

NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

MESSAGES

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF SMFS

Tempus fugit! I am now in the “lame duck” phase of my presidency of the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship and will soon be handing the baton to my successor, Theresa Earenfight. SMFS has expanded in important ways in the past two years, and I would like in my final message to solicit your help both in celebrating our accomplishments and thinking about ways this organization can continue to thrive and serve both its members and the medievalist and feminist communities at large.

Communications and Visibility: SMFS is now fully a member of the Information Age. The listserv, *medfem-l*, which originated as an independent entity more than a decade ago, has now been taken under SMFS’ wing and secured long-term support from the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (ACMRS) based at Arizona State University. *medfem-l* remains an independent listserv: membership in SMFS is not required nor is content controlled by SMFS. Rather, we hope it will continue to do what it has always done: be a convenient and open forum for members to share news and queries related to feminist studies of the Middle Ages. Similarly, SMFS’ website has been updated and now serves as the main “portal” for information about our organization. If any of you have IT experience and wish to put your name forward for our still-vacant post of IT Manager, please contact our Elections Manager, Chris Africa <chris-africa@uiowa.edu>.

Kalamazoo, MLA, and Leeds: 2007 was the inaugural year of SMFS’ official representation at Leeds. Our thanks to our Leeds committee—Liz Herbert McAvoy and Kim LoPrete—for making our first foray “across the pond” such a success. Liz will be joined in her duties next year by one of our graduate student (or “postgrad”)

representatives, Robin Gilbank, so please contact them if you want any further information about the program or other events. Leeds now joins Kalamazoo and the Modern Language Association as a regular venue for feminist work supported by the Society. May our presence remain strong and vigorous!

Other SMFS Business: All other aspects of regular SMFS business—our mentoring exchange, our Best Article Prize, and the Medieval Foremothers Society—went well this past year. For the Article Prize, we had a whopping forty-four submissions, which made the work of the committee both daunting and fascinating. Please join us in congratulating Nicola McDonald for her winning essay, “Games Medieval Women Play,” in *Chaucer’s “Legend of Good Women”*: Context and Reception, ed. Carolyn P. Collette (Boydell & Brewer, 2006), pp. 176-97, and the following four scholars whose work was selected for Honorable Mention: Kara A. Doyle, Kathy Krause, Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, and Adrian W. B. Randolph. The Advisory Board approved this year a plan to begin offering student essay prizes: one competition for undergrads and another for graduate students. I encourage all members to note the names of subcommittee members (listed on our website) and contact them directly should you have any queries or wish to submit nominations. We will have a big turnover in the Advisory Board composition this year, as five vacancies open up. In a separate mailing, you’ll be receiving your ballots for these elections. Please fill these out promptly and send them in so we can welcome a new generation of active and enthusiastic scholars to the work of this organization.

SMFS in the Future: It is probably my identity as a historian that brings me to ponder where SMFS will be ten or twenty years from now. There have been and continue to be many advantages in our being a small and nimble organization—one that can, on a dime, pull new and relevant sessions together every year at Kalamazoo (our line-up for next year includes sessions ranging from getting grant money to assessing Judith Bennett’s latest book on the role of feminism in history) and one that can still function on a personal level in welcoming new members and mentoring our

next generation. But I also hear Virginia Woolf nagging at me. An endowment would allow us to offer small stipends for graduate student travel, to regularize support for our prizes (which now are covered out of our general membership fees), and to support our members (hopefully including our growing international membership) in other ways. We have, now, a room of our own. But could we not also use £500 a year to go with it?

Monica Green

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

SMFS at Twenty: The Reception of Feminist Scholarship in Medieval Studies—An Editorial Essay

Twenty years ago, the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* was founded as a vehicle to promote and publish feminist scholarship on the medieval period. Since its inception, there have been many changes, including the name of the journal to the *Medieval Feminist Forum*, but the overriding concern was to support feminist scholarship in a field that had not embraced it, much less welcomed it. Consequently, the journal has been a place for members of the Society of Medieval Feminist Scholarship to share news, publish peer-reviewed articles and bibliographies, and review books. As the stature of *MFF* has grown, we have seen a simultaneous change in academic publishing since 1986. Traditional journals in the field now accept and publish woman-centered scholarship, and there are several theoretical venues for feminist studies, gender studies, and studies of sexual orientation and identity. We can count other successes as well, good reasons to celebrate the work that has been accomplished thus far: essays in mainstream feminist journals; whole issues devoted to medieval feminist work in traditional medieval studies journals; and book series on women and gender in the Middle Ages. We can be proud that some of these changes have occurred because SMFS has actively encouraged feminist scholars to serve on editorial boards of academic presses and scholarly journals, as well as to serve on the advisory boards of academic associations.

These advances might make it seem that feminist work is now mainstreamed in medieval studies (perhaps even post-feminist in some minds), yet in some disciplines, in some journals, and in some specific areas of research, one might not think that medieval feminist scholarship

exists or has ever had any impact. A recent review of a feminist book in art history, for example, provided a scathing denouncement of the author's approach and training as ones that were not sound or appropriate to the medieval objects under consideration. Such a position suggests that we need to reflect on the successes of medieval feminist scholarship since 1986 and consider possible avenues for development, since our collective work has not accomplished as much as we might like. Pausing to reflect on where we have been and where we need to go, the members of SMFS planned four sessions to honor the organization's anniversary at the 41st International Medieval Congress at Western Michigan University: Founding Mothers, Archives, Pedagogy, and Theory. These sessions, run under the rubric "SMFS at Twenty," were organized respectively by Natalie Grinnell, Jennifer N. Brown, Mica Gould, and Marla Segol, and the presenters in them have helped shape a conversation about the current state of SMFS and its historic role in the field.

Essays from the Founding Mothers session appeared in *MFF* 42 (Winter 2006), and it seemed expedient to consider in *MFF* 43.1 (Summer 2007) the issues raised in the other sessions in "SMFS at Twenty." With these sessions in mind, I participated in several conversations about the current reception of medieval feminist scholarship at that same Congress, including one with Rachel Dressler on the field of art history and its continued resistance to feminist work and another with Anne Clark Bartlett on how *MFF* might be the right vehicle for discussing some larger questions about the field of medieval studies and the place of feminist work within it. The result was that I urged the SMFS Advisory Board to focus this issue of the *Medieval Feminist Forum* on the reception of feminist scholarship. Some of the over-riding concerns that I had as I collected essays for this volume include:

- What obligations do we have as medieval feminist scholars to cite and remember the scholarship of earlier feminists?
- How have we moved from citing theoretical arguments in our work to assuming their usefulness, rather than articulating why we are using them? And, how are these expectations specific to individual disciplines?
- What has been the reception of medieval feminist scholarship in publishing generally? In journals? At university presses? At commercial presses?
- By consequence, what is the reception of medieval feminist scholarship in the various disciplines? Are some disciplines post-

feminist while others are still struggling to recognize medieval feminist scholarship?

- Who is reviewing medieval feminist scholarship? Other feminists? Scholars without a feminist agenda or training in feminist scholarship? Scholars who are in the same discipline (or not)?
- How is medieval feminist scholarship valued during tenure review, promotion cases? How is it dismissed or considered not qualitative?
- How has medieval feminist scholarship changed? What are the expectations of a given essay or book? Whose work must be cited for it to be considered feminist? What do footnotes look like? What do bibliographies look like?
- What obligations do we have to protest bad reviews of medieval feminist scholarship? To respond or to pressure general editors to attend to the nature of reviews that are clearly knee-jerk reactions?

The essays included in this issue take up a number of these questions, even as they demonstrate an interchange that was evident in the presentations at Kalamazoo. Carole Levin's essay, for example, asks that we consider how traditional biography is written and how feminist inquiry means a different way of looking, an alternate way of examining archival data from the past. Caitlin G. Callaghan shows us that documentation of female suicides is less likely to be recorded than for men, and she suggests how we might examine the available death records to find other suicides that were labeled accidents. Similarly, B. J. van Damme demonstrates that assumptions about women in archival documents have been made and require that we attend more carefully to the ways women participated in community life. Jennifer N. Brown, moreover, illustrates that theory can be usefully employed in reading the lives of the saints and considering how these lives were constructed. Sylvia Federico asks us to attend to our approach as scholars and to consider what it means to invoke psychoanalytic theory or new historicism, even as Erica L. Artilles reminds us how anthologies of medieval literature have changed and how little these changes have affected how we approach women readers and writers in literary surveys and what we need to consider when making significant changes in the canon. Rachel Dressler recounts the generation and demise of the Medieval Feminist Art History Project (MFAHP) and provides a review of feminist publishing in four art history journals. Her results are both encouraging (women-centered studies are being

published) and discouraging (they have done little to change the shape of traditional methodologies in art history). As in *MFF* 42 (Winter 2006) where the scholarship of Mary Martin McLaughlin and Thelma Fenster was celebrated, this issue also recognizes another medieval feminist's scholarly achievements in Lynn Arner's tribute to Sheila Delany. As part of the initiative to remember our foremothers and their work, Arner's piece was originally published in a special issue of *Exemplaria* alongside a series of essays on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century culture in Delany's honor. We gratefully acknowledge *Exemplaria's* generosity in allowing us to reproduce it here.

I thank these contributors, and the organizers of the "SMFS at Twenty" sessions, for helping us get started on these conversations, and I commend Rachel Dressler for her initiative in reviving the MFAHP. Moreover, I am grateful for useful conversations with Anne Clark Bartlett that helped generate the questions I have outlined here—and eventually led to my role as editor of this volume. As Anne and I knew when we generated this wish list of ideas, it would not be possible to address all of the questions in them, but we hoped that they would situate some of the on-going questions in our work as medieval feminist scholars. I urge all of you—at this moment of reflection—to read these essays with attention to these questions, to generate your own list of questions, and to join in this conversation, whether at conferences, in publications, or in informal settings. We have much to discuss.

Virginia Blanton
University of Missouri, Kansas City

MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

You may have noticed a slight change to the issue number of this edition of *MFF*. We will now be adding volume numbers so that each year will be listed as XX.1 (Summer 2—) or XX.2 (Winter 2—). This will bring us into closer alignment with the majority of professional organizations and their citation styles. The issue/volume format clearly indicates non-continuous pagination, while indicating the continuity of the year and the General Editor.

You may have noticed another formatting change starting with Issue 42 (Winter 2006)—articles now appear in single columns, while the two-column format has been retained for book reviews. This change allows for easier reading, especially since so many of our contributors use block quotations and extensive translations, while still allowing some artistic freedom.

As usual, I would like to include a reminder that we sincerely look forward to receiving your article submissions. Issue 44.1 (Summer 2008) will be an open topic issue, so please send in those articles you've been saving! The submission guide has been updated, with clearer guidelines for online sources and details such as abbreviations. An extended list of allowed abbreviations is also included. Both of these will be available on the website, so be sure to check them before sending in your submissions.

Finally, as I am halfway through my first term as Managing Editor, I wanted to say "thank you" to everyone who has been supportive of all of us here at Minot State. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Editorial Assistants who have worked with me these past few years, most of whom have moved on to bigger and better things—teaching, working, attending graduate school—and hope they realize how lucky I was to have worked with each of them. Finally, I want to extend my sincere thanks to Wendy Melvin, the first *MFF* Art Director from MSU, who brainstormed our extensive redesign and Qalm, our mascot, and also to Roxi Homelvig, who has served as Art Director for the past four issues and will continue to do so for now. She is amazing! It is a great experience to work with undergraduates who are interested in medieval studies and feminism, and I hope our work together will secure the future of SMFS and other such organizations.

Overall, it has been an interesting and rewarding experience working on the journal, and I look forward to our continued journey together. Please keep in touch with ideas, articles, and new subscriptions, and be sure to visit our website.

Michelle M. Sauer

MESSAGE FROM MSU'S EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Throughout my college experience, I knew that I wanted to pursue a future in publishing. I went on believing that I would complete my degree without experience until I discovered the priceless opportunity in the form of an internship with the *Medieval Feminist Forum*. This position allowed me the opportunity not only to learn the inner workings of a journal (the blessings as well as the stresses), but also to further my exposure to medieval literature through a feminist perspective. It made me realize what I love about literature. I valued the experience, and I am excited about the possibilities that having had this internship will offer me in the future.

Eileen Southam