

# NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## **A NEW HOME FOR MFN**

MFN is moving! The editorial responsibilities for MFN have always shifted between universities as different editors assume the position of chief editor for one year, but for the past eight years **Hamilton College** in Colgate, New York, has been the production site of MFN. Hamilton has been a gracious and generous benefactor. We wish to thank those at Hamilton who have made MFN happen: Barbara Emmett, Chris Ingersoll, and Bonnie Krueger. In a very real, material sense, their dependability and commitment has made MFN possible. Production of MFN has now moved to the **University of Oregon**, where Clare Lees and Gina Psaki worked hard to find administrative support for MFN.

MFN will be housed with Oregon's **Center for the Study of Women and Society** and published under the aegis of the Feminist Humanities Project. CSWS, dedicated to supporting, generating and disseminating research on women, has generously committed itself to providing the financial stability and security, computer equipment, and staff support necessary to keep MFN in the style to which it has every right to become accustomed, for the next five years at least! While this transition accounts in part for the late appearance of issues 22 and 23, the advantages will be visible in the new format and design of MFN, which will feature a new presentation and greater readability.

## **NEW EDITOR**

Joining the editorial board for the next four years is Nancy Jones. Many of us know Nancy as the organizational genius behind our membership directory (MFN No. 20). Welcome, Nancy!

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF MFN AND SMFS**

MFN was born in a crowded airport lounge at the Kalamazoo airport, just as Beth Robertson, Jane Burns, and I were about to board our planes after the Medieval Congress in 1985. We all agreed that it would be wonderful to have a forum for scholars pursuing medieval studies from a feminist perspective and we decided, on the spot, to put together a mailing list of colleagues we knew in different fields working on women and gender issues and to establish a very informal newsletter. Beth put together the first issue in the spring of 1986 with seventy-nine names. In early issues we described research interests, exchanged syllabi for our newly formed courses on Women in the Middle Ages and

Medieval Women Writers, and posted announcements about upcoming feminist panels. In June 1987 Thelma Fenster joined us as editor of the Commentary column, which published brief position papers and responses on a range of critical issues. We also began to publish our book reviews, and in 1988 we organized our first special sessions at Kalamazoo at the Medieval Institute's 23rd International Congress on Medieval Studies.

During the late 1980s, the course of MFN followed the exciting expansion of feminist studies, gender studies, and work on women in virtually every domain of Medieval Studies. Beth, Jane, Thelma, and I, all literary scholars, soon created an advisory board of scholars in History, Art History, Philosophy, Religious Studies and other national literatures to invite very broad participation and to encourage cross-disciplinary exchange. By 1990 we had grown to include over 300 subscribers and we sponsored four or five yearly sessions at Kalamazoo, which often had standing-room-only audiences engaged in intense discussion. There was plenty of controversy about the representation of women and gender and about the politics of feminist studies in the academy, and the debate often spilled over into our Friday afternoon Business Meetings, where the agenda for the upcoming issues of MFN and Kalamazoo meetings was set. The Newsletter evolved from being a miscellaneous bulletin board of announcements, reviews, bibliography and commentary to including a special focus on a particular theme or common concern. We published issues that featured Medieval Multiculturalism (No. 16), Gay and Lesbian studies (Nos. 13 and 14), Feminist Research in Art History (No. 12), Graduate Student issues (No. 19), Gender and Violence (No. 21), and others. Jennifer Rondeau began to collect Internet addresses of MFN readers and the discussion of women and gender in Medieval Studies went "online" in *medfem* and *medgay*.

The evolution of MFN from a small mailing list of medievalists interested in exploring feminist issues to a large group of scholars actively publishing books and articles was extremely gratifying to Beth, Jane, Thelma, and Bonnie, who profited not only from their contact with critical developments in the field but also from their frequent interchanges with each other. From its inception, the editors tried to enact feminist principles of organization and to run the newsletter in a cooperative fashion, sharing editorial responsibilities and participating equally in all decision. This worked very well in the early years, when the Newsletter was still relatively small. But once we reached a certain critical mass in our readership, we realized that radical steps would have to be taken in order to ensure that the four of us did not embody, in readers' or our own perceptions, a hierarchical power and editorial authority that we did not seek. In order for the MFN to remain true to its mission as a cooperative exchange of feminist research, it seemed imperative to open up what we had created, in more formal ways, to many more medievalists.

To this end, the editors took two steps. In 1991, they launched the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship as an independent scholarly association with leaders elected from its members, MFN subscribers; MFN then became the newsletter of the new organization, and its Advisory Board was elected by SMFS members. Then, one year at a time, Thelma, Beth, Jane and then Bonnie stepped down as MFN editors, to be replaced by editors elected from among Advisory Board members.

From 1990 to 1996, in addition to her role as editor, Bonnie has also served as coordinator of production of the Newsletter, which has been designed, printed, and prepared for mailing at Hamilton College. Thanks to the generosity of three successive Deans of the Faculty, Eugene Tobin, G. Roberts Kolb, and Bobby Fong, MFN has enjoyed a special status at Hamilton, and its editors have benefited from secretarial and technical assistance. Two people in particular deserve warm thanks for their efforts in producing MFN during these years: Barbara Emmett, secretary of Romance, East Asian, and Critical Languages, has served as bookkeeper for MFN accounts and has supervised MFN mailings; Chris Ingersoll, graphic artist, has designed and formatted MFN. Both Barbara and Chris have accommodated most graciously our tight deadlines and inevitable last-minute additions.

At the printing of the Directory of the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship in Fall 1996 (MFN no. 20, "the yellow pages"), the membership of our organization had grown to over 800 members. Once again, it seemed time for a change, and Bonnie sought a new "home" for MFN production and SMFS finances, preferably in an institution where several MFN members might share responsibilities. Happily, Gina Psaki, Clare Lees and other members at the University of Oregon were eager to adopt MFN, and the University of Oregon's Center for the Study of Women in Society has generously made this possible.

*Bonnie Krueger*  
*Hamilton College*

**Beth Robertson's addendum:**

I was waiting in line to catch a plane back home from Kalamazoo and noticed Jane Burns's tag. I had wanted to meet her because she and I have a mutual (non-academic) friend in North Carolina who had recently had a radical mastectomy. I asked Jane how Sarah was. (I guess I like it that MFN started because of women's concern for women first.) Jane asked me how I had liked the conference; I said I was dissatisfied with the presentations on women. She agreed and said I ought to meet her friend, Bonnie. Bonnie agreed and the three of us discussed the questions we would like to have seen addressed (e.g. literacy, women and work, etc.). Bonnie's plane was called and as she headed out the

runway she said, “let’s keep talking, start a newsletter or something”—all tossed out as she rushed down the runway. Subsequently I sent out a call for interest and put the first newsletter together in the spring of 1986 with 79 names. I think it is worth mentioning that without Jane Chance’s enthusiasm, MFN might never have gotten off the ground—Jane listened to us talk and then urged Otto Gründler to give us a chance. Once our first sessions took place everyone saw the need for more sessions and it was smooth sailing, but it took Jane’s support and Otto’s openness to make it possible.

*Beth Robertson*  
*University of Colorado*

### **MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY FOR MIEVEAL FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP**

As I have chatted with graduate students and younger scholars about MFN, I have come to realize what an important role this publication plays in providing both an exciting forum for the newest ideas and a supportive environment for thinking them through. Many of us depend on MFN to provide the intellectual lifeline often missing on our own campuses; its bibliographies launch our projects; its pedagogical discussions launch our new courses; its position papers stimulate our thinking: MFN stands at the center of an enabling community.

Yet the continuity of this community depends entirely on our participation. We are now a large organization, and it is easy to conclude that others will annotate the bibliographies, respond to the position papers, contribute to the fora. As our society makes the transition from a small, highly committed group and continues to grow, we don’t want to lose the heady excitement of those early days, with their sense of forward-looking change taking place with our students, our institutions, and ourselves, and that excitement was based on participation. The message of this message from your president is DON’T BE A LURKER! MFN needs your collaborative engagement.

*Pamela Sheingorn*  
*Baruch College, New York NY*

### **MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR**

The topic for this issue of MFN is **Gender and Medievalism**. We have personal reminiscences, essays on such figures as J.R.R. Tolkien and Joan of Arc, and thoughts on the future of feminism in medieval studies. In addition, two novelists have written essays for us: Katherine Kerr, who writes historical fantasies set in a world that shares many characteristics with the pre-Christian