CONCLUSION

The case studies of Margery Kempe and Christine de Pisan have focused on two aspects of these medieval women and their writing. Firstly, they have examined the difficulties faced by both authors because of their gender. Situating each woman within the dominant modes of textual production of their time has highlighted the problems caused by the gendered nature of their writing. Furthermore, understanding their struggle to gain the authority and confidence to write has allowed us to appreciate better the achievements of our literary predecessors.

Secondly, I have followed the textual history of Margery's and Christine's books from the response of their contemporaries to their modern critical reception. I have specifically examined the recent scholarship of feminist historicists from the fields of both history and literary studies. By questioning the validity of the label 'proto-feminist', as it has been applied to Margery and Christine, I have sought to correct some of the inaccuracies developing out of this large body of scholarship and contribute my own work to the on-going project of rewriting women's history.

To achieve the two aims of this thesis I have employed strategies influenced by critical historicist discourses. I have combined close textual readings with contextualist analysis of the socio-political and cultural environment in order to place these books in relation to the non-discursive practices and social institutions which influenced these women and their writing. In the case of Margery, for example, the religious suspicion in England aroused by Lollardy, and testified to in the heresy act of 1401, provides an added impetus to Margery's need to record and explain her visions and validate her mystical vocation. Similarly, the rise of early renaissance humanism has enormous impact on the modes of literary discourse and the construction of literary authority in the intellectual circles of the French court where Christine was employed.
Such significant external influences on the work of Margery and Christine cannot be ignored without increasing the risk of historical inaccuracy and literary misinterpretation. The special need within Medieval Studies for detailed textual and contextual research must not be compromised in the attempt to recover medieval women from the obscurity of the past. Feminist historicist scholarship in the medieval period must maintain the pedantry and the 'capacity for Sitzfleisch' which, in some ways, define the medievalist, if it is to effectively challenge the perception of medieval women and their writing which still prevails in the traditionally conservative realm of Medieval Studies.¹

Much research remains to be done at all levels, from the translation and editing of still unpublished manuscripts of medieval women's writing, to the theorised challenges to historical periodisation and the political constructions of sexuality, family and women throughout history. This thesis is one more piece in the puzzle.

1. Patterson, *Social Change*, p. 3.
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Title: Medieval textual production and the politics of women's writing: case studies of two medieval women writers and their critical reception

Date: 1991-07


Publication Status: Unpublished

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/39453

File Description: p.315-336

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