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## Editorial: On Falling into Medievalism

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## Editorial: On Falling Into Medievalism

Part of the journal section "Forum: Falling into Medievalism"

### Editorial: On Falling Into Medievalism

Medievalism, the continuing process of rethinking, rewriting, and recreating the Middle Ages, is a cultural phenomenon that has in recent years received much attention not only in the academy in general, but especially on the campus of the University of Northern Iowa. In 2002, Jesse Swan and I co-hosted the Seventeenth International Conference on Medievalism on the UNI campus, with sixty scholars and students of medievalism from six countries, and we co-edited an essay collection, *Postmodern Medievalisms*, with Boydell & Brewer Publishers in 2005. In May of 2005, I had the pleasure of facilitating several sections on medievalism for the participants in the Roy J. Carver summer seminar on "Integrating Disciplines in the Liberal Arts Core." These events, and a graduate seminar I taught on the topic back in the fall of 2002, have occasioned - in one form or other - most of the essays united in the *Forum* section presented here.

I first fell into (and for) medievalism when I presented a paper on the German modernist Alfred Andersch and his conspicuous "literary nominalism" at the Seventh Congress on Medievalism at the University of South Florida in 1992. After my presentation, a colleague by the name of Kathleen Verduin spoke to me and later introduced me to her husband, the late Leslie Workman, founder of the academic subject of medievalism in the English-speaking world and, together with Verduin, editor of *Studies in Medievalism*. Since then, I have made the reception of medieval culture in postmedieval times one of my specialty areas: Engaging with medievalism has helped me understand why Renaissance humanists and Enlightenment thinkers anxiously constructed the Middle Ages as the "dark other" which they successfully left behind; why Romantic and Victorian enthusiasts wholeheartedly embraced a more positive idea of the Middle Ages since it supported their own discontent with impending industrialization and mechanization; and why Modernists and Postmodernists desire to seek out as well as deny that which would link them with a myriad of potential medieval origins. Last but not least, medievalism has enabled me to collaborate with many of the colleagues involved in this *Forum* section.

Kathleen Verduin, a Professor of English at Hope College, became a mentor and very dear friend. Her contribution is a fascinating passionate memoir of how she fell in love with the investigating subject (Leslie Workman) and - consequently - with the subject under investigation (medievalism). Others, like the members of the Copenhagen Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals, several of whom participated in a video conference on the occasion of the 2005 UNI Carver seminar, chanced into medievalism by virtue of their strong interdisciplinary interest in the medieval *and* postmedieval periods. Stephanie Glaser, for example, investigates the "concept cathedral" as it begins in the Middle Ages and resurfaces in nineteenth-century France and Germany. Mette Bruun challenges the application of the term "medievalism" to the seventeenth century "re-'vival" of the

Cistercian order, demonstrating how the early modern Cistercians' Christian perception of time might resist scientific and historicizing readings of their beliefs. Eyolf Østrem, in an essay that experiments with different authorial voices, printing fonts, and creative and scholarly agendas, navigates between historical relativism and scientific historiography in his quest for an answer to the question: "Does it matter what the music of the Middle Ages sounded like when it was made?" And Nils Holger Petersen, polymath extraordinaire and director of the Copenhagen Centre, tropes Østrem's philosophical essay by sharing his own negotiation between a creative and scholarly approach to medieval culture as a composer *and* historian of "medieval" music.

Artur Golczewski, from UNI's Department of Art, explores the fascinating interconnections between the scholarship of medievalist Ernst Kantorowicz and cultural theorist Michel Foucault in the areas of sovereign right, democracy, and the rule of law. Two other contributors investigate recent literary attempts at recreating the Middle Ages: Linda Bingham (Hawkeye Community College) and Heather Kennedy McDonald (UNI Graduate Student in English Literature) reveal contemporary authors' intentional use of medieval narrative (Michael Crichton, *Timeline*; Barry Unsworth, *Morality Play*) to comment on issues topical in the late twentieth century. Carol Robinson (Kent State University) explores the various reductionist neomedievalist images of medieval times propagated in contemporary video games and proposes her own medievalistic video game, one which would use players to recognize and learn about the fine line between reality and fantasy, the ideal and the real. And Anne Lair, my co-editor from UNI's Department of Modern Languages, entices us to take a new look at a well-known medieval French text, *The History of Reynard the Fox* which, viewed in the light of contemporary sociological and anthropological thought (Pierre Bourdieu; Marcel Mauss), yields an ample harvest for observations about the history and development of culinary culture.

I am sure that these essays, through their diversity, polyphony, and interdisciplinarity, will contribute to the continued progress of the paradigm "medievalism" in the academy. Moreover, I would hope that many readers of these essays who are trained specialists in postmedieval studies would recognize the intriguing potential of medievalism and perhaps "fall into" medievalism themselves.

Richard Utz



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