

# NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## MESSAGES

### MESSAGE FROM THE SMFS PRESIDENT

A question I often get from students, and I'm sure you do, too, is "What else is there to know about the Middle Ages?" This usually comes from someone who was taught by someone who made the past seem like a static, frozen set of facts rather than a ceaselessly fascinating field of inquiry. A better question, posed by a student about ten years ago, was this: "OK, now that we've dismantled the 'Great Man theory' and empiricism and study women, race, colonialism, and all that, what's next?" In the course of the conversation, he proceeded to answer his own question with a desire to challenge heteronormative presumptions. We feminist medievalists do this all the time, of course, but that course on theory was the first time he had seriously thought about it and he got to the word "heteronormativity" like we did, by asking good questions. This sort of conversation is familiar to us all and I regard it as a sign that feminism is not dead; it is alive and kicking. No matter how many times I hear a student say she or he is not a feminist, I watch them think like feminists, ask questions like feminists, and take up feminist subjects.

I guess this is why I'm an optimist, but not the cock-eyed kind. My optimism is supported by strong empirical evidence. For example, this year, for the first time, we awarded prizes to the best graduate and undergraduate students. The graduate prize is awarded to Sarah Celentano at the University of Texas, Austin, for her paper, "Commentary from the Canoness: Female Agency and Christian-Jewish Debate in the *Hortus Deliciarum*." The prize is 5 years' membership in the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship, which includes a subscription to the journal *Medieval Feminist Forum*, and publication of the winning paper in the *MFF*. The undergraduate prize was awarded to Amy Brown from The Women's College, University of Sydney, for her paper, "Gender, Power and Heroism in Ælfric's *Judith*."

The prize is 5 years' membership in the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship, which includes a subscription to *MFF*, and publication of her paper on our website. Although we could only choose one winning paper in each category, the selection committee members were impressed by the very high quality of all the papers submitted. This is a testimonial to the intellectual gifts of both the students and their faculty mentors and a sign of a very healthy and vibrant generation of young scholars. One of the most important things we do is build a Society through mentoring young scholars, and we look forward to reading more of their work and meeting them at conferences in the future.

Among those of us in the Society with our doctorates well under way or already in hand, we are reaching further past our familiar settings of Kalamazoo, Leeds, and wherever the Modern Language Association is hosting a conference. This year, our reach is now firmly grounded in Australia and New Zealand, thanks to Elizabeth Freeman (University of Tasmania), who organized two sessions on behalf of the Society at the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies (ANZAMEMS) 7th Biennial International Conference held at the University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 2–6 December 2008. Julie Ann Smith (University of Sydney) chaired a session on religious women with papers by Roswitha Dabke (Independent scholar, “Hildegard of Bingen as Mediator for Religious Houses in Lorraine and the Rhineland”), Anthony Ray (University of Tasmania, “Far Away in the Province of Liège . . .’ an Encounter between Abbot Philip of Clairvaux and Elizabeth of Spalbeek in the Later Thirteenth Century”), and Susan Marti (Historical Museum, Bern, “Singing Nuns and Celebrating Clerics—Gender Specific Decorations in Liturgical Manuscripts from Late Medieval Germany”). David Griffiths (University of Melbourne) presided over two papers on medieval women by Michael Aiken (University of New England, “The historiography and misappropriation of Constance of Sicily”) and Elizabeth Freeman (University of Tasmania, “Visionaries and Education in 12th- and 13th-Century Convents: Case Studies from St Thomas an der Kyll and other German Nunneries”).

For the first time ever, thanks to the efforts of Anne Clark Bartlett (DePaul University), the Society sponsored a session at the Medieval Academy of America, Chicago, March 26–28, 2009. I organized, and Monica Green (Arizona State University), past president of the Society, will preside over a session on Political Theorists and the Rule of Women (Printer’s Row) with papers by Keith Sisson (University of Memphis, “Political Aristotelianism and the Rule of Women in the Writings of Medieval Theorists from Thomas Aquinas to Christine de Pizan”), Mary Dockray-Miller (Lesley University, “Hagiography as Political Theory”), and Nancy McLoughlin (University of California at Irvine, “Jean Gerson’s Visionary Daughter of the King and Woman as Counselor”).

In more good news, there are more subscribers to the medfem-L discussion list and membership is up. We had some wonderful, unexpected good news this fall in the form of a very generous donation from a long-time member, J. Frank Henderson, who sent an additional check for \$500 “as a donation to aid the work of the Society.” This gift will help to continue the publication of the *Medieval Feminist Forum* and support the many initiatives that promote our work and make it possible for us to continue to grow as an organization.

Our recent election generated an impressive thirteen candidates for three spots on the Advisory Board, and I’m delighted to welcome Wendy Hoofnagle (English, University of Northern Iowa), Sally Livingston (History and Literature, Harvard), and Colleen Slater (graduate student, history, Cornell). Welcoming new members means wishing a fare-thee-well to departing Board members Jennifer Brown (English, University of Hartford), who has been invaluable to medieval feminists through her work as Secretary and MLA liaison for the Society for the past two years; Liz Herbert McEvoy (English, Swansea University, who maintained a high standard for the Society’s presence in the United Kingdom and Europe as liaison to the International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds, and Barbara Harding (graduate student, English, University of Colorado), an eloquent and passionate voice for graduate students in the Society. We will miss you, but are sure to see you at

conferences, read your books and articles, and hear your voice on the medfem-L discussion list.

*Theresa Earenfight*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The current issue of *MFF* has two parts, both of which developed out of sessions held at the International Medieval Congress at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo, MI): "Show Me the Money!" and "Feminist Approaches to Medieval Visual Culture."

"Show Me the Money" has the extremely pragmatic goal of helping the readers of *MFF* increase their success rate in fellowship and grant competitions. The contributions (by Jane Chance, Nancy Bradley Warren, Susan Dudash and Corine Schleif) were organized by Rachel Dressler and Virginia Blanton, who also shared editorial responsibilities with me for this section of *MFF* 44.2 We decided not to remove the many points of overlap among the various contributions, on the grounds that any piece of grant-getting advice important enough to appear in multiple essays is *ipso facto* deserving of repetition. In any case, every author articulated her points, even very similar ones, in different ways; that very variety can help assure that the maximum number of readers will benefit from the advice contained in the essays. "Show Me the Money!" will be particularly helpful to younger scholars, but scholars at every career stage should find some useful tidbit that can improve their future grant-getting prospects. Indeed, there is really no part of the advice offered by Chance, Bradley Warren, Dudash and Schleif that is limited in its utility to feminist scholars (let alone feminist medievalists). The short essays collected here provide excellent advice that should be useful to any scholar, and readers (despite the risk of stiffening the competition!) may wish to publicize this issue of *MFF* quite broadly among their colleagues.

"Feminist Approaches to Medieval Visual Culture" has been co-edited by Marian Bleeke, who also provides a substantive introduction to the four papers, which run the gamut from

sixth-century floor mosaics in Palestine and Arabia (Karen Britt), through twelfth-century Irish Sheela-na-gigs (Jennifer Borland), through the visual experiences of the Italian poet Petrarch (Kristen Grimes), to fourteenth-century French carved ivories (Elizabeth L'Estrange), yet all hang together through their common methodological commitment to feminist analysis and concern with the politics of “the gaze.” It was a pleasure to work with the contributors.

*Felice Lifshitz*

### MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

This is my last “solo” issue as Managing Editor. (The next issue should be completed in conjunction with whoever takes over the position.) I want to take this opportunity to thank the many people I have worked with over the years as well as the members of SMFS. I appreciate the trust the Board, under the leadership of then-President E. Ann Matter, placed in me back in 2004. I have enjoyed working with all of the Editorial Assistants—each of them an undergraduate student eager to learn more about medieval scholarship, feminism, editing, and journal business. I have also truly benefited from working with the Art Directors, also talented undergraduates, especially Wendy Melvin and Roxi Mathis. Wendy started things off at MSU, assisting with the revamping of the look, designing our female dragon, and establishing some of the new parameters. Roxi picked up the torch, and has carried us through with aplomb. She has been professional, talented, and a lot of fun, and I am certain she will be a successful graphic artist in the future.

I believe I accomplished a great deal while at the helm of *MFF*. I am especially proud of the new look, particularly the perfect binding and the elegant and consistent covers. There is a house style guide and a standard layout. We are also now catalogued in the MLA index, and both international and institutional memberships have improved, aided by credit card collection.

I am happy I had the opportunity to serve the profession in this manner. I believe that feminist medievalist scholars should

work together in a communal fashion in order to improve the situation for all of us, and a journal such as this one is a forum where we can share ideas, network, and generally join forces against academic patriarchy. I wish the next Managing Editor all the best, and hope we can all continue this journey together.

Finally, I want to say “thank you” to the members of SMFS, from the newest recruit to the Founding Mothers. As cliché as it sounds, neither the society nor the journal would exist without you...keep up the good work! And on a personal note, I truly appreciate the many compliments I have received about *MFF* over the past few years, the supportive notes and comments, and the general feeling of sisterhood I have felt within the membership body. Best wishes always.

*Michelle M. Sauer*

## **CORRECTION**

In the *MFF* 44.1 “Message from the Editor,” Jill Wagner’s name was incorrectly given as “Jill Webster.” Ms. Wagner is the author of Christine de Pizan’s *City of Ladies: A Monumental (Re) construction of, by, and for Women of All Time.* *MFF* sincerely regrets the error.