

# NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF SMFS

Dear Friends,

As I write this column it's the end of June. This year's Medieval Congress has passed (what a pleasure it was to meet and see again so many fabulous SMFS members!), the school year has ended, the summer party season has begun, and the garden has once again become my obsession. After a year of reading and writing texts, it's blessedly restorative to invent, arrange, and express in different medium. For a time, I enjoy trading mental activity for physical work, exchanging the unpredictable rewards of intellectual labor for the steady progress of vegetal growth.

And the process of planting is easily as satisfying as the results. Like many gardeners, I revise my garden continually. One week I'll highlight the silver foliage of an artemisia with some spiky purple liatris, cool a patch of yellow loosestrife with a bushy mound of bee balm, or frame a pot of fiery red lantana with lush potato vines and ferns. Next week's blooms will bring new inspirations and adjustments. It's instant and endless gratification.

In addition, our hot and humid summers allow me to indulge what gardeners call "zonal denial." Chicago is classified as USDA Zone 5 and has a typical growing season of 187 days. (By comparison, the growing season in Sacramento lasts 289 days.) As the temperature climbs, I can augment my stands of hardy and dependable perennials with giant pots of tropicals: cannas and fuchsias, dahlias and begonias, and—this year's prize—a blazing yellow allamanda vine. These lush exotics turn our Chicago patio into a brief (but brilliant) paradise. So greetings and best wishes from here. Find your paradises where you can (many of you are traveling this summer!), and enjoy them while they last.

Best wishes,

*Anne Clark Bartlett*

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of the *Medieval Feminist Forum* is an open topic, and the essays demonstrate both interesting commonalities as well as the range of scholarship within the ranks of the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship. From an Anglo-Saxon depiction of St. Agnes to Marguerite de Navarre as author of laughter to Mary of Woodstock as patron of a chronicle dedicated to her, all three essays explore the ways in which aristocratic women functioned within their societies, and the extent of their ability to control the texts that record their activities. Yet each essay derives from a different disciplinary/interdisciplinary perspective. In the first essay, Miranda Hodgson uses the theories of Luce Irigaray to theorize that, although depicted as a brave martyr, Agnes's speech is

constructed in ways that constrain any possibility of Agnes as a role model for other women. Hodgson calls Agnes and saints like her “impossible women”, women whose valor can be appreciated but not imitated.

Laura Barefield’s essay about the relationship between a female patron (matron?) and the chronicle dedicated to her theorizes more positive authorial possibilities for aristocratic women in the Anglo-Norman period. Barefield views Mary of Woodstock as more than passive recipient of masculine genealogies. Instead, Barefield explores the ways in which Trevet’s chronicle foregrounds matrilineal genealogies, both religious and historical, to theorize that Mary played a role in insuring that her female family members would have a permanent record of their part in history for descendants as well as future audiences.

Finally, Dora Polachek’s analysis of the function of laughter in Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron* brings us to examination of women as actual authors. Polachek wonders why laughter is assumed to belong to the domain of men. What happens when a woman laughs? Does her laughter have different rhetorical strategies than those of male authors? Her examination of laughter in two of Marguerite’s novellas posits that laughter has both a recuperative and an aggressive function. As well, might the materiality of bodily functions highlighted in the *Heptaméron* be a reason that later writers downplayed its humor?

These essays, crafted around close studies of specific medieval women, suggest directions that future feminist scholars might take. It will be interesting to see the results! With this issue I end my term as editor of MFF. I would like to thank the Managing Editor, Gina Psaki; the Associate Editors, Ulrike Wiethaus and Ann Matter; and the University of Oregon production team.

*Mary Suydam*

#### **MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR**

For academic year 2002-3, and thus for *MFF* issues 34 and 35, Barbara K. Altmann of the Department of Romance Languages, University of Oregon will serve as Managing Editor. Please send Barbara any notes and announcements (calls for papers, calls for submissions, proposals for *Subsidia* volumes, etc.) to: Barbara K. Altmann, Dept. of Romance Languages, 1233-University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403-1233. Her e-mail address is [baltmann@oregon.uoregon.edu](mailto:baltmann@oregon.uoregon.edu)

*Gina Psaki*