

## EN3A2 Women and writing 1150-1450

### Week 1 seminar

#### Reading:

Extracts from antifeminist writings; *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* (in the Riverside Chaucer).

The extracts are as follows: Extracts from [Ovid](#) (43 BC-AD 18), [Heloise and Abelard](#) (12th century), and [Jean de Meun's \*The Romance of the Rose\*](#) (c. 1275), in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. by Alcuin Blamires (Oxford, 1992), pp. 17-25, pp. 87-91, pp. 148-63. Extract from Saint [Jerome, \*Against Jovinian\*](#) (c. 393), in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 360-66.

These extracts are provided as scans from the Library; please click links on the module webpage for electronic copies.

#### Some issues to think about:

What are some of the common tropes and strategies of the antifeminist extracts from Ovid, Jerome, Heloise and Abelard, and Jean de Meun?

Can you detect any places where they are ambivalent about women?

What issues are raised by the way these texts report or imitate female voices?

How does the use of voices in these texts compare with that in the Wife of Bath's Prologue (you might want to think about why so much of the prologue is occupied by the Wife quoting speeches made by her previous husbands)?

In what ways does the Wife of Bath's Prologue respond to the antifeminist tradition represented in these extracts?

Is the Wife of Bath simply enacting a female stereotype?

Is she, like Heloise, trapped inside a masculine discourse about women? Or is she mimicking the place assigned to women in society and therefore exposing the workings of patriarchy?

In what ways can she be seen to appropriate the tools male writers have used against women?

Is the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale merely a masculine fantasy?