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Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory

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WINNER of the SOUTH CENTRAL MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION PRIZE for BEST SCHOLARLY OR CRITICAL BOOK FOR 2009

Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory presents the first exhaustive treatment of the rhetorical use of description and memory in all the narrative works of the late 12th-century poet, Marie de France--the first woman to compose literary texts in French. Though she had no access to treatises devoted solely to the arts of memory that were to develop in the centuries following her own, she nonetheless exemplifies some of the same techniques that are extolled by their authors.

Logan E. Whalen's insightful study begins with a discussion of Marie's literary plan in light of classical rhetoric and the art of *inventio,* or literary topical invention, that developed in the Middle Ages. He then demonstrates how the fifty-six-line prologue that precedes Marie de France's *Lais* gives an outline of her literary plan, not only for the narrative texts that follow in that particular collection, but also for the whole of her poetic corpus.

Marie's use of description in the *Lais* shows the way in which she creates an imaginative locus that is conducive to memory through her elaborate descriptions of people, animals, places, events, and an assortment of inanimate objects. Her *Fables* is examined in light of the way in which scribes and illuminators of the centuries that immediately followed the composition of these texts interpreted them scripturally and iconographically. Finally, Whalen compares the structure of memory and description in the two works the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz* and the *Vie seinte Audree*--a text that has traditionally been ascribed to an anonymous author but that has recently been argued to be a fourth text by Marie de France.

Logan E. Whalen is assistant professor of French at the University of Oklahoma.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"Logan Whalen's work brings together all the elements of memory and remembrance in the four works attributed to Marie and he demonstrates just how important use of memory was to her narrative invention

and to her success in bringing her texts to the 12th-century audience. The book is well thought out and develops its thesis in a thorough and reasonable manner." -- Emanuel Mickel, *Encomia*

"This slim book is best appreciated as an act of homage to two writers who happen to be women. Logan E. Whalen's love for his subject, the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman poet known as Marie de France, is manifest on every page." -- Monica Brzezinski Potkay, *Christianity and Literature*

"Logan Whalen's work brings together all the elements of memory and remembrance in the four works attributed to Marie and he demonstrates just how important use of memory was to her narrative invention and to her success in bringing her texts to the 12th-century audience. The book is well thought out and develops its thesis in a thorough and reasonable manner." -- Emanuel Mickel, *Encomia*

"Whalen's book begins with helpful introductory sections on the rhetorical foundations of medieval memory as well as the art of *descriptio*.... This study elegantly enriches our understanding of Marie by illuminating her relationships to her literary communities, her successors, and her broader cultural contexts in the visual and plastic arts." -- Seeta Chaganti, *H-France Review*

"[A] thoughtful and persuasive study." -- Sally L. Burch, *French Studies*

"The book is among the first comprehensive studies of Marie de France's writing to include *La vie Seinte Audree* among the works attributed to her since June Hall McCash's influential article was published in *Speculum* (July 2002). Additionally, Whalen's analysis contributes fresh evidence to the case for Marie's authorship of the *Audree*."--Paula Leverage, *Speculum*

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