



Medieval Feminist Newsletter

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FROM THE EDITORS

We welcome Thelma Fenster, Director of Medieval Studies at Fordham University, as an editor of the MFN in charge of our new "Commentary" column. This section will be devoted to discussion of concerns we might have as medievalists and feminists, as researchers, writers, scholars, teachers. Among these might be the matters - stated most generally - of how to approach the texts we study from a feminist perspective, and, second, how to present these texts to our students. For example, in what terms can the medieval representation of woman most profitably be explored? What kind of presentation is most advantageous in the classroom? We would like to include your views, or your answers to or modifications of one or both of these questions in the next "Newsletter." Or, perhaps you have an allied question you prefer to send us. Please feel free to write or telephone Thelma Fenster, Center for Medieval Studies, Fordham University, Bronx, New York 10458; telephone 212-579-2041.

The second issue of the MFN features recent bibliography on women in the Middle Ages and on potentially useful work in Women's Studies or feminist theory.

For our next issue, we would like to focus on "Teaching Women in the Middle Ages." Please share with us your own pedagogical successes and curricular insights. Send a brief note to RLK on the following questions:

- 1) What courses specifically devoted to women or gender in the Middle Ages do you teach? Send a brief course description.
- 2) How do you incorporate material on women into other courses?
- 3) What texts, editions, articles, films, videos, recordings have been useful? What projects or assignments have worked well? We invite syllabi, innovative exam questions, and any other material.

*** We remind you that the MFN is funded entirely by the intellectual efforts of its subscribers and that it is never too late to contribute your thoughts!

Special Sessions on women or gender announced for the 22nd International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, May 7-10, 1987:

Misogynist Literature: The Texts and the Genres of the Tradition
(Elizabeth Psakis Armstrong)

Sex, Money, and the Portrayal of Women in Chaucerian Comedy
(Leigh A. Arrathoon)

Joan of Arc: Heroine, Saint, Mystic (Beverly Boyd)

Images of Women in Medieval Art (Magdalena E. Carrasco)

Feminist Mythography (Jane Chance)

Gender and Class in Italy, 987-1987 (Stanley Chojnacki)

Medieval and Renaissance Women's Writings: Views on Virginity, Chastity, and Marriage (Anne R. Larsen)

The MFN will sponsor a cash bar and brief business meeting at Kalamazoo. Look for details in the upcoming program. We hope to see you there!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

THANKS to Martha Driver, Mary Erler, Judith Ferster, Monica Green, Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Sylvia Huot, Penelope Johnson, Ann Matter, and Ellen Raymond for their contributions, and to Heidi Rockwell for her helpful assistance with this issue.

Baker, Derek, ed. Medieval Women. Oxford: B. Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1978.

Bell, Rudolph. Holy Anorexia. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Bell compares the self-starvation of some Italian holy women to the eating disorder diagnosed as anorexia nervosa, in which an upper-class, obedient girl of dotting yet demanding parents refuses nourishment. Although his psychological arguments advanced by Bell are tentative (based as they are on hagiographic accounts), Bell's social analysis is provocative: the anorexia of these saints was a move of resistance and opposition to the domination of the family, the threat of imposed marriage, and the patriarchal social structure of medieval Catholicism. Deprived of other means of self-definition available to men, the holy anorexics attempted to gain autonomy "over the only thing western society allows a teenage girl to conquer - herself." (RLK)

Benton, John F. "Trotula, Women's Problems, and the Professionalization of Medicine in the Middle Ages," Bulletin of the History of Medicine 59 (1985), 30-53.