

# NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## MESSAGES

### MESSAGE FROM THE SMFS PRESIDENT

This year at Kalamazoo, for the first time in all the years I've been going to the conference, I only went to the SMFS-sponsored sessions. I had to pass by the sessions with my colleagues who study medieval Spain, but as president of SMFS it just seemed to make sense. I'm glad I did it. It's really the only way to grasp the range and scope of the work we do and to appreciate the innovative methods and theories on which our work rests. How else could I soak up the intellectual euphoria that comes from the convergence of young scholars and "Founding Mothers" and everyone in between who are devoted to unraveling the vexing problems of studying women who died centuries ago? SMFS now sponsors sessions at conferences at the University of Leeds and the Modern Language Association, and soon at the Medieval Academy of America and the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, but Kalamazoo is where most of us come to present our work.

And what a body of work it is. Feminists presented work on "feminist men," disturbing women, feminist art history, fakes and antifeminism in *The Da Vinci Code*. We brainstormed strategies to get grants and fellowships, praised and criticized Judith Bennett's *History Matters*, and lauded the work of foremother Susan Mosher Stuard. It's not only the range and depth of this work that is so impressive; it's the way it continually pushes against the grain of everything it touches. Whenever we read Aldhelm or Robert of Arbrissel or Peter Damian, watch a Hollywood movie about the Middle Ages, or gaze at art made for, about, or by women, we do so with our feminist antennae up. We are always and everywhere alert to women in society. As the panel on Susan Stuard's work made clear, she has left an impressive mark on the field of women's history. But it is inspiring to know that there is still much to be done, that we are just beginning to know about medieval women such as merchant women in Paris, the legal standing of Flemish women, and strictly cloistered English nuns and their lawyers.

If you haven't yet read *History Matters*, add it to your reading list. Judith Bennett has a lot of smart things to say about feminism

as a theoretical and analytical framework, patriarchies as pervasive and powerful social forces, and why scholars need to be attentive to history. Chapters 1 and 2 should be required reading in all Feminist Theories and Feminist Methodologies courses to contradict the impression that there were no feminists before Olympe de Gouges or Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The book raises important questions and is provocative in the best possible ways.

I'm still thinking about the discussion in response to Bennett's question, will we lose our feminist edge if we study masculinity? I honestly don't have a good answer. I spent the last year in a seminar on masculinity, and still I'm struck by how poorly theorized the field is and how much it borrows from feminist theories on power and subordination, sexual identity, alterity, and social constructions of gender identity. To be honest, it was amusing to turn the tables and subject men to a rigorous feminist analysis. I now think about violence in an entirely different way, and I have a much better vocabulary for discussing heteronormativity and patriarchy. Still, I must be missing something because it seems to me that masculinity studies is feminist studies with a beard. Don't get me wrong—it was enlightening to think about kings through a feminist lens. And it makes sense to me because monarchy, as I see it, is relational. It encompasses both queens and kings because monarchy is a family affair, a composite institution with both feminine and masculine aspects. To know why women in some places, at some times, could rule, I need to know not only what propelled them forward, but what ultimately held them back. It's been a useful exercise, but it's not enough.

So, for now I would say to Bennett that we lose our edge only if we ourselves occlude women from the research, if we shift our gaze to men at the expense of women, if our analyses fail to recognize feminist theory as integral to understanding both the past and the present, and if we have any hope of affecting present social practices. Although I learned a lot from studying masculinity, I think the question is not what can feminists learn from men, but it remains, and will for some time, what men, and the practitioners of masculinity studies, can learn from feminists.

Above all, what really impressed me about Bennett's book is her admonition to us to continue to advocate for well-funded medieval studies programs with strong feminist faculty members to counteract the distressing trend toward cutting back the study of the past in favor of modern and global studies. I agree wholeheartedly with Bennett that

our task is two-fold. We need to impress upon our colleagues in art history, history, language, literature, philosophy, and theology about the importance of studying the medieval past. We know how important this is, but I fear that many of our colleagues dismiss out of hand the study of the European Middle Ages as antiquarian, quaint, barbaric, or nostalgic. But we also need to move beyond academia and speak more often and more eloquently to wider audiences. Our own age is increasingly feudal—many of our prisons and much of the military are now in private hands, and our government is weakening parliamentary forms of self-rule that arose in the twelfth century. Meanwhile, women are only earning a few pennies more than they did in the fourteenth century (you can look it up in *History Matters*). Now it is even more timely than ever before to be sure we keep medieval feminist studies vibrant and at the pedagogical forefront of intellectual discourse and public debate.

Theresa Earenfight

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

*Part One: Gender and Geographies, continued*

This issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum* continues the theme of “Geographies of Gender” building on the idea of mappable geography to extend to the theorization of space, place, and language of power, in or about medieval women’s experience. The essays address both English and Continental, secular and religious women, in history and literature. Kimberly LoPrete begins by probing the problem of how to talk about a woman who holds public power—the *domina*. Insisting on the usefulness of the terms “public” and “private,” LoPrete also demonstrates how feminists must approach those concepts historically—this is crucial for feminist assessment of medieval women of power who acted as independent agents and were understood by their contemporaries to wield their power with legitimacy. LoPrete’s evidence is drawn from a carefully delineated time and place, but her question and theoretical framing gives us tools to think with beyond France in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. LoPrete’s ideas will be particularly useful for those of us who struggle with how to describe a female “lord”—confined and constructed as we are by modern notions of “lordship” as gendered male, and “private” as gendered female.

Katherine Olson’s essay “Invading Queens. . .” explores the medieval historiography of Gwendolyn and Estrildis, legendary women

whose roles in the foundation of Britain were crucial, helping twelfth-century historians Geoffrey of Monmouth, Layamon, and Wace to articulate a British identity formed against the “invasion” of women and (other) monsters. Olson demonstrates the potentially unifying role of violence and invasion in terms of British identity, and the potential of invaders, including queens, to transform into defenders. Queenship was always potentially disruptive, but Olson argues that these historians read feminine invasion as simultaneously a “source of disruption and order.”

Crossing the channel and moving forward in time to the thirteenth century, Els de Paermentier examines the Rich Clares of Ghent and the relationship between the regulation (literally, through the nuns’ rule) of space and behavior, using the fourteenth century copy of the Rule of 1263 prepared for the Rich Clares. De Paermentier examines the perception and use of space, particularly in relation to women’s entry into the cloister: what did it mean in terms of limitation, freedoms, identity? Again, this essay takes up the challenge to modern perceptions of public and private—reminding readers that these ideas, as modern constructs so important to feminist theorizing—must be historicized.

Finally, Jill Webster reads Christine de Pizan’s *City of Ladies* as a manifesto for modern feminists, resonating across time and space. Webster claims Christine’s feminism for the history of feminist thought, insisting on a broad interpretation of the definition of feminism. All women, Webster argues, not just Christine’s medieval audience or her historical female worthies, are the building blocks, keys and defense of their city.

*Part Two: Honoring our Foremothers: Susan Mosher Stuard*

This issue of *MFF* also features the “proceedings” from the roundtable session held at the International Congress of Medieval Studies this past May (2008) in honor of Susan Mosher Stuard. The Medieval Foremother’s Society honored Stuard because of her significant contributions to the field of women’s history beginning with the edition of *Women in Medieval Society* (1976) and continuing in multiple ways since. Personally speaking, the essay “The Dominion of Gender” in the second edition of *Becoming Visible* (1987) was life-changing, illuminating the medieval world in a way—for me, as a graduate student drawn to women’s history but not sure where to begin—that finally made sense. *Becoming Visible* as a whole informed the perspective of many students of women’s history in the 1980s. Stuard has continued to teach through her writing and research, particularly in the fields

of historiography and Italian and Dalmatian social history. The five participants in the roundtable (Jacqueline Murray, Theresa Earenfight, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, Joel Rosenthal, and Dyan Elliot) have generously submitted their presentations for publication here. Margaret Schaus, who presided over the roundtable has also shared her reflections on the event as a whole, bringing in the audience who completed the session. Finally, we include a bibliography of Stuard's work compiled by Stuard and Catherine Mooney. Altogether, these pieces communicate, I hope, the excitement, energy, and passion of those in attendance at Kalamazoo. They reflect the wider feminist medievalist community's debt of gratitude for Stuard's work, and I hope they will inspire the discovery of (in some cases) or return to (in others) of that wonderful body of scholarship, which, as Elliott points out, should not go out of fashion.

This issue marks my last as the General Editor for *MFF*, and as a member of the editorial board. Serving on the editorial board and working with the board as General Editor has been a rewarding, educational, and even fun experience! Stepping down as Editor also marks the end of a long tenure on the SMFS Advisory Board, during which time I have moved from being an independent scholar to a (late-blooming) assistant professor. In those years, the SMFS was the one consistent supporting institutional force in my life—but it's the Society's membership, not the institution, of course, which has made it so. Words really fail me here (another good reason to step down as editor?), but I would like to try in this moment to express what I have also heard so many others say to this amazing organization over the course of the last decade: thank you.

*Miriam Shadis*

## MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

This issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum* marks the last one produced at Minot State University. I will be moving to the University of North Dakota this fall semester, and I decided not to pursue a renewal of my position as Managing Editor. However, as I have one year left on my current term, this year will witness some changes to SMFS and *MFF*. First, we will be looking into creating a membership coordinator position. This is something the Advisory Board has been discussing since February 2008 and should make for a streamlined membership center. We will also be looking into separating the Treasurer position from the Managing Editor position, differing means

of production, and so forth. Of course the biggest news is that we will now be searching for a new home for *MFF*—meaning that interested parties should begin looking into things now. More details about the search will be released as things are finalized, so please be in touch. Otherwise, I will continue to oversee production until the end of my term. Thank you, as always, for your continuing support.

*Michelle Sauer*

### MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

I never thought to go into publishing when I started on my long road through college. Working for the *Medieval Feminist Forum* just landed in my lap and it sounded interesting to me. I believe the experience has taught me much more than just how a journal operates; I have become a better editor and more organized as a result. I am no longer timid with the editing and publishing processes and do not discount returning to this field at a later time. I was already interested in feminist literature and now have a strong appreciation for medieval literature as well. I have truly enjoyed reading every essay. This has been an exciting experience for me, and I am grateful—thank you!

*Michele Kozloski*

## GIVING CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE: NEGLECTED CONTRIBUTIONS OF FEMALE SCHOLARS

We invite submissions for a special issue of the Medieval Feminist Forum (volume 45 number 1) to recover and highlight important contributions by female scholars to any area of Medieval Studies. We are particularly interested in original contributions that have been, for one reason or another, underappreciated, neglected, or even misattributed to (or falsely claimed by) male authors. It is expected that the majority or even the totality of the examples will date from several decades ago or more, but essays on important cases of more recent vintage are also welcome.

Inquiries from potential contributors may be addressed to the editor:

Felice Lifshitz, Professor of History  
Florida International University  
[lifshitz@fiu.edu](mailto:lifshitz@fiu.edu)

The deadline for completed submissions, which should be sent via email to Felice Lifshitz, is **January 15, 2009**. Style guidelines and other contributor information for MFF are available on the website of the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship (<http://www.minotstateu.edu/mff/contributor.shtml>).

