



# Medieval Feminist Forum

A Journal of Gender and Sexuality

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a female author, to undergraduate students taking their first medieval literature and culture course.

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*Gender and Voice in Medieval French Literature and Song*, edited by Rachel May Golden and Katherine Kong. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2021. Pp. ix + 310. ISBN: 9780813069036.

In this volume editors Rachel May Golden and Katherine Kong place voice at the center of medieval French and Occitan poetry and song, “posit[ing] voice as a multivalent and multimedia phenomenon ... that enacts aspects of communication, exposes individual and communal emotions and beliefs, negotiates gender and class relationships, and asserts an authorial, social, or rhetorical power” (2–3). The focus on voice allows for an engagement with philosophical and literary traditions, examining the role of gender in medieval social systems, the role of the voice as something that differentiates humans from animals, and the role of the voice as very much an embodied phenomenon but also existing as traces in written forms. The act of “restoring female voice and subjectivity to their rightful place alongside male voices in medieval French literature and lyric” emerges as a primary focus across the volume.

Catherine Kong’s “Silence and Speech in *Le Chevalier de la Charette*” opens up the volume with an examination of the gendered roles of literary production in Chrétien de Troyes’s prologues and then more closely in the *Charette*. This chapter examines the role of the voice and unvoiced promise, silence, and speech acts in the broader economy of gendered relations in the romance. These turns offer nuanced and novel approaches to Chrétien’s work, arguing that the apparent contingency of Lancelot’s masculinity is in fact framed by a security in which even seeming violations of masculine performance reinforce rather than critique it. Tamara Bentley Caudill’s “It Takes Two: Considerations of Voice and Performance of the Male-Female *Tenso*” follows and focuses on the gendered experience of reading the *tenso*. Voice emerges as what the medieval listener may have heard, very different from the voice imagined by a modern reader, and framed by the assumed or presumed gender of the writer. She critiques the long-standing tradition that the

*amics* must be the troubadour and the *domna* is entirely tied to the fiction and form of the lyric. This essay thus offers us a methodology that recalls Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "reparative impulse" that allows for the production of a reading that goes against a tendency to foreclose the expression of female voice in Occitan poetry. In another critique of our reading practices, Anne Adele Levitsky, in "'Per vers o per chanso': Grammar, Gender, and Song in Aimeric de Peguilhan's *Mangtas vetz sui enqueritz*," examines the gender fluidity in Aimeric's definitions and explanations of the grammatical gender in poetic form, in contrast to grammatical treatises in Latin or Occitan. The turn to Aimeric's methodology offers us, as modern readers, a medieval practice of separating grammatical and sonic gender, showing voice to resist rigid associations between sex, gender, and body.

The following essay, "When Courtly Song Invades History: Lyricizing Blanche de Castille," by Meghan Quinlan, offers a compelling account of Blanche de Castille's voice and its after-effects and negations across song. Through a deft analysis of music, context, and form, working through musicology and psychoanalysis, Blanche's subjectivity emerges as a threat to be silenced, betraying the author's anxiety over her sovereign power. Rachel May Golden explores gendered voice, experience, and trauma through crusade lyric in "Gendered Grief, Temporality, and Reinvention in Two Northern French Crusade Songs." This essay continues one of the aims of the overall volume, challenging assumed male authorship and masculine authority in female voices. It also deftly weaves in queer theory and temporality to examine how these songs resist normative gendered expression and temporality, at times collapsing time and space and at others using repetition, circularity, and mimicry as a means of working through the trauma of the Crusades. Lydia M. Walker's contribution, "Real Men Preach: Constructions of Clerical Masculinity in the Context of Thirteenth-Century Crusade Preaching," shifts genre but remains in crusade literature, exploring gendered voice and content in sermons. Jacques de Vitry, in particular, emerges as having deployed sexual and marital metaphors in ways that shaped masculinity throughout the Crusades. Walker then shows how Jacques's preaching in Genoa and beyond focused on women with a particular intimacy in how he preached to them in different gendered tones and using different metaphors as a means to preach, albeit indirectly, to their husbands and sons.

In "*Chansons polies?* Expressing Gendered Identity and Experience in the *Ars antiqua* Motet," Lisa Colton "locate[s] motets as an expression of cultural understandings about the body" (178), opening up these motets to an exploration of power, gender, and affect. This anal-

ysis brings the *ars antiqua* motet to the center of an analysis of embodied and performed gender that reveals how the polyphonic and polytextual nature of the genre opens up possibilities for understanding the instability and volatility of gender in the thirteenth century. Anna Kathryn Grau continues the polyphonic thread with “*Jonete et Jolie: Polyphony and Gendered Voices in the Old French Motet*,” examining the role of music and performance in locating the female voice. Here the polyphonic motet emerges as a form where musical elements may allow us to read against the surface of the text, allowing the female voice to resist objectification and oversimplification. In “‘Et encore ne me puis taire’: Voice, Gender, and Class in Christine de Pizan’s Political Writings, 1405–1413,” Emily J. Hutchison explores Christine de Pizan’s advice concerning women’s voices, which is at odds with her open critiques of men in her later work. Hutchison looks at how Christine’s speech is often at odds with her advice to women, especially women of the Third Estate. This essay challenges us as readers to take a more nuanced approach to Christine’s politics, and acknowledge when classist and misogynist tropes and rhetoric are reified rather than critiqued. In the final essay of the volume, “Voiceover: Anne de Graville’s *Beau Romant*, Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, and Alain Chartier’s *Belle Dame sans mercy*,” Daisy Delogu argues that Anne de Graville usurps the voices of her male precursors, creating her own authority, criticism, and knowledge. Anne’s works thus operate to correct and overwrite the voices of her predecessors, shifting from misogynistic registers to one of general moral improvement, decentering male authority and the male seducer as protagonist.

Overall, this volume does a stellar job at exploring the tension between gendered voices, between the written word and the voice of the narrator, singer, and author that offers novel approaches to the persona of the female speaker, her voice, as well as women writers such as Christine de Pizan and Anne de Graville. The centering of voice—textual, embodied, imagined, and performed—tests the limits of textual interpretation, especially through lenses of music, audience, and context. It is hard to capture these essays in a short review, but I expect this volume to challenge and inspire medievalists and their students to think about questions of voice, sound, gender, and textuality in new ways.

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