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Foreword: Cultural politics

The break-up of consensus in British political life during the 1970s was accompanied by the break-up of traditional assumptions about the values and goals of literary culture. Initially at specialised conferences and in committed journals, but increasingly in the mainstream of intellectual life, literary texts have been related to the new and challenging discourses of Marxism, feminism, structuralism, psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, and juxtaposed with work not customarily accorded literary or artistic standing.

Some recent developments offer a significant alternative to traditional practice: others are little more than realignments of familiar positions. But our belief is that a combination of historical and cultural context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis offers the strongest challenge and has already contributed substantial work. We call this cultural materialism.

There are (at least) two ways of using the word 'culture'. The evaluative use has been more common when we are thinking about 'the arts' and 'literature': to be 'cultured' is to be the possessor of superior values and a refined sensibility, both of which are manifested through a positive and fulfilling engagement with 'good' literature, art, music and so on. The analytic one is used in the social sciences and especially anthropology: it seeks to describe the whole system of significations by which a society or a section of it understands itself and its relations with the world. Cultural materialism draws upon the latter, analytic sense, and therefore studies 'high' culture alongside work in popular culture, in other media and from subordinated groups.

'Materialism' is opposed to 'idealism': it insists that culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, but nor can it be independent of it. Cultural materialism therefore sees texts as inseparable from the conditions of their production and reception in history; and as involved, necessarily in the making of cultural meanings which are always, finally, political meanings. Hence the series title: Cultural Politics.
theoretical approach is itself a hybrid of linguistics, anthropology and psychoanalysis and obliges students and teachers to transcend traditional academic disciplines. None of these courses is exclusively a 'women's course'; all of them include male authors, critics and theorists as well as, on occasion, male colleagues and male students. Juxtaposition is a shared technique: canonical texts are taught alongside non-canonical texts, the literary alongside the non-literary, medieval alongside modern. The results are often exciting and illuminating, though it seems at times as if we are demanding more from these courses than they can possibly provide: at the end of the day we agree that feminist criticism is not just another, optional, way of looking at literature but an instrument for personal, institutional and social change.

Painting the lion: feminist options

Lesley Jeffries, Lesley Johnson, Lynette Hunter, Vivien Jones, Margaret Reynolds

'Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?'

Like this article, the third-year option course 'Feminist approaches to literature' is a product of the Women's Group in the School of English at Leeds University. Both the course and the article are collaborative ventures, attempts to use our experience of meeting regularly as feminists within a particular institution, initially in a teaching context and now as the basis of a piece of (academic) writing. The option is team-taught, with two members of staff present in each seminar and at least three teaching on the course as a whole; the article has been written by five members of the Women's Group, of whom only two have taught regularly on the option. We have based the article on a series of lunch-time discussions which were written up by members of the group in turn. Drafts were then redistributed for revision. These were new experiences of collaborative teaching and writing for all of us, and this change from our usual academic practice, often solitary and implicitly defensive, and from the principles of author, period or genre on which courses are normally organised has been exciting and liberating, but also problematic. In this article, we describe briefly the evolution of the 'Feminist perspectives' course and the course itself, then focus on Christine de Pizan's The book of the city of ladies, Chaucer's Wife of Bath's prologue and tale and Freud's 'Dora', texts which are juxtaposed to form one five-week section of the course. Our aim is to explore some of the interrelated issues raised by these particular texts, by the form and teaching method of the course, and by the Women's Group itself.

Feminist approaches to literature

For the past four years the Women's Group in the Leeds School of
English has been meeting regularly during term for a weekly lunch-time discussion. Because of the size of the English department (thirty-five full-time members of staff, of whom eleven, including one professor, are women; seven part-time or fixed-term contract staff, of whom five are women – a telling proportional difference) there are enough women who identify themselves as feminists to make a women’s group viable and significant within the School. All women who teach in the department are invited, though there is a small nucleus of regular attenders and some members of the department have never been. Topics range from discussion of literary and critical texts and films to teaching practice, institutional experiences and (often) immediate personal concerns.

The option course grew out of the group. In both the second and third years, students taking Single Honours English at Leeds take two optional courses alongside compulsory period courses and language courses. Three years ago we offered ‘Women in language and literature’ as a third-year option, taught by a total of six women whose interests – language, medieval literature, and nineteenth and twentieth century fiction – were reflected in the content of the course. An initial section on women and language was followed by a study of a selection of medieval texts about women and by women, and then by various nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels, in some cases juxtaposed with different kinds of feminist readings. The course was popular and the student response was very positive for the most part – largely, perhaps, because it was at that time the only course on offer with any kind of theoretical identity. However, we were unhappy with the course for various reasons. We felt that the mixture of topics, as we had presented them, was confusing rather than helpful; possibly discouraged by the title, no men took the course; and the lack of an introductory and theoretical section tended to perpetuate rather than address the tensions the students themselves felt between those members of the course who identified themselves as feminists (and had a background in feminist theory and practice) and those who were using the course to discover and test out what ‘feminism’ might mean. In fact, the immediate effect of our dissatisfaction with the course in its initial form was that we ourselves had to define what feminism meant for us in terms of teaching practice.

This resulted in various changes. We now offer the course under the title ‘Feminist approaches to literature’. The new title both announces the course’s political identity and avoids the ghettoising effect of ‘Women in language and literature’ with its implicit reproduction of the patriarchal view of female identity as an undifferentiated object of knowledge.

Similarly, changes in format have given the course much greater coherence and direction. During the first year, theoretical issues had arisen haphazardly in the process of looking at particular texts. The course now begins with a section looking at the work of various representative feminist theorists of the ‘Anglo-American’ and French schools and opening with Virginia Woolf’s A room of one’s own. Our collaborative teaching and variety of interests can now be seen in the context of feminism’s critique of academic hierarchies, canons and traditional notions of historical periods and, indeed, of the varieties of approach within ‘feminism’ itself. The rest of the course is arranged so that texts are paired in various ways to introduce some of the issues and focuses of feminist criticism and women’s writing: Christine de Pizan’s The book of the city of ladies, the newly recovered, non-canonical text with the canonical Wife of Bath’s prologue and tale; The Wife of Bath’s tale with Freud’s case history of Dora – male readings of women, purporting to answer the question ‘what do women want?’; Jane Eyre, with its twentieth-century re-writing, Wide Sargasso Sea; Woolf’s Orlando and Piercy’s Woman on the edge of time as examples of female fantasy and sharing a concern with androgyny; Margaret Lewellyn Davies’s anthology of working-class women’s autobiography, Life as we have known it and Maya Angelou’s I know why the caged bird sings. So far, assessment has been by two long essays; in future, students will be given a choice between essays and a three-hour examination. The course continues to be popular (this year fifteen women and five men took the option), and it continues to evolve as we try to respond to student reactions and to the interests of particular groups.

Space is left for additional, collectively chosen texts and an informal retrospective session at the end of the year provides a forum for responses to the course.

‘…let us go to the Field of Letters. There the City of Ladies will be founded on a flat and fertile plain, where all fruits and freshwater rivers are found and where the earth abounds in all good things’.²

Most members of the course have read Geoffrey Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s prologue and tale before they take the option; few have read Christine de Pizan’s Book of the city of ladies or Freud’s ‘Dora’; these texts are discussed as a follow-up to the introductory section on feminist critical theory. The combination of familiar/unfamiliar texts by female and male writers provides a useful testing ground for considering feminist approaches to criticism in practice and for assessing the way in which our reading preconceptions may be influenced by the sex of a writer. The theoretical
section of the option concentrates on introducing students to the polit- 
ics of the text, raising questions about who is writing, who is reading, 
what constitutes a literary tradition, how we recreate a context for a 
work. All these issues are brought to the fore in discussions of this 
juxtaposition of medieval/modern, canonical/non-canonical texts. 
Discussing medieval works in a feminist critical context is still a relatively 
uncommon activity and goes against the prevailing trend of much 
modern feminist criticism with its emphasis on nineteenth- and twen-
tieth-century novels written by women. It also goes against the grain of 
much criticism of medieval literature which, if it addresses the subject of 
gender representation and sexual politics at all, tends to get caught up in 
discussing images of women in medieval literature in terms of Eve/Mary 
sterotypes, as if these images could just be culled from texts and are not 
the product of any reading activity. Rereading medieval texts in this 
context is double-edged. But this is an area of literary study which is 
changing fast. Much more primary and secondary material on medieval 
women writers, the sexual politics of medieval texts, the construction of 
women’s place in medieval society, is available now than three years ago 
so the marginal status of feminist work on medieval texts is changing 
too.5

In five weeks we can draw attention to the problem of how to contextualise 
all three works, but recognise how much skimping we have to do on 
getting to grips with the very different cultural contexts in which the 
work of Christine de Pizan, Geoffrey Chaucer and Sigmund Freud was 
produced and received. The book of the city of ladies offers one possible 
starting point for a feminist view of literary history in so far as it promotes 
Christine de Pizan herself as a pioneering woman writer, the first in the 
field to offer a positive representation of women, their qualities and 
activities (BCL, pp. 10–11). Our approach to her work is to consider the 
claim made by some twentieth-century readers that she is the first 
modern feminist writer, and we discuss the narrative in conjunction 
with Joan Kelly’s own pioneering article on ‘Early feminist theory and 
the “Querelle des femmes” 1400–1789’.4

‘One day as I was sitting alone in my study surrounded by books on all kinds of 
subjects . . .’ (BCL, p. 5)

The opening scenes of The book of the city of ladies focus on the relationship 
between gender and the reading and writing of texts as Christine, the 
narrator, reflects on the literary images of women that surround her in 
her study and, as a result, comes to despair of her sex. The production of 

her book, this city for ladies which she constructs with the help of 
Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, offers a remedy for her despair. In con-
structing the city, Christine de Pizan takes a leaf out of previous male, 
clerical, compilations about women and produces a book of narratives 
about women, predominantly from the Classical and Christian past, 
which are written from, and reflect a different view. The result is a 
biographical collection which challenges some conventional readings of 
the activities of celebrities and throws the spotlight on some previously 
“unknown” shapers of history.5 Many of the textual strategies employed 
by Christine de Pizan in constructing her city have parallels with those 
employed by Virginia Woolf in making A room of one’s own (1929), our 
opening text. Both writers play on the subjective/objective stance of 
their narrator and on the corresponding fictional/historical status of 
their narrative; both offer a difference of view based on their access to 
female experience; both challenge the distinction between theory and 
practice, between analysis and action by literally activating the process of 
reading and writing – writer and readers together construct cities and 
rooms of their own, but not separatist states.

In seminar discussions we have found that it is Christine de Pizan’s 
revisionary stance and her comments on the sexual politics of literacy 
and education that have most fired the enthusiasm of our students for 
the work. These perhaps are the kind of ‘potent observations for our 
times’ which Marina Warner suggests fill the Book of the city of ladies 
(FOREWORD, p. xiii). But we have also found that reading this medieval 
narrative sharply focuses the differences between the kind of ‘feminist’ 
theory and practice possible in fifteenth-century France and that of 
our time.

‘If Nature did not give great strength of limb to women’s bodies, she has made up 
for it by placing there the most virtuous inclination to love one’s God and to fear 
sinning against His commandments. Women who act otherwise go against their 
own nature.’ (BCL, p. 37)

Christine de Pizan’s collection of citizens is made up from a mixture of 
exceptioanl and exemplary women. The exceptional women are those who 
have challenged the prevailing stereotyped views of women’s capacities. 
The Amazons, for example (pp. 40–51), are exceptional women because 
of their physical strength and courage; Novella (p. 154) is exceptional 
because she has been educated and has proved herself to be a first-class 
lecturer in law (although her lectures have to be delivered from behind a 
curtain so her female identity will not be seen). It seems from such
examples that women are made and not born and that Christine de Pizan is indicating that gender identity is culturally formed, and is not an essential, biological given. However other aspects of the city's construction challenge that view. The exemplary women of the city, those who provide models of conduct for all time, are those who embody the traditional, ‘natural’ virtues of the ‘weaker’ sex. Griselda, for example, is presented as a woman strong in natural virtue who can endure the ordeals inflicted on her by her husband who wishes to test both her patience and her constancy (pp. 170–6). In its context in the Book of the city of ladies Griselda's story appears to function as a straightforward example of wisely behaviour and a model for those wives, addressed at the end of the book, who have husbands who are ‘cruel, mean, and savage’ (p. 255).

The most difficult problems for modern readers of Christine de Pizan’s compilation come at the end of the book when the categories of exceptional and exemplary women are integrated as the elite of the city of ladies appear on the scene. A company of female saints and martyrs, headed by the Blessed Virgin Mary, is introduced by Justice as the crowning glory of the city. These are exemplary, Christian Amazons but how do we read their histories? Are they pornographic narratives of ‘masochistic martyrs of sado-spiritual religions’? Should they be read in the context of medieval hagiographic conventions as a kind of narrativ in which women as well as men are empowered to triumph over earthly power structures and be a witness of transcendent spiritual power? May the histories of these women and the kinds of physical, sexual torments they suffer be read as an analysis of the nature of earthly, if not spiritual, patriarchal designs and power structures? Confronting these areas of the city has generated serious debates in our seminars about the sexual politics of Christianity and about the kind of historical context in which the book as a whole should be placed. At the very least, reading Christine de Pizan’s book demonstrates how the perception and representation of female experience is itself a historical variable.

‘I grant thee lyf, if thou canst tell me / What thing it is that wommen moost desirien.’ (Wife of Bath's tale, II. 904–5)

Almost all the members of the option course have read Chaucer's work before and some have studied The Wife of Bath's prologue and tale as an A level set text too. From our point of view as teachers, Chaucer's text raises questions about possible differences in approach when we teach it as part of a general medieval literature course and on a feminist option.

FEMINIST OPTIONS

And those questions about the politics of who reads, writes and categorises texts, introduced in the initial theory section and developed by juxtaposing Christine de Pizan with Chaucer and Freud, are exactly the questions raised in the voice of the Wife of Bath in her Prologue. The disruption of historical and literary traditions in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue again rests on a claim to have access to authentic female experience, as in The book of the city of ladies. The autobiographical monologue from the Wife of Bath challenges man made theories and representations of the experience of a married woman. Or does it? Reading this text too generates radically divergent interpretations amongst members of the option which are often split initially over whether the representation of a sexual stereotype is subverted or confirmed by the voice of the Wife of Bath in her Prologue and the construction of her Tale. Does her monologue titillate the desires of a male audience by exposing female secrets (her ‘pryvetee’) to public view? Does the Prologue highlight a difference of view in revealing the economic constraints on female expression of desire? Does the Wife's Tale articulate an archetypal male fantasy (that women's desire is a riddle and yet there is a key to their desire) or expose that very fantasy for what it is—a male construction?

Clearly, a range of such possible interpretations ought to be examined in every context in which the work is discussed. Those who teach on the feminist option and on general medieval courses felt that students taking the option were much readier than those on other courses to comment on the economic determination of the Wife’s career and on the power politics of literacy, that they had a vocabulary and a context which allowed them to challenge readings of the Wife as a normative comic character. The juxtaposition with Christine de Pizan’s work makes the analysis of the prevailing representation of women in the Wife’s performance seem less of a historical aberration—though it also reveals the way in which reading preconceptions are partly determined by the sex of the author. This last point, that the position of the viewer already determines the perspective of the view, is one made throughout the Wife’s performance itself through the attention given to the sources of representations of married women and through the allusion to the Aesopian fable about lion-painting. Women-painting, she suggests, has largely been the prerogative of male clerks.

‘By God if wommen hadde writen stories / As clerkes han . . . ’ (Wife of Bath’s prologue, II. 693–4)
On the feminist option we explore The Wife of Bath’s prologue and tale by considering some of the other texts which overtly and covertly are used in the making of the Wife’s performance. We do not attempt anything like a thorough source and analogue study but confine our attention mainly to the function of the Wife’s allusions to Aesop and Ovid; to the Christian views of marriage, widowhood and virginity based on St Paul ‘th’apostle’; to analogues to the Wife’s tale (the version the Wife tells is unique in being triggered by a rape); and to the representation of a Widow in the thirteenth-century narrative of Le vieve, by Gautier Le Leu, in which a male voice is used to present a female biography similar in some respects to that of the Wife of Bath. The politics of book writing and book learning is the anchor for our discussions as we consider how power structures affect communication and how textual dynamics affect interpretation. Our aim is to raise awareness of the construction of the voice of the addressee and the roles of the addressee; of the way in which a cultural tradition may determine not only the nature of the representation of a woman’s voice but also any attempt to disrupt that practice of representation, limiting the forms such disruptions can take. The Wife’s token revolt takes the form of ripping out part of a clerical compilation about wicked wives: in confronting her sources in literary tradition, the Wife literally takes a leaf out of that book. Whatever expert advice on how to do the course is hear how the Clerk on pilgrimage uses the tale of patient Griselda to answer the Wife’s challenge that ‘it is an impossible / That any clerk wol speke good of wyves, / But if it be of hooly seintes lyves’ (pp. 689–90) — a further contextualisation which is open to students of the text on medieval courses. Instead, on the feminist course we turn to a rather different representation of a woman’s desire in Sigmund Freud’s case history of Dora.

‘I knew you would say that.’

“That is to say, you knew that it was so.”

The juxtaposition of ‘Dora’ with the Wife of Bath’s prologue and tale is calculated to shock students used to chronologically arranged courses into a re-assessment of ways in which texts might be linked. The danger of course is that the axis of a feminist perspective implies an essential continuity or transhistorical sameness in the experience of female repression, whereas one of our aims in disrupting chronology is to highlight the specificity of historical conditions. To ask ostensibly the same question — ‘What do women want?’ — within discourses as different as medieval romance and nineteenth-century psychoanalysis is in effect to ask different questions, though those differences might be mutually illuminating. Just as the Wife is ultimately restricted to speaking from within the discourses of male literary representations of women, Dora’s words and her sexuality are always already interpreted by Freud’s theory. The Wife’s rebellion was voiced by her tearing of the book; Dora’s (as interpreted and appropriated for feminism) by the eloquent silence of her withdrawal from analysis. The politics of speaking and being heard are central to each.

‘Dora’ is the most consistently successful text on the feminist course. The feminist context gives the students the confidence to contradict and explode Freud’s authority and to offend their own rival interpretations — a latter-day version of the Wife’s bold questioning of the inevitability of clerical authority. But what also happens is that the students’ excitement at the more recent text overshadows Christine de Pizan and Chaucer, and our intentions to explore the implications of the juxtaposition. Though disrupting established assumptions by unexpected juxtapositions looks good in theory, many students follow it up in their essays. And in this case, as with Christine de Pizan and Chaucer, the different arrangement of the feminist course means that other kinds of contextualisation are skimped: it is almost impossible to offer an assessment of Freud’s achievements to balance the student’s sense of having seen through his sexist strategies. But with Freud as with all the other topics on the course we can do little more than suggest starting-points, possible feminist approaches. It is up to the students to explore further and to define their own version of feminist criticism. Our hope is that at the very least, they will develop the conviction that familiar arrangements and modes of interpreting texts are not natural, but open to constant question and disruption.

**Feminist options?**

Our aim when the Women’s Group was established was to have a gradual feminist impact on the degree course as a whole; a collaboratively-taught option course seemed the best way of immediately highlighting feminist concerns in the meantime. Since then, we have become very much aware of the problems and compromises which mark both areas of our experience as feminists and practising teachers. We still face problems within the option course itself: the new mixture of men and women has sometimes created difficulties in the balance of contributions and participation in seminars; different degrees of political
commitment among members can cause tensions; some texts have been more stimulating than others (though not always the same ones from group to group and year to year). Perhaps more seriously, we recognise that the choices of principle that have governed revisions of the course — as well as the rationale imposed on it retrospectively in the process of writing this article — have led us into political minefields. We have, for example, consciously rejected a course on ‘Women’s writing’ which is identified solely by the sex of the writers included, and which leaves links and issues open to the directions seminar discussions take. On the contrary, bad experiences at the beginning of the course when we left the initiation of discussion up to the students as much as possible meant that the gradual revision of both content and teaching method has tended towards greater direction of the students’ attention, implicitly reasserting pedagogic authority and claiming an academic rigour and respectability for feminism which would be seen by some feminists as hopelessly reactionary. Nevertheless, we still team-teach the option, with two of us present at each seminar, in a conscious attempt to suggest that one aspect of feminism might be to subvert the teacher/student hierarchy established by the single authority of the teacher/lecturer which students are used to. But we are aware of our need to think through the effects and success of this different teaching practice: does it simply multiply authorities or does it actually achieve its intended effect (as some students have said)? And the residual competitive tensions between us as teachers have never been properly addressed.

Outside the option, the course causes other difficulties which we have not resolved. The very fact of offering feminist options reinforces the idea held by some students (and colleagues) that, whatever feminist perspectives may be, they are of marginal interest and status, and probably associated with an aggressive, trendy and ephemeral kind of political activity. Some students’ attempts to extend the methodologies discovered on the option to their compulsory course work have met with a hostile response — and in this way the apparent marginality of feminist concerns is reinforced as the student loses the confidence to extend the challenge to established critical methods outside the safety of the option. Alternatively, tolerant and even sympathetic members of the department find it all too easy to assume that the presence of feminist options within the degree course (there is also a feminist option for second-years on eighteenth-century fiction) means that ‘women’s’ topics are adequately catered for. And the feminist options are invariably referred to by staff and students as the ‘women’s courses’, a formulation which tends to contain and defuse their political identity and bite.

Such institutionalised containment makes it all the more important that we continue to try to make feminist reappraisal familiar and everyday — outside the designated context of the options. On the simplest level, we can highlight gender prejudices by questioning the conventional exclusion of women from the acts of writing and reading (when presented with an unfamiliar text, a large number of students will assume the author to be male); we can discourage the use of the masculine pronoun (albeit in defiance of linguistic convention) which tacitly excludes the majority of the lecturer’s audience in most English departments; and it is always possible in studying any text to raise questions about attitudes to and representations of women. But outside the feminist option course, we have often found it difficult to help students to move beyond ‘images of women’ criticism to consider the historical and textual construction of gender. A large conceptual leap is needed to move from alluding to women’s imagery to asking how those images are produced and interpreted; and compulsory courses generally, based on traditional and untheorised notions of historical period and literary value, fail to address theories of literary production and reception. Many students have never been encouraged to think about the reading process — ‘I just read’ — and without a theoretical platform, it is hard to persuade them that the construction of the writer’s/reader’s ‘self’ will exert its influence at both ends of the literary act. Feminism thus raises fundamental questions about the construction of courses and the role of theory.

Even visible feminist interventions can have undesirable results. We apparently collide in the stereotyping we would wish to avoid when, say, the one woman teaching on a compulsory course in Romantic literature gives the lecture on Jane Austen using feminist theory, or agrees to provide the token ‘woman’ question for the exam paper (which is not to say that we can yet do without either). Similarly, we may ourselves be partly responsible for the view that the ‘women’s courses’ are for the minority. We have, after all, a ‘Women’s’ Group, fiercely separatist and ridiculed for being so, and yet we run ‘Feminist’ options which we encourage men to take. We are strategically essentialist when it comes to creating a space for ourselves as women within the department, but explicitly critical of forms of essentialism (such as any simple idea of ‘women’s writing’) when we teach the option. The inconsistency may be strategically understandable, but it can be difficult to explain to those
(mainly male) colleagues whose reactions to the options and particularly
to the Women's Group range from puzzled indulgence to overt
hostility. Within the options and the Women's Group, where feminism
is accepted as inevitable and right – students taking the options have
expressed 'the relief of not always having to explain why one's interest is
woman-centred' – it is also recognised as plural, fraught with internal
debates. Outside the options that constant need for explanation,
self-justification, can make it difficult to explain feminisms or the role of
strategic 'inconsistencies' and to avoid a defensive and simplifying
position.

But the defensiveness is not simply a response to external challenges.
Throughout the development of the course we have been aware of a
tension between our appropriation for feminism of the 'scholarly',
rigorous – but also hierarchical and individualist – methods in which we
have been trained, and our sense of more fluid and experimental
alternatives; and the same debates over how to put feminist theory into
practice have recurred within the Women's Group and in the process of
writing this article. What we are aware of now is how we have tended
to give the course retrospectively a consistent rationale and underplayed
the haphazard process of its development. We have suppressed
problems within the Women's Group and recognition of the variety and
inconsistency of our viewpoints and writing practices in the interests of
producing a smooth narrative, failing to escape the simplifying coer-
ence imposed by the form of the academic article, in spite of multiple
authorship. But whatever the result, the value of the exercise has been in
the support and challenge which collaboration in this context has
produced, demanding from us the constant self-assessment and the
political and critical self-consciousness which, as individual feminist
teachers, we hope to encourage in our students both inside and outside
the feminist option course.

With thanks to Jill Le Bihan, Sally Shuttleworth.

Notes
1 'The Wife of Bath's prologue and tale', in The complete works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited by F.
N. Robinson (2nd ed., Oxford, 1957), 1692. All subsequent references are to this
edition and will hereafter be included in the text.
subsequent references are to this edition (BC) and will hereafter be included in the text.
3 In fact in choosing to include The book of the city of ladies on the course, we no longer have to