

Proposal to CLAGS Program Committee

*Present to scholars
take in Humanities
week - into no panels
etc.*

I. Title: QUEER MIDDLE AGES

II. Preferred date: October 8-9-10 1998
Alternate: 1-2-3 October 1998, Nov. 5-6-7

Conference is to start off on Th. evening with a plenary address and reception; bulk of panels and activities on Friday; additional panels on Sat., possibly ending with a social event.

III. The conference is being proposed by the Society for the Study of Homosexuality in the Middle Ages and has been endorsed also by the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship. The planning committee consists of 15 medievalists, including graduate students and faculty members, with a wide range of experience in organizing conferences (both in medieval and in lesbian/gay topics) and of publications in the fields of medieval studies, gender studies and queer studies.

*Plus
substitute
program
in Medieval
Studies*

They are: Edith Benkov (San Diego State U., French and Italian), Linde Broccato (U. of Ill, Urbana-Champaign, Spanish), Jim Cain (Columbia U. grad. student, English), Francesca Canade Sautman (HC and GC of CUNY, French and Women's Studies), Robert Clarke (Kansas State U., French), Marilyn Desmond (SUNY Binghamton, English) Joanne Krause (CUNY grad. student, English), Steven Krueger (QC and GC, English), Jacqueline Murray (U. of Windsor, Canada, History), Dan Rakus (U of Toronto, Philosophy), Fred Roden (NYU grad. student, English), Pamela Sheingorn (Baruch C. and CUNY, Art History and History), Alan Stahl (NY Numismatic Society), Christopher Vaccaro (CUNY grad. student, English), Richard Zeitlowitz (CUNY grad. student, English).

Endorsements from academic programs throughout CUNY and at other NY institutions will be sought.

IV. The conference is to be a two day event (plus one evening), dedicated to "queering the Middle Ages", to the methodologies and documentation pertinent to and the interpretation of the same-sex choices of women and men who resisted heteronormativity in their sexual and emotional practices during the period generally known as the "Middle Ages". While we are acutely aware of the problematic nature of this term when applied outside of the West (and sometimes, within the West itself), we are also concerned by the even more problematic position of ignoring histories taking place at the same time in other parts of the world, where culture might not have been in a "middle" stage at all. Thus, we are firmly committed to insuring a culturally diverse program that truly reflects this resistance to compulsory heterosexuality in a wide range of the globe's cultural areas, within this period, such as the Arab and Islamic worlds, China or the pre-colonial Americas. We understand the "middle ages" to be a flexible, not prescriptive term, which can begin, depending on the area under discussion, as early as the 4th cent. CE and end as late as the end of the 16th century CE.

The conference will bring together scholars who have contributed significant steps forward to the field of lesbian/gay or queer medieval studies, with those who are engaged in new, cutting-edge work in the field. It will provide a thorough "stock taking" of work done in the field as well as break new ground, striking down the multiple barriers which have kept the Middle Ages more or less intact from far-reaching inquiry in lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender studies.

*tribute to John Brinwell a part
of the*

V. To date, there has been no conference of this amplitude dedicated specifically to the Middle Ages. Queer studies have made significant inroads in the early modern period, but the Middle Ages have only sporadically been the object of "queering" and of documenting lesbian, homosexual, and bisexual lives, in the context of other more general conferences, such as the International Congress on Medieval Studies which meets every year at WMI, Kalamazoo. Over a number of years, special panels and sessions have gained credence and increased visibility at that conference at others in which medieval topics are discussed. However, no conference of national and international scope has yet taken place in which the Middle Ages are the focus. Such a major event has not been planned yet in NYC and it seems particularly fitting that CUNY and CLAGS be the host of such a pathbreaking event.

Furthermore, the Middle Ages play a potentially critical role, too long ignored, in current debates over the historical parameters of the construction of homosexuality, offering a much needed counterpoint to rigid theories which deny any possibility of its existence before the modern age. The particularities of same-sex non-heteronormative behaviors in the Middle Ages also provide an enormously rich material for a better understanding of many aspects of gendered identities.

VI. The conference should appeal to a wide body of medievalists and early modern scholars, regardless of their previous experience in the fields of lesbian/gay studies or queer studies; as well, it is directed at a large audience from queer and gender theorists; thirdly, it should appeal to a larger body within the educated New York area public with an interest in things medieval and queer. It should move discussions over the above mentioned intellectual questions greatly forward. It will insure that the study of the Middle Ages, at least in this continent, will no longer be able to ignore queer studies.

VII. The conference organizers intend to publish the proceedings of the conference, or at least, its best papers. This publication would be the first of its nature, a truly ground-breaking work in the field of medieval queer/lesbian-gay studies, preceded to date, only by a shorter volume consisting of papers in a special issue of GLQL. A volume (or possibly set of volumes) of this amplitude, remarkable not only by the novelty of subject matter but also by the breadth and diversity of its contents, is sure to be the object of instant interest on the part of several publishers. We would plan to contract ahead of time for such a volume.

CLAGS
Amis
?

We do not feel that a video of the conference on the other hand, is of much relevance or utility.

VIII. We want to organize the conference along two lines: a) invitations to a small group of 4 plenary speakers, as well as a few more well-known scholars who would be asked to lead workshops or roundtables on specific subjects b) with a broad-based, inclusive call for papers, which would insure that some of the current work, especially by isolated scholars, that has not yet been brought to light, would find a suitable forum.

We foresee the need to cover two broad categories of panels: a) Approaching the Middle Ages through theoretically and methodologically oriented sessions, including, but not limited to, the relation of queer theory to feminist theory, the impact of cultural studies, the role of the disciplines on queering the Middle Ages (religious studies, art history, sociology etc), the relation of lesbian studies to the study of homosexuality, pedagogy, teaching queerly, archival resources and methods of inquiry.

b) sessions dedicated to discrete points of scholarly investigation as well as central questions in the field of medieval studies for which queer interpretations are being proposed, including, but not limited to, devotional material, queer Chaucer, Issues of Representation, Visual Cultures, Lesbian Lives, Identities, queerness and subjectivity, nationhood and homophobia, misogyny and female sexuality, western constructions of eastern sexuality as queer, pre-colonial America, "passions of the Cut Sleeve". The call would be formulated in such a way as to encourage submission of totally original work that fits no pre-determined category.

A number of names have been advanced as possible plenary speakers. Some have pioneered work in lesbian/gay/queer medieval studies; others have offered particularly enlightening theoretical approaches which have greatly influenced the queering of the Middle Ages. Among these, four plenary speakers and possibly as many discussion leaders would be asked to participate, on the premise that these scholars may be willing to speak for the rather modest fee we are budgeting. We have indeed decided to eschew "star honoraria" that are unrealistic for our budget, would inflate our needs, and distort the concept of the conference with an excessively unequal valuation of scholars' work. The scholars approached to fulfill a plenary or discussant role include: Carolyn Dinshaw, E. Ann Matter, Judith Brown, Karma Lochrie, Jacqueline Murray, Allen Frantzen, Larry Scanlon, Judith Bennett, Kathleen Biddick, Michael Goodich, Valerie Traub, Jonathan Goldberg, Jonathan Dollimore, James Brundage, Carla Freccero, Louise Fradenburg, Michael Camille.

IX.

The Planning Committee is applying for endorsement and financial support from CLAGS, with the understanding that we would also seek additional funds elsewhere to meet all our expenses. These revenues include: donations from academic programs at the colleges and the Graduate School; registration fees and donations at the door; advertisement from local gay and gay-supportive businesses in the final program.

Conference budget:

a. Space: in-kind contribution from GC, HC and NYU	
b. Supplies: printing of announcements, posters and programs:	1500
c. mailing:	700
d. travel and honoraria for 4 plenary speakers	2800 = \$700
e. discussion/workshop leaders	800 = 200/each x4
f. thursday reception	700
g. 2 morning coffee services	800
total:	6200