

The Performance of Masculinity and Femininity: Gender Transgression in *The Sowdone of Babylone* (summary)

Judith Butler has observed that “gender is an identity tenuously constructed in time... through a stylised repetition of acts”, and the performative nature of gender identities has often been highlighted. In this paper I will address the way that knights are described as masculine and ladies as feminine, how the former are feminised and the latter defeminised and what this might suggest within our understanding of medieval society. I will use *The Sowdone of Babylone* to discuss my hypothesis. My argument is that knights are constructed as masculine when they are in a heroic, knightly role, but they are constructed as feminine when they are described as being in love or in a “buddy” relationship with a peer. Women are depicted as feminine when they perform the roles of daughter, servant or wife, but they are depicted as masculine when they move beyond these functions in order to aid knights or promote Christianity.

Bonnie Millar-Heggie, B.A. (Hons.), M.A., Ph.D.
Nottingham Trent University, U.K.
email: bonnie.millar-heggie@ntlworld.com