

REPORT ON PUBLICATIONS PROJECT

Submitted by Kathleen Biddick, Marilyn Desmond



At the May 1992 meeting at Kalamazoo, Kathleen Biddick (History-University of Notre Dame) and Marilyn Desmond (English-SUNY Binghamton) agreed to begin work on a *MFN* project concerning editorial policy and feminist and queer publishing practices in medieval journals. They also agreed to circulate a subscription letter to all members on the CEMERS list urging institutes to subscribe to *MFN* (letter sent April 26, 1993). We have begun a statistical study of the appearance of women and feminist and queer articles in five selected journals, *Speculum*, *Traditio*, *Exemplaria*, *Viator*, and *Romance Philology*.

Based on our preliminary work, we make the following recommendations to the *MFN* readership to be considered for 1993-1995:

- (1) That *MFN* sponsor a Kalamazoo roundtable in May 1995 on *Intellectual Leadership and Journal Publication in the 21st Century*. We recommend the following editors be invited to participate: Carol Clover, *Representations*; Carolyn Dinshaw (co-editor) *GLQ*; Barbara Hanawalt, *SIGNS*; Lisa Kiser, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*; Pamela Sheingorn (co-editor), *Studies in Iconography*; Al Shoaf, *Exemplaria*; Luke Wenger, *Speculum*. Each of the editors could discuss their policies for soliciting and evaluating manuscripts and their priorities for the intellectual leadership of their journal in a transforming academy.
- (2) We recommend that *MFN* include a regular "Journals" section in the *Newsletter* and invite the above-mentioned editors and others to begin this conversation with short contributions in the forthcoming issues of *MFN* up to 1995. Such a feature section would enable us to engage in productive and informative conversation prior to a 1995 Kalamazoo panel.
- (3) Slightly outside of the domain of publications, we also recommend a panel on *Intellectual Leadership and Research Centers* with invited panelists from the Institute for Advanced Studies, Humanities Research Triangle, Stanford Humanities Center, etc.
- (4) We also query whether the Advisory Board of *MFN* would want to open a confidential file to which members could send histories of their experience of trying to get a particular work in print.

COMMENTARY: MULTICULTURALISM IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE



The following entries were sent in to the newsletter in response to our call for notes, queries, bibliographies or longer commentary on multiculturalism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. We hope that those of you pursuing research in this topic or thinking of

bringing multicultural issues into your classes will find this material useful. For the next issue, we would like to solicit responses to any or all of these entries. Please send your responses by April 1 to:

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Because of the length of this issue, we have decided to hold bibliography, book reviews, and the unusually long list of new subscribers until the next issue. We would like you to know, however, that our membership has now reached 600.

MULTICULTURAL SUBJECTIVITY IN
READING CHAUCER'S "MAN OF LAW" TALE
GLORY DHARMARAJ, CHURCH CENTER FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

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Ethnographically speaking, the "melting pot" theory is outdated in the U.S. by the presence of too many unmeltable ethnics. The "salad bowl" theory has not yet been an adequate substitute either. An apparently flippant question like, "Who will be the predominant 'lettuce' in the salad bowl?," can undermine the latter theory's claim to validity. While arguing for the necessity of a pluralistic approach to reading medieval texts, I seek also to address the problematics of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism as a way of living and pluralistic criticism as a tool of reading are the two sides of the same coin of social practice. A multicultural reading perspective not only subverts the homogenizing effect of the dominant way of negotiating meanings but also opens up the interpretive field for competing viewpoints. When race-class-gender- and sexuality-inflected readings decentralize the dominant meaning system, the question arises as to the theoretical status of each of the rival reading claims. Which is a 'more equal' reading stance towards a particular text?

I am resorting to a story and an image to address the need for and problematics of the use of other voices in texts. I have used the following anecdote from African folklore many times in my presentations:

There was a little boy in an African village who customarily came home from the mission school with excitement about his learnings of the day. On one particular day, he came home . . . with a look of puzzlement on his face. And when he came into his house his father inquired about this. I go to school everyday and the teacher often tells us the story about this lion who they say is the king of the jungle. But this ferocious and strong beast always seems to get killed by the hunter in the story. I don't understand it. If the lion is so strong why does the hunter always kill the lion? The father responded, "Well son, until lions learn how to write books, that is the way the story will always end."¹

The lions' stories have to be located in texts. These stories do not replace those of the hunters. The former exist as counterstories alongside the latter in the archive. Stories of