

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

Celtic world, and Sharan Best Newman, who writes mysteries set in eleventh-century France. They share their observations on the medieval world fantasies their readers bring to their novels, and their thoughts on the significance of historical work on medieval women for their own writing.

I would like to share how I came to choose this topic. It has to do with my sister, Alis A. Rasmussen, who writes historical fantasy novels under the name of Kate Elliott (her newest novel, set in a world that resembles ninth-century Germany, is called *King's Dragon*. There, I got in a plug for her work!). As she worked on this medieval fantasy for the last two years, Alis asked me all sorts of interesting questions. "Are there any English translations of Isidor?" "What has been written about missionaries?" "What do you think the material and social circumstances of a ninth-century female slave might have been, and what can I read about that?" "I've got all my characters holed up in a castle that's under siege and I can't figure out how to get them out!" Our most heated exchange occurred when Alis decided that there would be no gender in this book. "Look, you CAN'T have a medieval world without gender!" I exclaimed (I'm both the expert AND the big sister, after all). "But I'm writing FICTION," Alis replied, and trumped me. Our roles were clear: I'm the scholar, she's the novelist, working on the same material with very different perspectives and goals, yet our conversations enriched both of us. We have a lot to learn from one another. Our talks got me thinking about the split between scholarly work and popular work about the Middle Ages, and they got me wondering about the absence of public dialogue between these two approaches. I know, of course, that scholars study medievalism, but where can we listen to the creators of popular culture, and how can scholars move their knowledge into the larger, public sphere, where images of the Middle Ages are also created and circulated?

It seems to me that MFN is an ideal place to begin—or in my case continue—this fascinating and thought-provoking conversation. I hope that this initial issue will inspire responses from many readers, and so I mention here some questions that have been turning in my mind on this topic. Does anyone use film when they teach about the Middle Ages? What about novels, whether historical or fantastic? Perhaps someone has a syllabus they would share; perhaps others have used film or modern fiction to frame questions of historiography or to encourage critical discussions of how we use the past to serve the present; perhaps someone has a personal story to tell about explaining to family and strangers the urge to study the Middle Ages. Tell us about it! Perhaps someone knows a screenwriter (my fantasy!) who has worked on the medieval world and would tell about his or her approach.

Other topics suggest themselves. A large body of fiction for children treats the Middle Ages; many adolescent girls, for instance, are now introduced to the Middle Ages through works such as Karen Cushman's novels *The Midwife's*

*Apprentice* (winner of a Newbery Medal, a prestigious award for children's books) and *Catherine, Called Birdy* (a Newbery Honor book). A contribution that surveys and discusses some of this literature would be most welcome. Recently, the *medfem-1* discussion list has been responding to a request for suggestions for texts to use in teaching a group of "vulnerable, gifted" ninth-grade girls about the Middle Ages. There have been many, many interesting responses; perhaps someone would pull them together in an annotated bibliography that MFN could publish? Teaching middle school—and even elementary school—children about the Middle Ages happens regularly across the country, yet what resources do scholars have when the teacher-colleagues in our community schools turn to them for assistance and advice? Perhaps there are subscribers who have put together medieval lesson plans that they would share with us; perhaps some have had some experience in collaborating with primary and secondary school teachers. Please take the time to join in the conversation and write for MFN!

*Ann Marie Rasmussen*  
*Duke University*

### **MFN 23: GENDER AND MEDIEVALISM**

The topic for MFN vol. 23 will be a continuation of this discussion on gender and medievalism. We ask for contributions on this topic, including but not limited to: gender in popular representations of medieval culture; popular medievalisms in teaching; how we address our students' preconceptions about gender and medieval culture; the success, failure, advantages, disadvantages of using popularizations in teaching; how we recognize and channel our own nostalgia into scholarly discourse. We hope to receive as well contributions from creative writers on what kinds of medieval scholarship they read and how they use it.

Contributions for MFN vol. 23 can be forwarded either by email (preferred) or by regular mail.

DEADLINE: June 1, 1997

REGULAR MAIL: Mail to Prof. Ann Marie Rasmussen, German Department, Duke University, Box 90256, Durham NC 27708-0256. If possible, please send a diskette copy (in WordPerfect or any ASCII-format; for IBM) of your essay together with the paper copy.

E-MAIL: Post to [amras@acpub.duke.edu](mailto:amras@acpub.duke.edu)