography of Criticism: Women in Medieval French Literature," *Romance Notes* 25, no. 3 (1985): 375-90.

22. One of the earliest attempts to demystify the effects of courtly love on women was by John Benton, "Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Courtly Love," in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F. X. Newman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1968), 19-42.

23. See Joan Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), and E. Jane Burns, "The Man behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric," *Romance Notes* 25, no. 3 (1985): 254-70.

24. See, for example, the historian Joan Kelly's notion of female power in the literature of courtly love in "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koontz, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137-64. For a more nuanced approach, see Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin*.

25. The historian's contributions are too vast and various to summarize, especially if one considers the geographical field beyond France. As examples of recent studies that offer new perspectives on the structure of gender relations, we note Caroline Bynum's examination of female spirituality in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Judith Bennett's study of rural gender relations in *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock before the Plague* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Martha Howell's analysis of gender and economic relations in Northern European Cities in *Women, Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and the essays on female participation in the labor force edited by Barbara Hanawalt in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). A review of how women have been idealized and marginalized by French historians from the Middle Ages to the present is provided by Susan Mosher Stuard, "Fashion's Captives: Medieval Women in French Historiography" in *Women in Medieval History and Historiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 81-100. For a useful bibliography on women in medieval France, see pp. 160-71. For theoretical considerations of the impact of feminist research on historical studies, see Joan Kelly, "The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History," in *Women, History, and Theory:*

*The Essay of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-75; Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1986); Judith M. Bennett, "Feminism and History," *Gender and History* 1, no. 3 (1989): 251-72; and Denise Riley, "Does Sex Have a History?" in her *Am I That Name?*, 1-17.

26. A reading of Marie de France as a textual voice unrelated to a biologically female author takes such a tack. See Jean-Charles Huchet, "Nom de femme et écriture féminine au Moyen Âge: Les *lais* de Marie de France," *Poétique* 12 (1981): 407-30, and, for discussion of the implications of such an approach to feminist theory, see Roberta L. Krueger, "Double Jeopardy: The Appropriation of Woman in Four Old French Romances of the 'Cycle de la Gageure,'" in Fisher and Halley, eds., *Seeking the Woman*, 21-50. Alexandre Leupin's *Barbarolexis: Medieval Writing and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) offers the most recent and extensive instance of reading masculinity and femininity as textual functions; in Leupin's words, "In the final analysis, sexual difference is a textual matter, and it is important to perceive it this way" (166).

27. See E. Jane Burns, "Knowing Women: Female Orifices in Old French Farce and Fables," *Exemplaria* 4, no. 2 (1992): 81-104, and her "This Prick Which Is Not One: How Women Talk Back in Old French Fables," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body*, ed. Sarah Stanbury and Linda Lomperis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Kathryn Gravdal, "Camouflaging Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in the Medieval Pastourelle," *Romantic Review* 76, no. 4 (1985): 361-73.

28. See Roberta L. Krueger, "Love, Honor and the Exchange of Women," *Romance Notes* 25, no. 3 (1985): 302-17; "Desire, Meaning and the Female Reader: The Problem in Chrétien's *Charrette*," in Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe, eds., *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in Arthurian Tradition* (New York: Garland, 1988), 31-51; Helen Solterer, "Dismembering, Remembering the Chastelain de Coucy," in *Romance Philology* 46, no. 2 (1992): 103-24.

29. Peter Dronke, *Medieval Women Writers: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua to Marguerite Porete* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984); Katharina Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); Meg Bogin, *The Women Troubadours* (New York: Norton, 1980).

30. See, most recently for Marie de France, articles in *Stanford French and Italian Studies* 58 (1988) by Diana M. Faust, "Women Narrators in the *Lais* of Marie de France," 17-28, and Stephen G. Nichols, "Working Late:

Marie de France and the Value of Poetry," 7–16; and Bloch "New Philosophy and Old French." On the women troubadours, see William Paden, ed., *The Voice of the Trobairitz* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

31. See annotated bibliographies by Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliographical Guide* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1984), and Edith Yenal, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliography of Writings by Her and about Her* (Metuchen, N.J. and London: Scarecrow, 1982 and supplement 1989). Additional bibliography in *Poems of Cupid: God of Love: Christine de Pizan's Epistre au dieu d'Amours and Dit de la Rose: Thomas Hocleve's The Letter of Cupid; with George Sewells' Proclamation of Cupid*, ed. and trans. Thelma Fenster and Mary Erler (Leiden: Brill, 1990). See also the recent special issue of *Revue des langues romanes* 92, no. 2 (1988) devoted to Christine studies and the first modern edition of the *Livre des trois vertus*, ed. Charity C. Willard and Eric Hicks (Paris: Champion, 1989) along with Charity Willard's English translation of it, *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor*, ed. M. Cosman (New York: Persea Books, 1989).

32. See, for example, Renate Blumenfeld Kosinski, ed., *The Writings of Margaret of Oingt, Medieval Prioress and Mystic* (Cambridge: The Focus Library of Medieval Women, 1990), and for the most recent work on the lady's *Response* to the *Bestiaire d'amour*, Jeanette Beer, "Richard de Fournival's Anonymous Lady: The Character of the *Response* to the *Bestiaire d'amour*," *Romance Philology* 42, no. 3 (1989), 267–73; Helen Solterer, "Seeing, Hearing, Tasting Woman: The Senses of Medieval Reading," in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Reading*, ed. Anna Berthold (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); and *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

33. See, for example, the debate about Christine de Pizan's alleged "feminism" and her class status: Sheila Delany, "Mothers to Think Back Through: Who Are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan," in Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Schichtman, eds., *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1987), 177–200.

34. For the problem of male academics' relation to feminism within the literary profession as a whole, see Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987). For an example of how the tension has played itself out in medieval circles, see the debate surrounding R. Howard Bloch's "Medieval Misogyny" (*Representations* 20 [fall 1987]: 1–24) in the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 6 (1988) and Bloch's response in *MFN* 7 (1989).

35. For feminist readings of the romance genre, see especially the work of Roberta L. Krueger, "Love, Honor and the Exchange of Women," in

Yvain: Some Remarks on the Female Reader *Romance Notes* 25, no. 3 (1985); "Desire, Meaning and the Female Reader: The Problem in Chrétien's *Charrette*;" "Double Jeopardy: The Appropriation of Woman in Four Old French Romances of the 'Cycle de la Gageure,'" in Fisher and Halley, eds., *Seeking the Woman*.

36. Léon Gautier, *Les épopées françaises*, 3 vols. (Paris: 1865–68); 2d ed., 4 vols (Paris: V. Palme, 1878–94); Gaston Paris, *Histoire poétique de Charlemagne* (Paris: 1865); 2d ed. (Paris: E. Bouillon, 1905); Paul Meyer, editions of (inter alia) *Daurel et Beton* (Paris: S.A.T.F., 1880); *Raoul de Cambrai* (Paris: S.A.T.F., 1882); Joseph Bédier, *Les légendes épiques, recherches sur la formation des chansons de geste*, 4 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1908–13; 2d ed. 1914–21; 3d ed. 1926–29); Ferdinand Lot, *Études sur les légendes épiques françaises* (Paris: Champion, 1958); Edmond Faral, *La Chanson de Roland, étude et analyse* (Paris: Mellottee, 1932).

37. See, for example, Robert Pensom on the *Roland*: "The true subject of the poem is the confrontation of a transcendent ethical value (without which there can be no order) with ego-centered relativism such as we see depicted in the person of Ganelon," *Literary Technique in the Song of Roland* (Geneva: Droz, 1982), 114.

38. Pensom, *Literary Technique*; Robert F. Cook, *The Sense of the Song of Roland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

39. Bernard Guidot, *Recherches sur la chanson de geste au xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après certaines oeuvres du cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*, 2 vols. (Aix and Marseilles: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1986).

40. E.g., Stephen G. Nichols, "The Spirit of Truth: Epic Modes in Medieval Narrative," *New Literary History* 1 (1970): 365–86; R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

41. Rita Lejeune, *Recherches sur le thème: Les chansons de geste et l'histoire* (Liège: Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1948); *Girart de Roussillon, chanson de geste*, ed. W. Mary Hackett, 3 vols. (Paris: Didot, 1953); Micheline de Combarieu du Grès, *L'idéal humain et l'expérience morale chez les héros de chansons de geste*, 2 vols. (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1979), 2:665–756; *Raoul de Cambrai, An Old French Feudal Epic*, trans. Jessie Crosland (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926); Pauline Matarasso, *Recherches historiques et littéraires sur "Raoul de Cambrai"* (Paris: Nizet 1962); Joseph E. Vallerie, *Garin le Loheren, according to MS A* (Norwalk, Conn., 1947); Pauline Taylor, *Gerbert de Mez, chanson de geste du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Namur: Secretariat de publications, facultés universitaires, 1952); Anne Iker Gittleman, *Le style épique dans Garin le Loheren* (Geneva: Droz, 1967).

42. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951.
43. Cited from the edition and translation by Sarah Kay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
44. See the passage in which the dead Raoul's heart is compared favorably with that of the gigantic Jehan de Ponthieu whom he killed at Origini, vv. 3055–72 (ed. Kay).
45. Jean Rychner, *La chanson de geste: Essai sur l'art épique des jongleurs* (Geneva: Droz, 1955).
46. See, for example, William Calin's battle royal with Joseph J. Duggan occupying the whole of the spring number of *Olifant* 8 (1980–81). Calin's contention that "C'est une question de stylistique qui est au coeur de la dispute entre littéraires et 'oralisants'. Les oralisants voudraient nier le caractère et la qualité littéraire des chansons de geste" (267–68) may be somewhat overstated, but his own method of reading chansons de geste as suggestive, psychological, and political narratives tends to be closer to feminist practice than Duggan's more statistical approach. See below, however, how Duggan's approach has been used effectively in the service of feminist analysis by Allison Elliott; and, regarding close reading as a strategy of feminist critique, see Caren Greenberg, "Reading Reading: Echo's Abduction of Language," *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. Sally McConnell Ginet et al. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Praeger, 1980), 300–9.
47. Ellen Rose Woods, "*Aye d'Avignon*": *A Study of Genre and Society* (Geneva: Droz, 1978).
48. Patricia Harris Stäblein, "Catastrophe Theory in Reading Narratives: A Way to Figure Out *Raoul de Cambrai* and Its Rôle in the Lyrics of Bertrand de Born," *Olifant* 8 (1980): 3–28. See also her *Narrer/nourrir: La signification, la violence et la contamination dans la structure de Raoul de Cambrai*, in *Manger et boire au moyen âge, Actes du Colloque de Nice* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984), 451–65. Other feminist-inspired critics to write on *Raoul de Cambrai* include Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin*, 12–18; Thelma Fenster, "The Son's Mother: Alais and Marsent in *Raoul de Cambrai*," *Olifant* 12 (1987): 147–53.
49. Sarah Kay, "La composition de *Raoul de Cambrai*," *Revue d'histoire et de philologie belge* 62 (1984): 474–92; *Raoul de Cambrai* introduction, paras. 3.4.4–3.4.6.
50. Alison Goddard Elliott, "The Double Genesis of *Girart de Vienne*," *Olifant* 8 (1980–81): 130–60.
51. See Sarah Kay, "Investing the Wild: Women's Beliefs in Old French *Chansons de Geste*," *Paragraph*, "Displacement and Recognition: A Special Issue on Medieval Studies" (1990): 147–53.

52. "Bele Yolanz en sa chambres seoit," from Michel Zink, *Les chansons de toile* (Paris: Champion, 1977), 77 (translation ours).

53. Pierre Bec, *La lyrique française au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Picard, 1977), 1:57–62.

54. For other examples, see Zink, 86, 93, 102, 103, 166.

55. As the typical opening stanza of most *chanson de toile* attest, the woman's voice figured in these poems, although it may be the first lyric "I" to appear in the poem, remains nonetheless a voice constructed by the narrator who reports the woman's words to us. The narrator's creative activity resembles that of the male lyric persona in the *chanson de malmariée* who gives to us, as the fabric of his poem, a song he heard three women singing, thus having appropriated their voices to his (Bec, *La lyrique française*, 2: poem 8), or any number of *pastourelles* that recount how the narrator's poem results from a woman's song he overheard (Bec, 2: poems 41, 42, 43, 49, 50).

56. For another example, see "Bele Ydoine," stanza 14, Zink, 117. For instances where the female protagonist speaks the refrain from a dead faint, see Zink, 86, 117.

57. Scholarly discussions of the *kharjas*, romance refrains in a woman's voice that were incorporated into Mozarabic poems called *muwashshahs*, and of the Gallego-Portuguese *cantigas de amigo* provide particularly striking examples of a critical blindspot regarding gender (Pierre Le Gentil, "La strophe zadjalesque et les khardjas," *Romania* 84 (1963): 1–27, 209–50, 409–11). See especially Peter Dronke's statement, "The greatest flowering of woman's songs in medieval Europe occurred in thirteenth-century Portugal. There both the court poet and the *jogral* composed *cantigas de amigo*": *The Medieval Lyric* (rpt. 1977; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 102. For a feminist reading of the *cantigas de amigo* against the *grant chant courtois*, see Ria Lemaire, *Passions et positions: Contribution à une semi-otique du sujet dans la poésie lyrique médiévale en langues romanes* (Amsterdam: Rodopoi, 1988).

58. See Faral's thesis that women's songs were actually composed by men employing a consciously archaic style and his reasoning: that the *chansons de toile* were far too lascivious to have been sung by young girls: "L'héroïne de la chanson de toile n'était pas tout à fait dans le rôle d'une innocente, mais bien, comme on peut en effet le voir par le texte, dans celui d'une jeune femme qu'aucune règle ne fera renoncer à l'amour qui la tient. Ces raisons, de caractère moral, suffiraient à persuader que la notion de chanson chantées par des femmes est ici purement conventionnelle," Edmond Faral, "Les chansons de toile ou chansons d'histoire," *Romania* 69 (1946–47): 459 and more generally 453–59.

59. In *Diacritics* (summer 1982) see Peggy Kamuf, "Replacing Feminist Criticism," 42–47, and Nancy K. Miller, "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions," 48–53, and the update to their dialogue, "Parisian Letters: Between Feminism and Deconstruction," in Hirsch and Fox, eds., *Conflicts in Feminism*, 121–33.

60. The debate parallels a more general split between American and French feminist thought. For an explanation of their basic differences, see Alice Jardine, "Gynesis," *Diacritics* (summer 1982): 54–65, and Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985). On the distinction between gynocritics and feminist critique, see Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 22–41.

61. See Mary Jacobus, "Is There a Woman in This Text?" in *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 83–109. For recent discussions on essentialism, see Teresa de Lauretis, "The Essence of the Triangle, of Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain," and Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," both in *differences* 1, no. 2 (1988): 3–37 and 38–58; Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*; and Teresa de Lauretis, "Upping the Anti (*sic*) in Feminist Theory," in Hirsch and Fox, eds., *Conflicts in Feminism*, 255–70.

62. For a feminist reading of modernity's struggle with the issue of subjectivity and an assessment of the problematic turn toward a fascination with otherness, see Jardine, *Gynesis*, 118–44.

63. On the debate between feminism and poststructuralism, see Mary Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," Leslie Wahl Rabine, "Toward a Feminist Politics of Non-Identity," both in *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 51–65 and 11–31.

64. *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 67.

65. Alfred Jeanroy, *Les origines de la poésie lyrique en France au moyen âge* (Paris: Hachette, 1889); and Gaston Paris, "Les origines de la poésie lyrique en France," *Mélanges de littérature française du moyen âge*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Champion, 1912), 539–615. Bec does not reiterate Jeanroy's *ad feminam* attack on the rustic spontaneity of woman's song's as a sign of primitive and precourtly lyric composition (Bec, 58). Nor does he echo Jeanroy's now famous virulent denunciation of the *trobairitz*: "J'avoue tout en admirant la simplicité et le naturel du style, que j'ai bien de la peine à croire à cette sincérité, et que cette singulière attitude me paraît devoir s'expliquer autrement. Je me figure que nos trobairitz, esclaves de la tradi-

tion, incapables d'un effort d'analyse, se sont bornées à exploiter, des thèmes connus, à user d'un formulaire courant, en invertissant simplement les rôles." Alfred Jeanroy, *La poésie lyrique des troubadours* (Paris: H. Didier, 1934), 316–17. But the status of Bec's hypothetical woman poets does parallel, in a rough way, that of the Provençal *trobairitz* whose collective oeuvre has been carefully combed for evidence of a distinctive feminine poetics. See most recently William Paden, ed., *The Voice of the Trobairitz*, which includes extensive bibliography. For a sampling of studies of feminine poetics in Old French literature, see Michelle Freeman, "Marie de France's Poetics of Silence: The Implications for a Feminine *Translatio*," *PMLA* 99 (1984): 860–83; Stephen G. Nichols, "Medieval Women Writers: Aesthetics and the Powers of Marginality," *Yale French Studies* 75 (fall 1988): 77–94; Christine Reno, "Feminist Aspects of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre d'Othea à Hector*," *Studi francesi* 71 (1980): 271–76; Liliane Dulac, "Inspiration mythique et savoir politique: Les conseils aux veuves chez Francesco da Barberino et chez Christine de Pizan," *Mélanges à la mémoire de Franco Simone: France et Italie dans la culture européenne, I: Moyen Âge et Renaissance* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1980), 113–41; Kevin Brownlee, "The *Ditie de Jehanne d'Arc*," *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989).

66. The only named poet of the *chanson de femme*, Zink reminds us, was a man: Audefroï le Batard, and the only poetic "I" that of a male speaker. Although one *chansonnier* contains a small number of anonymous *chansons de femme*, most are interpolated into romance texts (Jean Renart's *Le roman de la rose ou Guillaume de Dôle*, *Le roman de la violette*, *Le lai d'Aristote*), where they stand as "false citations" of putative women's voices.

67. This line of reasoning parallels Jean Charles Huchet's problematic erasure of the *trobairitz*, Marie de France, and Heloise as literary constructions of femaleness without historical referent. See his "Les femmes troubadours ou la voix critique," *Littérature* 51 (1983): 59–90; "Nom de femme et écriture féminine," *Poétique* 12 (1981): 407–30; "La voix d'Heloïse," *Romance Notes* 25, no. 3 (1985): 271–87; or R. Howard Bloch's controversial argument that "If woman is defined as verbal transgression, indiscretion, and contradiction, then Walter Map, indeed any writer can only be defined as a woman," "Medieval Misogyny," *Representations* (fall 1987): 19. Within these critical frameworks, questions of gender appear central to an argument that actually speaks of woman only metaphorically. The woman becomes the seductive song for Zink, the process of writing for Huchet (see especially his *Le roman médiéval* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984], and "literature itself" for Bloch (20). For a more nuanced reading of the complex

dynamics of male and female textual voices in Old French texts. see Alexandre Leupin, "La compromission (sur Le voyage de Charlemagne à Jerusalem et à Constantinople)," *Romance Notes* 25, no. 3 (1985): 222-38.

68. Jardine, 105-18; Luce Irigaray, *Spéculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), 165-82.

69. Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), chap. 6.

70. No one has proven this better than Pierre Jonin, whose diligent efforts to classify the refrains of the *chansons de toile* into distinct categories ("heroine's refrain" versus "narrator's refrain") led him to talk about merging voices, overlap, "collaboration," confusion of categories: "Les refrains dans les chansons de toile," *Romania* 96 (1975): 209-44. See also his "Les types féminins dans les chansons de toile," *Romania* 91 (1970): 433ff.

71. Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poésie médiévale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 73.

72. Nancy K. Miller, "Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader," 112.

73. Little known to French medievalists, Lucy Toulmin Smith (1838-1911) was a British independent scholar who worked primarily in the area of economic history, editing several key texts. These projects brought her into contact with Meyer, with whom she jointly edited *Contes moralisés* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1889). Bonnie G. Smith comments briefly on Toulmin Smith in her essay, "The Contributions of Women to Modern Historiography in Great Britain, France and the United States, 1750-1940," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 723. See also her article, "Gender and Objectivity in the Writing of History," in *Objectivity and Its Other*, ed. Wolfgang Nader (New York: Guilford Press, 1995). Toulmin Smith's case offers an important corollary to the experiences of Jessie Weston, Gertrude Schoepperle, Charlotte Cipriani, S. Lutoslawska, Myrrha Lot-Borodine, and Mildred Pope, among other women working in medieval literary studies at the turn of the century. The story of these women is only now coming to light.

74. Two incisive readings of the institution of the master, as evidenced in France, are Emile Durkheim, *L'évolution pédagogique en France* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1938), 91-98, and Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Minuit, 1984), 127-28.

75. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Man on the Dump versus the United Dames of America: Or What Does Frank Lentricchia Want?" *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988): 389.

76. For a brief commentary on the status of the master in the High Middle Ages, see John W. Benton, "Masters at Paris from 1179 to 1215: A Social Perspective," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed.

Robert Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 143-53; and Richard Southern, "The Schools of Paris and the School of Chartres," *ibid.*, 135.

77. Alfred A. Ernout and A. Antoine Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*.

78. Gustave Cohen, "Expériences théophiliennes," *Mercur de France* (February 1, 1937): 476 (translation ours).

79. See Jane Gallop's suggestive remarks on this issue in *Thinking through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

80. For a discussion of this dilemma, see Adrienne Rich, "Towards a Woman-Centered University," in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose* (New York: Norton, 1988), 18.

81. *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Norton, 1988), 18.

82. Ed. Maurice Delbouille, *Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et de Lettres de Liège, no. 123* (Liège: Presse Universitaire de Liège, 1951).

83. This text was composed during the very period when the Aristotelian corpus was recovered and consolidated by masters at the University of Paris. Aristotelian thought argues, among many other things, for the material composition of women. See Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC-AD 1250* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985), 415.

84. Ed. Gustave Cohen, *Recueil de farces françaises inédites dy XVe siècle*, Publications of the Medieval Academy of America 47 (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1949), 113-22.

85. Myriam Greilsammer notes evidence for the extent of women's learning in her study, *L'envers du tableau: Mariage et maternité en Flandre médiéval* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), 14.

86. See "Critical Crossdressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year," in *Men in Feminism*, 116-36; and "Rape and Clarissa," in Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary History* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), 121-25.

87. See Jacques Derrida and Christie V. McDonald, "Choreographies," *Diacritics* 12 (1982): 66-76; and Jacques Derrida, *Feu la cendre* (Paris: Des femmes, 1987).

88. Nancy Miller outlines this phase in "Philoctetes Sister: Feminist Literary Criticism and the New Misogyny," part of her forthcoming book, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

89. Meaghan Morris' comments on this syndrome are germane; see "In any event . . .," in *Men in Feminism*, 175.

90. Dinesh D'Souza refers to feminism in this manner: *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 190, 229, 235-36.

91. Barbara Christian, "A Race for Theory," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 67-79 and Marai C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory For You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for 'the Woman's Voice'," *Women's Studies International Forum* 6, no. 6 (1983): 573-81.

PART THREE

CONTINUATORS OF THE  
DISCIPLINE

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