Remarks on *MFN* at Twenty

Roberta Krueger

It's hard to describe the excitement of the early years of *MFN*. These were days before e-mail and the Internet; there were no list-serves, discussion groups, or bibliographies on the Web. The editors made extensive use of the mail—in a pinch, express mail—and we made lots of phone calls. We were not a journal, with a relatively long period of gestation and production; we aimed to report recent activities and announce upcoming events as soon as possible. Contributors, book review editors, conference organizers, dissertations writers, commentators, and critics sent us material—solicited or over the transom—which we received in all shapes of envelopes and type fonts. Later, the material would arrive with an accompanying diskette in some invariably incompatible program. Several times a year the current editor would cull through the material, compile and organize it, send a draft to the other editors (through the mail, of course), and wait for the inevitable corrections, additions, and more substantial reactions. There were more messages exchanged, more phone calls, and more changes to final copy, all via the US post or FedEx. I really don't know how we did all this before email attachments and reasonably compatible word-processing programs, but we did. I have also repressed all memories of having hand-typed my dissertation with many small vials of correction fluid at my side.

As managing editor of the *Newsletter* for a number of years, I had the job of overseeing production. (All credit for the nitty-gritty goes to Chris Ingersoll, mistress of an early Mac formatting program, whose time was generously donated by Hamilton College.) The project consumed much effort and space. By the time our subscription list reached 800 and *MFN* had invaded the departmental office, I felt that the moment had arrived for *MFN*, soon to become *The Medieval Feminist Forum*, to find a new home—which it did, at the most hospitable University of Oregon, in Gina Psaki's fine hands.

But for almost a decade, working closely with *MFN* editors, I observed first-hand the progressive weaving together of announcements, notices of new members, bibliography, essays, queries, and commentary in each issue. Each element arrived as its

own bright thread, on letterhead from Philadelphia or London, each tidbit revealing a surprising connection, turning up a new lead, or posing a question we were all in the process of pondering.

What was most exciting was the sense of bridging and building an intellectual community, of collaboration and intersections as these pieces fell into place. People sent contributions to *MFN* that really mattered to them. First, they sent us their names. The first issue was mainly a list of names—there were around fifty—of people we knew who were interested in doing feminist work. Each subsequent issue would publish the new subscribers; it was fascinating to see who and where they were and what they were working on.

We shared our news in frequent phone updates: here's someone doing really interesting work on women and spirituality (Ann Matter); there are art historians thinking along these lines, too (Pamela Sheingorn, Paula Gerson); Monica Green has sent another installment on women and medicine; Karma Lochrie wants to organize an Anglo-Saxon panel; Jacqueline Murray will launch a theory session. We found historians and literary critics who were eager to reflect on collaborative scholarship (Sharon Farmer, Kathleen Ashley and Ruth Mazo Karras), and we helped to organize a forum on gay and lesbian concerns (with Simon Gaunt and Carolyn Dinshaw, among others). We were fortunate, early on, to be assisted by savvy librarians, like Chris Africa and Margaret Schaus, who later put *Feminae* online.

Members sent news of recent articles they had published or found useful; announcements of conferences or special sessions they were organizing; within a few years, notices of books of feminist scholarship; then descriptions of second and third books. We knew we had all arrived when publishers wrote to ask *us* for our mailing list. Although *MFN* was of course merely registering the bourgeoning of feminist studies, only indirectly contributing its cross-fertilization, it was thrilling to see that what had really mattered to us had become important to others as well. By the mid-1990s, medieval feminist studies had a place in the academy that would have been inconceivable a decade earlier.

As younger scholars, and later as more established scholars, we all had numerous academic obligations aside from teaching and

scholarship: departmental duties, committee service, and so forth. When we started *MFN*, none of us thought of the *Newsletter* or the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship, which later followed, as *that* kind of service. We never dreamed that *MFN* would "count" in any official way; indeed, we might have feared that feminist scholarship would be held against us. Whatever time and energy *MFN* demanded, I always considered the work as an opportunity rather than an imposition. Twenty years later, I still feel privileged to have participated in the early days of *MFN* and in the collaborative and intellectually expansive community that emerged.

Hamilton College