



Special Issue: Gender and Theory in Medieval Celtic Literature

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The field of Celtic Studies has long been somewhat resistant to theory, even as the broader field of Medieval Studies has embraced a variety of theoretical perspectives over the last three decades. Unfortunately, ahistorical ideas about ‘strong Celtic women’ still proliferate, and students face a comparative paucity of studies on gender in medieval Celtic Studies, even as there has been increasing interest in the sorts of questions that gender and queer theory can ask of medieval texts.

However, this is now changing. Over the last two decades, more scholars have been incorporating theory into their work, and ‘Gender and Theory’ has emerged as a significant strand of analysis. Successful conference sessions at ICCS 2023 and IONA 2024 that explored gender and theory attracted excellent papers and enthusiastic audiences. This special issue of *Studia Celtica Fennica* builds on this success by bringing together seven discussions of medieval Celtic literature that engage with a number of theoretical approaches to questions of gender. Such analysis is particularly important in this present moment, when LGBTQ+ identities are often dismissed as a modern fad, women’s rights are being eroded, and human rights are under attack. Insights from medieval Celtic literatures and the cultures that produced them can provide important historical context. Our contemporary ideas about sex, gender, and sexuality do not arise from nowhere. The study of gender in medieval literature can show us some of the ways that our modern gender systems arose, alongside other paths not taken. This special issue offers a variety of new perspectives on medieval texts written in Irish, Welsh and Latin. These articles illuminate new ways of seeing the texts, with a plurality of voices and approaches.

And yet, this plurality is not an endpoint. Many of the articles contained in this volume note that other work could be done in similar veins, or lament the absence of scholarship that would have allowed their arguments to explore further dimensions. We hope that the discussions in this issue will inspire further work in medieval Celtic Studies.

Roan Runge examines three Irish hagiographical texts using the lens of trans studies, revealing how social markers such as clothing, possessions and interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in the construction of sex/gender.

Rachel Rucker applies Sara Ahmed’s theory of affect alienation to the experience of Deirdriu in *Longes mac n-Uislenn* and of Cú Chulainn in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, exploring how their respective mourning for Noisiu and Fer Diad reject normative pathways of desire.

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Sev Munro's discussion of the Latin life of the medieval Welsh female saint St. Melangell unpacks the ways in which the saint's unusual life alone in the wilderness, and her association with brambles and hares, seem to open up a queer space in which she might be read as a 'queer virgin'.

Finn Longman examines three characters who express their desire to share Cú Culainn's grave with him in death, arguing that these relationships are open to queer readings and serve to dismantle heteronormative and amatonormative assumptions.

Rebecca Shercliff employs speech-act theory to show how Ferb's speech in *Tochmarc Ferbe* makes her an active, and indeed crucial, participant in the narrative rather than simply a female figure who prophesies and laments.

Krista Kappahn's discussion of medieval Welsh bards highlights the ways in which their gender fluidity could have been used by medieval authors to subvert and critique the social and ethical systems within the texts.

Emmet Taylor draws on Judith Bennett's theory of performativity to show how Medb's behaviour in the *Táin*, often seen as negative or as improper womanhood, in fact reflects her performative role as 'king'.