

# ON WORKING TOGETHER



FIVE YEARS AGO, the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* was born in the crowded departure lounge of the Kalamazoo airport where three of the editors, who were only vaguely acquainted at the time, were waiting for flights to their respective homes. As we reflected on our time at the Medieval Congress, we found ourselves wishing that there were some sort of network that might put feminist scholars of various disciplines within medieval studies in touch with each other. We decided to generate a list of interested medievalists who would provide their addresses and describe their research interests so that we could begin to circulate a bulletin of announcements and ideas. We agreed to make a special effort to include people in disciplines other than our own (literature). As her flight was called, Beth Robertson volunteered to publish the list, which became *MFN* 1 (1986).



Eleven issues later, *MFN* has well over three-hundred subscribers and publishes commentary pieces, discussions, surveys, bibliographies, and book reviews, as well as announcements. Newsletter subscribers have organized interdisciplinary sessions of the kind we don't like to miss each year at Kalamazoo, where our annual meeting/reception is held. We've moved beyond being only a newsletter to organizing an academic society (more on this, p.29 ). Every time we've thought about becoming a more formal "journal," the

editors have rejected the idea in favor of retaining the informality and immediacy that the newsletter format allows, although the matter is open to discussion.

From its inception, the *MFN* has been a collaborative project, and now, the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship hopes to encourage greater cross-disciplinary cooperation. The new Advisory Board named on the title page reflects the contributions of colleagues in art history, history, philosophy, and religion, as well as the national literatures.

To inaugurate the new society, this issue focuses on collaborative scholarship and on working together among the disciplines of medieval studies. As the editors know from working together, group projects have their frustrations and perils, as well as their rewards. We also realize that truly interdisciplinary projects in medieval studies are few and far between. *Feminist* medieval interdisciplinary projects are even scarcer. Methodological and theoretical hurdles loom large. But to move *beyond* the confines of departments and curricula — to work both *within* and *against* the traditional categories of knowledge — is vital to the medievalist as well as to the feminist project. At a time when feminist studies and medieval studies find themselves under political and/or economic pressure at many of our institutions, *working together* seems like the right direction to take.

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