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Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature (The Middle Ages Series)

Sharon Kinoshita

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In *Medieval Boundaries*, Sharon Kinoshita examines the role of cross-cultural contact in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century French literature. Starting from the observation that many of the earliest and best-known works of the French literary tradition are set on or beyond the borders of the French-speaking world, she reads the *Chanson de Roland*, the *lais* of Marie de France, and a variety of other texts in an expanded geographical frame that includes the Iberian peninsula, the Welsh marches, and the eastern Mediterranean. In Kinoshita's reconceptualization of the geographical and cultural boundaries of the medieval West, such places become significant not only as sites of conflict but also as spaces of intense political, economic, and cultural negotiation.

An important contribution to the emerging field of medieval postcolonialism, Kinoshita's work explores the limitations of reading the literature of the French Middle Ages as an inevitable link in the historical construction of modern discourses of Orientalism, colonialism, race, and Christian-Muslim conflict. Rather, drawing on recent historical and art historical scholarship, Kinoshita uncovers a vernacular culture at odds with official discourses of crusade and conquest. Situating each work in its specific context, she brings to light the lived experiences of the knights and nobles for whom this literature was first composed and—in a series of close readings informed by postcolonial and feminist theory—demonstrates that literary representations of cultural encounters often provided the pretext for questioning the most basic categories of medieval identity.

Awarded honorable mention for the 2007 Modern Language Association Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for French and Francophone Studies

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