

# Medievalism in the Age of COVID-19: A Collegial Plenitude

Compiled and edited by Richard Utz

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## Introduction

About four decades ago, when Leslie J. Workman organized the first sessions on the subject of Medievalism at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, [few people listened](#). As a paradigm, Medievalism Studies questioned the prevalent scholarly notion of an unbridgeable chasm between ourselves and the medieval artifacts and subjects we study. Only a scientific and distanced approach to this almost incomprehensibly different era, so scholars of Medieval Studies professed, would yield reliable results. Medievalism was branded as something amateurs, dilettantes, and enthusiasts do.

As I am writing the intro to this collection of news, reflections, reports, shout outs, and vignettes, it is as clear as is the summer sun that the paradigm of [Medievalism has helped transform the way we study and engage with the medieval past](#). By focusing on the humanity of medieval people and their emotions and motivations, and by understanding and embracing our own (sublimated) desire for a deep engagement with the medieval past, we have enriched and humanized our own present as well as the past we investigate, re-present, and reenact. Journals, book series, essay collections, blogs, radio programs, videos, podcasts, and annual conferences attest to an almost omnipresent multimodal rendezvous with the past that investigates and acknowledges the multiple mirrors through time that influence our contemporary scholarly and creative reinventions of the Middle Ages.

Another essential insight medievalism studies has revealed is [how scholars, artists, practitioners, and fans all collaborate](#), albeit often in their own groups and in diverse ways, at increasing what we know about the Middle Ages and its continuities in the present. Appropriately, then, the authors of the short pieces assembled below include not only those who work at (or alongside) educational and research institutions: graduate students, retired faculty, full-time tenure track faculty, contingent faculty, independent scholars, administrators; but also those in non-academic or academy-adjacent professions: publishers, writers, a medieval coach, a composer, an industry analyst, and a jousting and professional fencing master. The contributors are based around the world, including Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK, and the USA; and their areas of interest, from the medieval through the contemporary, include Art, Comparative Literature, English, Church History, Cultural Studies, History, Latin, Linguistics, Literature, Media, Music, Political Science, and Philosophy. Because such is the collegial plenitude of Medievalism.

Despite this plenitude, this compilation of more than 40 voices is not meant to be a formal and comprehensive survey of the current state of medievalism studies. However, in the time of COVID-19, when we cannot meet in person during our annual pilgrimages to Kalamazoo or Leeds, where we usually refresh our batteries and learn about our projects, I thought it would be a good idea to share publicly what's been happening in our field of engagement. I contacted colleagues either because I knew they were working on projects or had presented papers and plenaries at our past

conferences and events. I originally imposed word counts, only to abandon them when confronted with a somewhat longer well-wrought urn (well, some contributions were so long that they will be published in full in [Medievally Speaking](#) as individual pieces in the near future); I did not edit everyone into one style sheet or variety of English; since not everyone sent me a “title” for their entries, I invented some; I added some links and visuals not originally included by contributors; and I specifically asked about personal as well as professional news, impressions, and messages, which means that readers will learn about a joyous wedding (*cum* picture) right next to the announcement of a new essay collection. I encouraged this conscious mélange of the personal and professional because, most of all, I wanted this project to offer a collegial sign of hope and continuity in a world that has been too much with us in recent months.

Many medievalism-ists I contacted were simply too busy at this time of the year, as they took on additional stressful responsibilities at home and at (remote) work. And, yes, one colleague had to decline because she has been suffering from the symptoms of COVID-19. Therefore, because some voices could not be included this time around, I promise there will be future opportunities for our ailing colleague and others to share what they would like to share. [Medievally Speaking](#) will remain open to additional contributions.

I will end this intro with the joyful news that the most recent issue of [Studies in Medievalism](#) has just been published, expertly brought together and edited by Karl Fugelso, and beautifully produced by our friends at Boydell & Brewer. In its 29<sup>th</sup> iteration, it remains the top journal in Medievalism Studies. Together with our annual conference (to be hosted by Kevin Moberly for its 35<sup>th</sup> iteration at Old Dominion University, November 12-14, 2020), and our conference proceedings, [The Year's Work in Medievalism](#) (edited by Valerie B. Johnson and Renée Ward), *Studies in Medievalism* ensures the continuity of the multivocal intellectual community we call the **International Society for the Study of Medievalism**. You can find the *SiM* 2020 Table of Contents as well as the Call for Papers for the 35<sup>th</sup> International Conference as the two final entries, below. Because, you guessed it, such is the plenitude of Medieval-ISSM.

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## News, reflections, reports, shout outs, and vignettes

### All we need is ... Radio Medieval

Teodora C. Artimon, Publisher, Trivent Publishing, Hungary



*"Past Perfect!" - Five Years of Interviews with CEU Medieval Radio*, edited by Christopher Mielke, Stephen Pow, and Tamás Kiss (Budapest: Trivent, 2020) includes a selection of interviews with the most memorable guests invited to the *Past Perfect!* talk show hosted by Central European University's first and only radio station, CEU Medieval Radio. CEU Medieval Radio was established by Tamás Kiss in 2012 as a non-profit initiative to popularize medieval and early modern music, history, and culture. *Past Perfect!* is the station's show on medieval and early modern history and culture, where the interviews conducted by Christopher

Mielke aim to popularize myriad issues in medieval studies with the help of some of the most internationally well-known scholars in their fields – the selected interviews in this volume include academics like Natalie Zemon-Davis, Patrick Geary, Averil Cameron, János Bak, Peter Burke, József Laszlovszky, Richard Unger, etc. talking about topics as varied as mythbreaking, witch hunting, beer, queens, code-breaking, and apocalypses. Furthermore, as both the radio station and this volume value interdisciplinarity and try to keep subjects relevant, these interviews reflect historic topics that carry a strong resonance up to the present day: examples are the programs dedicated to Crusader studies and to the impact of religious warfare on modern issues such as demography, diaspora, and the environment. Plans for future interviews touch on the New World and the Far East in the Middle Ages, medieval humor, the Middle Ages in modern culture (fantasy literature and video games), and the medieval roots of modern political conflicts.

The volume is available at [Trivent Publishing](#), here with three interviews readable in open access; CEU Medieval Radio can be accessed at <https://medievalradio.org/>.

### **What did the Tudors think of Middle English?**

David Matthews, English, University of Manchester, UK

Many people comment that they find it hard to concentrate in the current situation. I share that, and find that I'm best at pursuing tasks for a short time and then turning to something else. However, I was in the incredibly lucky position that I was already on research leave when lockdown in the UK commenced. I was already deep into the slightly strange headspace that leave can create - removed from teaching, students, even my office - and working away on a couple of talks I had to give, one of which was cancelled at only a few days' notice. Left with a bunch of ideas that had no immediate outlet, and in the yawning spaces that have opened up, when I am not baking bread (like the rest of the UK, it seems), I have been able to think about my long-term project. I have been interested in [Middle English](#) for a long time, and particularly the ways in which the study of it came to be - this could be thought of as being about 'medievalism before medievalism'. I've been looking at the Tudor understanding of Middle English, because there's a real sense in which the Tudors invent it; they have to, in a sense, to be modern themselves. They have to have a perceptible past. That's putting it rather simply - it's a rather more complicated matter than that! I was fortunate in that ahead of the lockdown I had spent time in libraries, looking at some early printed sources of Middle English material, and specifically the annotations on medieval devotional material, either side of the Reformation. So I'm living off the memory of that sense of contact with the medieval and early modern past and doing quite well, if only for a couple of hours a day, at reconstructing the ways in which Tudor readers put together a sense of the Middle Ages. The past - fortunately - is another country, and it helps to be there sometimes.

### **Medievalism at the Met**

Sylvie Kandé, History & Philosophy, SUNY Old Westbury, USA

[Crossroads](#), the tripartite exhibit currently on display at The Met, is a brilliant commentary on both the *virulent* nature of nationalism and the calcifying effects of categories.

“[Power and Piety](#)“, one of *Crossroads*' three installations, showcases magnificent objects taken from their respective collections and paired to shine in a novel, transcultural manner. Two of them (an “African Magus” from a Cistercian Abbey in Lichtenthal, sculpted before 1489; and a 14-17th-

century Dogon “Male Figure with Raised Arms”), labelled “Venerated Intermediaries,” are, according to the curatorial description, “powerful depictions of Africans from the premodern era.”

The concept behind *Crossroads* is indeed felicitous; moreover, it succeeds in firmly reinscribing Africa in museal medievalism. However, when examining what M. D  tienne calls the “mechanisms of thought in the articulation among the elements brought into relation,” one may feel that the pairing of the Magus with the Rainmaker somewhat undermines the exhibit’s main purpose. Though both figures are mighty mediators represented in acts of devotion, should we assume that they were Africans in the eyes of the anonymous artists who sculpted them? Was a premodern African identity meaningful for the models (provided they existed), or is this identity projected onto the juxtaposed objects by our modern (that is to say, shaped by the legacy of slavery) minds? And doesn’t this juxtaposition reaffirm, instead of challenging, the alleged divide between ethnic and Western art?

As we are preparing to emerge into a post-COVID-19 era, shifting from the concept of “objects of inquiry” to that of “lines of inquiry”, in medieval matters and beyond, could help us train our eyes to un-see Modernity’s invented colors.

**Et Nolite Te Buteones Carborundorum**, or advice on making it through this mess with your feathers intact from two reprobate gamers (excerpt from an extended discourse to be published in [Medievally Speaking](#) in full soon<sup>TM</sup>)

Brent A. Moberly, Software Developer, Indiana U, USA

Kevin A. Moberly, English, Old Dominion U, USA

[Joust](#) (1982) – If you must social distance, then what better way to do it than armed with a six-foot lance astride an ostrich (or a stork) soaring over an ever-rising lava lake. The gameplay is as simple as it is allegorical: keep flapping and don’t let the buzzards get you down. Originally released as an arcade game, *Joust* has been ported to any number of home entertainment systems and is [still widely playable](#) on the web. It also lives on as a sort of ghost in the machine, with cameos in [World of Warcraft: Cataclysm](#) (2010) and Ernest Cline’s [Ready Player One](#) (2011). For those of us with as-of-yet unspent research monies, a restored version of the original arcade cabinet is available [for around \\$3000](#).



## Bayeux Zoom

Arwen Taylor, English & World Languages, Arkansas Tech, USA



Recently my academic writing group (re)discovered the [Bayeux Tapestry meme generator](#) (you might recall the [Medieval Knieval](#) or [Field Barren of Fvcks](#) iterations). I've been meeting with this writing group for around eight years now; we started out workshopping each other's dissertations and shifted to Skype as we started taking fellowships and jobs in other states. There's a lot to say about the Bayeux meme as medievalism, in its use of archaic but anachronistic language, its juxtaposition of

medieval and modern media, its depoliticized grab-bag treatment of the tapestry as ripe for appropriation and re-arrangement. But also, it's just fun, something that a couple of computer-savvy students made available to anyone who wants to play. Lately our writing group meetings have been more personal conversation than writing feedback, as scholarly projects are on some back burner way behind online teaching, family care, and anxiety management. But making Bayeux Zoom jokes and putting masks on Norman soldiers amounts to a small, satisfying creativity that is also a little grounding: in uncertain times, we can still make things and say things, and connect with each other while doing it.

## The Afterlives of Vienna's Jews

Siegrid Schmidt, Medieval German Literature, Paris Lodron U of Salzburg, Austria

Medievalism, in the German-speaking world still generally referred to as *Mittelalter-Rezeption*, entered my research agenda once again recently when Vienna's Jewish Museum invited me to contribute an essay on contemporary perceptions of the Middle Ages for a catalog exhibit on the everyday experience of Vienna's Jewish population. What surprised me immediately was that the invitation did not at all specify that I focus on phenomena related to the lives and experiences of Vienna's Jews. Instead, I was asked to write on the afterlife of the Middle Ages in general. Of course, I could not imagine writing such a general treatment without at least spending some time on searching for potential intersections with Jewish culture. What I found was shocking: In the German-speaking world I could not identify any recreations of Jewish life during the Middle Ages. While I did not have time for a comprehensive investigation, the only full-scale representation of medieval Jewish history and culture I could find was Willy Thaler's German translation, *Der Medicus* (1987), of American author Noah Gordon's bestseller *The Physician* (1986), and of course the widely viewed 2013 movie version, [Der Medicus/The Physician](#), directed by Philipp Stölzl. This topic definitely invites more in-depth study.

## **Living the Medieval Podcast**

Danièle Cybulskie, Author/Historian/Medieval Coach, [www.danielecybulskie.com](http://www.danielecybulskie.com)

The [Medieval Podcast](#) is based at home, so the way it's put together hasn't been much changed by COVID-19. But as our doors and borders closed, suddenly its significance did change, at least to my mind. I had always thought of it as being a pleasant diversion: a friendly way of learning something new. As our worlds shrunk to four walls, however, every time I sat down at the microphone, I was reminded of the significance of radio during the tumultuous moments of the twentieth century: how it brought people together and gave them some relief from the bleakness of war. Now, I create each episode with an ear to how it might bring information and entertainment, but also relief from loneliness and stress. Maybe medievalism isn't an essential service, but in this moment especially, I think it can still be put to the service of others in some small way.

## **The Kilwa Coins: Australia and the 'Global Medieval'**

Louise D'Arcens, English, Macquarie University, Australia

The northeast coast of Arnhem Land, in Australia's Northern Territory, offers tantalising but inconclusive evidence of possible contact with medieval Islamic trade networks. Six copper coins from the East African sultanate of Kilwa Kisiwani have been found on Yolngu country, on the Wessel Islands. Five coins were found in 1944 by an airman monitoring Japanese threats to Australia. The sixth, discovered in 2018, is currently unconfirmed as a Kilwa coin but has the same dimensions as the others. Dated c. 900-1300 CE, the coins bear the names of identifiable rulers. Kilwa's significance within a premodern Eurasian/African mercantile 'world system' is well-known. One theory is that the coins washed up from a later shipwreck. Others believe trade ships from medieval Kilwa could have reached the seas near Arnhem Land: Ian McIntosh ([Australasian Science, May 2014](#)) claims "[t]he Kilwa-Oman-Gudjerat-Malacca-Moluccas sea route was well established by the 1500s" (2014). Did the 'global Middle Ages' stretch to Northern Australia? Do the Kilwa coins "implicate Australia's Aboriginal peoples in the Maritime Silk Route" (McIntosh)? What alternative accounts might the Yolngu offer?

## **Receiving the German Middle Ages**

Mary Boyle, Medieval and Modern Languages, University of Oxford

In the midst of lockdown, I am embarking on a three-year Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at the University of Oxford, investigating how, during the long nineteenth century, German- and English-language writers created distinct constructions of the Middle Ages by translating, adapting, and rewriting one another's medieval literature. This builds on my previous work on nineteenth-century Anglo-American reception of the German Middle Ages, which was funded by the Irish Research Council and hosted by Maynooth University. I am indebted to both funding bodies for enabling me to conduct this research – deeply relevant in today's political climate in which populist narratives depend on selective interpretations of medieval and modern history. As borders close around the world, my research emphasises the interdependence of German and anglophone contemporary and historical constructions of the national(ist) and transnational past.

## **Medievalism's relevance, right now**

Jonathan Good, History, Reinhardt University, USA

Medievalists, particularly American medievalists, are usually starved for attention. They must work very hard to convince other people that their subject is relevant. So when the country is under coronavirus quarantine, they naturally bring up parallels with the Black Death of the fourteenth century, which can provide illuminating insights or at least comic relief. A friend claimed that he and his family were hunkered down, “telling a story a day to each other,” like the characters in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Another jokingly announced:

Hmm, just got a thing from a local church. They’re organizing a large group of Christians to publicly pray for mercy and strike themselves with belts and other things to show that they mean it. If it goes well locally, they plan on organizing a march of penance to other towns and cities.

But presumably this neo-Flagellant group is *not* going to proceed to a local Jewish neighborhood and beat up the inhabitants there, for allegedly poisoning the wells. Because, let’s be honest: a study of history often makes one very grateful to be living in the time and place that one does. We know that this pestilence is caused by a *virus*, and we know how it spreads; we can even come up with vaccines against it, which eventually we will. No more messing around with astrology, humorism, or aromatherapy. We might study the Middle Ages, but I doubt any one of us actually wants to return to them.

Although, if there is one fruitful parallel between *Yersinia Pestis* and SARS-CoV-2 it is how the spread of both microbes was abetted by international trade. The Black Death got to Europe over the Silk Road; our outsourcing of most manufacturing to China has given us lots of cheap stuff to buy, but it is also the means by which a local outbreak of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan became an international sensation. This is an unintended price of globalism, and another reason why rebuilding our manufacturing base might be a good idea.

## **Entrenched stories of ancient national exceptionalism**

Matthias Berger, Medieval English Studies, U of Berne, Switzerland

Amidst a global pandemic, nationalist uses of the deep past – on which I’d just written a PhD – suddenly seemed a little more esoteric than I’d convinced myself they were. Before long, though, my sense of purpose was steadied by no less a figure than the British PM, who regretfully informed the British public that “the ancient, inalienable right of free-born people of the United Kingdom” – the right to a drink at the pub – would have to be suspended. There it was: the old Anglo-Saxonist myth, in bizarre miniature, of the free-born Englishman. My heart leapt for perverse joy.

Cultural memories of the Middle Ages continue to shift steadily towards themes of national belonging – not just in Britain, and also in rather more consequential forms. I’m eager to see how those who labour in the field of medievalism studies will continue to make themselves heard as global challenges boost ideas of age-old national exceptionalism.



## Memory in the age of antihumanism

Dina Khapaeva, Modern Languages, Georgia Institute of Technology, USA

In our virus-ridden “modern” world, which fights a pandemic with remedies that recall the times when Black Death ravaged Europe, neomedievalism emerges as a ghost of a dreadful past and threatens to become our daily reality. The question of how this pandemic will influence contemporary democracy may depend on the resistance to neomedieval politics in a given society and culture. In my current book project on neomedievalism in post-Soviet Russia (working title: “Memory in the Age of Antihumanism. Neomedievalism in Putin’s Russia and Beyond”), I argue that cultural neomedievalism is laden with and is reinforced by a neomedieval political and social agenda. I focus in particular on the fervent public debates surrounding the confluence of *oprichnina* – the first bout of state terror in Russian history (1565-1584) – and Stalinism. Over the past decade, the normalization of terror – both medieval and Stalinist – has become a staple of [Putin’s politics](#) and ideology. It seems that in Russia, the pandemic will only reinforce neomedieval projects. Will countries with a stronger democratic tradition be more successful at defying the challenges of neomedievalism amidst a modern plague?

## Anglo-Saxonism during a lockdown

Dustin M. Frazier Wood, English & Creative Writing, U of Roehampton, UK

With a series of conferences cancelled, public lectures postponed, and other projects delayed until libraries re-open, I’ve been expanding on a paper intended for Kalamazoo. That paper considers how people learned Old English in the 17th and early 18th centuries. Among my key sources are two versions of Edmund Gibson’s 1692 edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The first is a translation by the antiquary Richard Gough (1735-1809), now in the Bodleian; the second, an interleaved and heavily annotated ‘re-edition’ by the polymath and bibliophile Maurice Johnson (1688-1755), now at the Spalding Gentlemen’s Society (SGS). Reconstructing Gough’s and Johnson’s libraries from archival evidence means we can identify the Old English dictionaries, grammars, and editions they used to create their texts, both intended as a kind of learning exercise. The evidence reveals more than a process of language acquisition, though; it provides evidence for how language acquisition related to ideas about Old English as not-yet-dead language.

The lockdown in the UK has meant trading my normal volunteer work as Librarian of the SGS with a temporary role as the trustee responsible for carrying out weekly conservation, security, and environmental checks on the SGS’s museum, library and archive collections. That access - accidental and unfortunate as the circumstances that have led to it may be - gives me a chance to develop a project that has fascinated me for a while now.

A significant part of Maurice Johnson’s re-edition of the *Chronicle* is written in his imitation Anglo-Saxon hand. Beyond learning Old English, he was driven to create it in the form of facsimiles of extracts from manuscripts he’d seen elsewhere and as new text of his own composition. In fact, imitation medieval script is scattered throughout Johnson’s surviving papers. Some examples are beautiful, others clumsy; some recreate whole charters while others contain just a word or two. In some senses they were all unnecessary. In the early 18th century, published guides to medieval script were available and Anglo-Saxon fonts were used in printed editions; both types of source were available in Johnson’s library or the library of the SGS. One explanation is that they represent a particularly intense form of auto-didacticism - maybe Johnson was just *that* student. But there is too

much recreated medieval script, and too much evidence that Johnson's methods and skill level increased over the course of his life. It's one more of the many forms of medievalism that mark Johnson's intellectual oeuvre. From my perspective, it's one that seems key to understanding his ideas about the very nature of medieval text.

### **Memories are made of this**

Martha Oberle, Retired-Independent Scholar, USA

Some years ago, a little girl living in New York City looked up and down the Hudson River. Upriver stood the great bridge connecting two states; downriver, the yacht basin emptied by war, and beyond, the docks including Pier 90, home to Cunard's Queens, ocean liners become troop ships. The USNS Comfort sits there now.

Far downtown, Trinity Church; closer, St. Patrick's, buildings whose designs hark back to any medieval town's church or medieval city's great cathedral. The school, a convent – nuns conversant in English, French, Latin.

All true. The point? Bygones, aka Medievalism(s), speak to the present. Consider the parallels: *Crusade in Europe -The Conquest of Constantinople*. Apollo 13's voyage to unknown space -Prince Henry, da Gama, Columbus, Magellan. Feminism/scholarship/politics: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Hildegard, Hilda of Whitby. Unorthodoxies: the 60's -*Carmina Burana*. Certainly, particulars differ but the essentials – intelligence, daring, courage, hope, magnanimity, search for truth – are steady. And steadying.

### **(Neo)Medieval(ism) reaches out**

Kelly Ann Fitzpatrick, Industry Analyst, RedMonk

The academic job market being what it is, I now work in the tech industry at an analyst firm called [RedMonk](#). While the name and [logo](#) themselves are instances of medievalism, the work I do is not, focusing primarily on how developers build software. And yet, my tech colleagues have [embraced my background](#) in medieval(ism) studies, have supplied me with [venues](#) to [talk about medievalism](#), and were the first to congratulate me when my [monograph on neomedievalism](#) came out.

I am also unendingly thankful for the folks who engage with public medievalism(s), especially through social media. For those of us doing intellectual work in the field but who are, job-wise, on the outskirts of academia (or even in increasingly marginalized positions within it), it can be a lifeline to see our colleagues in action, whether they are combatting [plague propaganda](#), compiling [anti-racist resources](#), or surfacing [a Twitter take on medieval bunnies](#).

### **Medievalism matters both “there” and “back again”**

Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand, Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, Appalachian State U, USA

In the context of this call, I have found myself thinking about how the “matter” of medievalism has mattered in unexpected ways in spring 2020. In mid-February, I arrived in Austria ready to embark on two Fulbright projects designed to explore medievalism as a comparative study of the made and the found middle ages involving examples from US-American and Austrian culture. One project

involved a class for the American Studies program at the University of Graz on “The American Middle Ages.” The other project is a new research topic for me, a corollary to my recent work on museums, that explores installations and monuments relating to medieval literature in the modern Austrian landscape. I was eager to get better acquainted on site with a comprehensive project where medieval studies meets medievalism at the University of Graz entitled “The Styrian Literature Pathways of the Middle Ages.” (<https://literaturpfade.uni-graz.at/de/>) My own project builds on that work to explore the interplay of local, regional, and (to an extent) national interests in various representations of medieval German literature within the context of cultural sustainability in Austria today.

That was the plan—until the suspension of all Fulbright programs due to Covid-19 brought me home in early April. As I re-tool my research plan, looking forward hopefully to MAMO in 2021 (!), I find that medievalism seems to have provided a common coping mechanism for me and my Austrian students, who went to remote learning and then lockdown country-wide right after their semester began in March. Taking a page from Leila Norako in her introductory essay to *postmedieval* (2018), I asked the students to begin our course by reading “Harold and the Purple Crayon,” a book that I rightly suspected the students would not know. We could not realize, in early March, that Harold’s worldbuilding would offer inspiration, not just as a way of imagining an American “medieval” but as a metaphor for the sudden re-organizing of our own lives and a need to chart (draw) different paths through 2020. I also sense from the entire class a much keener pleasure in many-faceted medievalisms, as the students follow their chosen key critical terms through the semester; if you want to know, the most popular in this class of 27 are authenticity, humor, and simulacrum. The creative American middle ages will be happily colliding with Austrian notions of the authentic until June, and I think it gives us all something to look forward to more than we had anticipated.

### **What might be our future?**

Simon Forde, Director, [Arc Humanities Press](#), Europe

This Easter I have sat out in a garden for the first time in my adult life, marvelling at how nature is so rapidly restoring itself, and enjoying a peace and quiet that reminds me of my youth in the 60s. I have been reading novels by John Buchan set at another turning point in globalization, prior to 1914, and re-reading *La Peste*.

After this period in our anchoritic cells, will we really return so easily to our old frenetic, wasteful lifestyle? Facing into the abyss of my business being destroyed by the lockdown, and to guide my thinking, I have been pondering what the *Zeitgeist* might be in the coming generation, particularly in comparison with the post-Berlin Wall generation where globalism held sway and as medievalists we focused a lot on integrating scholars from the former Eastern Bloc. And how the Leeds IMC has played such a transformative role here.

Key features of this new period may well include increasing tension between globalization and localism, tension between home-working and travel by car or plane, and a quandary between repairing a destroyed economy and concerns for nature, the environment, and climate change.

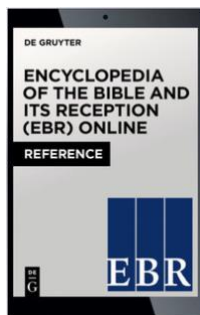
Accordingly, for medieval studies I wonder if minor conferences will lose their draw, with e-conferencing coming more to the fore. Will we finally make connections with archaeologists,

anthropologists, historians, and cultural historians in and of East Asia, Africa, and the Americas for the period roughly from 500 to 1500 and start seeing this millennium from a non-Eurocentric perspective?

### Medievalisms in music and religion

Nils Holger Petersen, Church History, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Watch out for the [\*The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism\*](#), ed. by Stephen C. Meyer and Kirsten Yri (OUP, 2020), which will appear in print this month. My contribution is the article “Medievalism and Rued Langgaard’s Romantic Image of Queen Dagmar,” concerning the Danish composer Rued Langgaard (1893–1952) and his appropriation of (assumed medieval) ballads about the Danish Queen Dagmar (early thirteenth century) in his *Ninth Symphony* (1942).



One of my other projects is the composite article on “Medievalism” (about the role of the Bible in medievalism) in the forthcoming vol. 18 of the [\*Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception\*](#) (De Gruyter, 2020). Richard Utz has written the general introduction, other scholars supplement from specific disciplinary angles, I write about music.

Currently, I am working on a book project about W.A. Mozart and medieval liturgy, basic for Baroque Catholic liturgy, also in Salzburg where Wolfgang grew up working at the court of the prince-archbishop. My claim (previously made in articles) is that even some of his most important operas draw on experiences derived from medieval Latin liturgy.

### Reading Communities Past and Present

Mimi Ensley, Literature, Media, and Communication, Georgia Institute of Technology

“In the modern western world reading is considered to be a silent, solitary, individual, and private activity,” writes Wendy Scase in the *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*. “Medieval reading was, by contrast, always a community activity.”

If modern reading is solitary and private, as Scase suggests, then social distancing has shown the value of reading communities. In March of this year, Sir Patrick Stewart began reading #ASonnetADay on his social media accounts. Author Yiyun Li started #TolstoyTogether to tackle *War and Peace* with other readers sheltering in place. Online story times fill the gaps left by shuttered schools and libraries. With physical separation, people craved interaction, and communal reading began to bring them together.

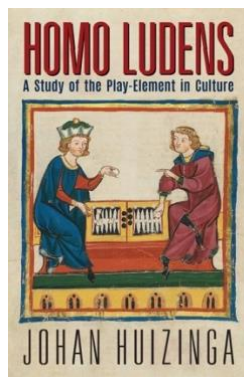
Like many, I am currently developing my online course for the summer semester, and I am considering ways to foster community in my virtual classroom. I’ve decided to take a cue from medieval readers and consider how the act of reading itself can support community. Indeed, my course, entitled “Reading Communities,” will be themed around this very idea. My students and I will examine digital communities of readers, and we will also investigate the long histories of such communities. We will, I hope, come away with a better understanding of reading communities past and present.

## Participatory networks

Andrew B.R. Elliott, Media and Cultural Studies, University of Lincoln, UK

Amid the global lockdown, it is often difficult to think about long-term research. (Imaginary) ivory towers are suddenly toppled as academics acclimatise to online teaching, all the while juggling caring responsibilities, new work-life balances, and often requiring us gracefully to herd animals, partners and/or children out of the office during Zoom sessions.

In my work on participatory medievalism, for years I've been exploring how the Middle Ages which circulate in popular culture are not passed down to us, but co-curated through a participatory model and hammered into shape by a fundamental human propensity to play and to share. Much of that work has involved tracking uses of the medieval across networks of hate.



The pandemic has thrown up some glimpses of the flipside of that equation. Despite its tragic context, it has shown that *homo sapiens* is not only a social animal, but a playful one. *Homo ludens* (as Johan Huizinga called us) exists across the family quizzes, the online board games, and the surge in multi-player online gaming. Likewise a global participatory project, whereby healthy citizens remain in isolation to benefit others more vulnerable, is showing positive results almost everywhere. 3D printers are quickly repurposed to produce medical equipment, previously paywalled content has been unlocked, and huge ad-hoc networks of volunteers from hyper-local to global have sprung up in response to a host of social problems. Despite its spiteful, selfish stockpiling, humanity has also shown its participatory hand.

I have no wish to be a Pollyanna about what is clearly a devastating pandemic. Rather, and simply, I note the irony that asking us to shut ourselves away in isolation has created the very participatory networks which prove humanity's playful, caring and sharing nature, and which serve as an antidote to the negative medievalisms I've been working with before.

## Medievalism-ists, meet Joscelyn?

Jenna Mead, English and Literary Studies, University of Western Australia, Australia

On 30 March @MSS\_AfterPrint tweeted a shoutout to Peter Baker, font-developer extraordinaire, with a gif showing his Joscelyn font appearing across a small screen to explain itself. 'This hand (not Joscelyn's own) is much more formal than many secretary hands . . .' By 2 April @MSS\_AfterPrint's tweet had notched up 1K likes and 382 RTs. The hive mind celebrated its novelty, its beauty, Professor Baker's undoubted talents, a new fetish object: we loved it with return gifs and hat-tips. This isn't my field: recent work was on medievalism and Indigenous country in Australia though current work has me reading Stephen Dodesham's hand in his copy of Chaucer's *Astrolabe* most days. And for some colleagues, Joscelyn is way too late for the medieval- part of medievalism. But there's something there, for medievalists, I mean. The Joscelyn font unfurling across the screen *looks* like Edward FitzGerald, wealthy, eccentric and obscurely intense, hard at work, in 1859, on the most famous of the Persian quatrains he translated. 'The moving finger writes; and having writ/Moves on.' Thankfully, the digital coding strips away all that icky red-plush slightly smelly über-mouldy 19thc fin-de-siècle medievalism. And with its being driven by code, there's Daniel unpacking that seriously bad news on the blank screen behind Belshazzar's feast. 'Haec est autem scriptura,



quae digesta est : Mane, Thecel, Phares.’ (Daniel V:25) The party’s over, dude. You’re in all kinds of merde. And then, over on the digitalmedievalist list, Peter Baker himself, having corrected a point about ligatures, laid it out for me. ‘Designing the *behaviour* of a font in this way is endlessly fascinating. I never get tired of it.’ This isn’t some indulgence of the Anthropocene or bit of flabby anthropomorphism. He means that individual letterforms, spatialized one after the other, adapt their habitual forms in response to each other. Letterforms *behave* relationally and that behaviour both requires a techné for its expression and solicits serious affective commitment. Professor Baker is ‘fascinated’ by such behaviour, attentive, mesmerized, spellbound, without tedium, without exhaustion, without end. Digital medievalism can do this: virtualizing a moment in the emotional life of your work and your thinking just long enough to catch your attention, to make it real.

#Chankó

## Hope in the time of COVID-19

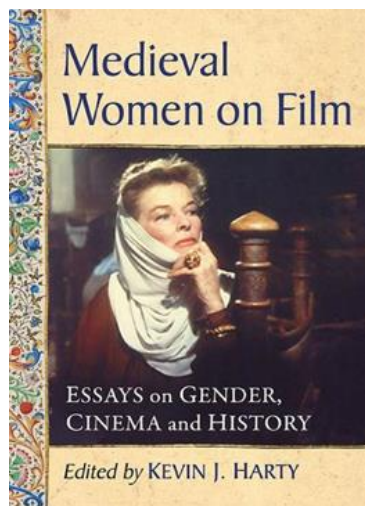
Kevin J. Harty, English, Lasalle University

So what can you do? -- Two things:

First, you can get married right before all hell breaks loose at the Church of the Atonement in Chicago—left to right Rick Tempone, the Reverend Mother Erika Takas (Rector of Chicago’s Church of the Atonement), and Kevin J. Harty.



And second, you can publish a new book on cinematic medievalism. [\*Medieval Women on Film: Essays on Gender, Cinema and History\*](#): In this first ever book-length treatment, 11 scholars with a variety of backgrounds in medieval studies, film studies, and medievalism discuss how historical and fictional medieval women have been portrayed on film and their connections to the feminist movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. From detailed studies of the portrayal of female desire and sexuality, to explorations of how and when these women gain agency, these essays look at the different ways these women reinforce, defy, and complicate traditional gender roles. Individual essays discuss the complex and sometimes conflicting cinematic treatments of Guinevere, Morgan Le Fay, Isolde, Maid Marian, Lady Godiva, Heloise, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Joan of Arc. Additional essays discuss the women in Fritz Lang’s *The Nibelungen*, Liv Ullmann’s *Kristin Lavransdatter*, and Bertrand Tavernier’s *La Passion Béatrice*.



## Contingent medievalisms

Ken Mondschien, kenmondschein.com, USA

In some ways the pandemic is a blessing in disguise for me. To be sure, it’s no picnic. I’m contingent faculty, so my job situation is unstable, as is all of higher ed. My main gig is a teach-out and would

have been done after this semester; whether the other is tenable depends on how many students come back next fall. Teaching is harder, of course, and I miss seeing my students. Zoom is no substitute for in-person contact (though now all the vet techs can bring their pets to “class”).

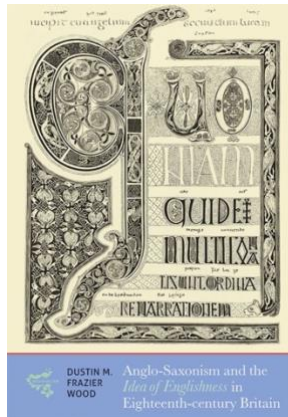
But it’s also a chance to slow down and not drive all over New England for work. I’m doing medieval brewing experiments (I have a stout, barleywine made with hops versus a batch made with wormwood, braggot, and spiced sack mead going). I have two books I’m proofreading. I’m finishing my fantasy novel and after that I’ll get started on the book on timekeeping primary sources that I owe Italica.

But, as someone on the margins of academia, I’m worried about my future. Teaching historical fencing was a big part of my income, and I’m trying to do online workouts for my fencing students, but that’s gone.

All of this is, I suppose, why I think we should come out of this with fundamental reform of higher education, as for the economy in general. The extraordinary efforts of poorly-paid adjuncts are critical to keeping schools going and providing services to our students so that they can graduate on time. Even if we’re not experiencing physical risk -- and I would never say we should be fiscally rewarded on par with the brave doctors, nurses, and EMTs/paramedics who are exposing themselves to infection on a daily basis -- our labor deserves the same consideration as the other necessary workers in this extraordinary environment, and we deserve the same financial security as anyone else.

## Anglo-Saxonism and Englishness

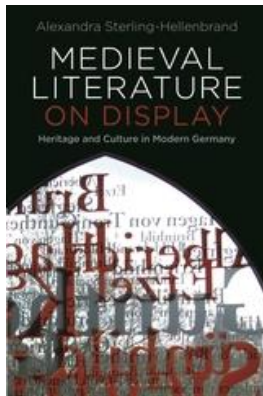
Clare A. Simmons, English, Ohio State University, USA



Literary history has often told the story like this: There’s not much to say about medievalism in eighteenth-century Britain since in the “Neoclassical” or “Augustan” age cultural expression drew inspiration not from the Middle Ages but from ancient Greece and Rome. Dustin M. Frazier-Wood’s fascinating new book *Anglo-Saxonism and the Idea of Englishness in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Boydell, 2020) tells a different story. Medievalism in fact flourished in the 1700s in the form of Anglo-Saxonism as many people from varied backgrounds began to think of the English before the Norman Conquest as being their true “ancestors.” Anglo-Saxonism could both be a means of critiquing or withdrawing from the status quo, as in the case of Non-Jurors like George Hickes and Thomas Hearne early in the century and John Cartwright towards the end of it; or of endorsing it by reminding everyone that the Hanoverian kings and the English Saxons shared common ancestry: “Rule, Britannia!” after all, comes from a masque celebrating Alfred the Great. Impeccably researched, the book provides a wealth of information on how literature, history, topography, the fine arts, linguistics, antiquarianism, and politics drew inspiration from an imagined sense of the Anglo-Saxon world. I would warmly recommend it to anyone interested in the history of medievalism.

## Medievalism, musealized

Richard Utz, Literature, Media, and Communication, Georgia Institute of Technology, USA



Here is a warm recommendation to all practitioners of medievalism: Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand's [\*Medieval Literature on Display: Heritage and Culture in Modern Germany\*](#) (2019) brings to bear museum studies, memory studies, heritage studies, nostalgia studies, medieval German studies, reception and adaptation studies on two regional museum spaces that attempt to past-presence (or re-present) two of the best known medieval German-speaking narrative traditions:

The museum in the small Franconian town of Wolframs-Eschenbach (a little over an hour away from where I was born), which intends to resurrect the author of the Middle High German *Parzival*, *Titurel*, *Willehalm*, and some of the most unforgettable *Tagelieder* (*aubades*); and the Nibelungen Museum in Worms, which aims at connecting us with the famed *Lay of the Nibelungs*, elevated by Wagnerians and post-Wagnerian national fandom to the German(ic) epic par excellence.

Alexandra has framed her scholarly observations somewhat similar to the way in which a Johann Wolfgang von Goethe described his first visit to Strasbourg and its cathedral. I find her close readings of the museum spaces' various elements and their affective and intellectual properties all the more believable because she manages to take me on a personal visit to the spaces in Wolframs-Eschenbach and Worms. Her introduction confirms this personal approach, linking her research to a specific moment in her younger years, similar to what Jacques Le Goff did in his [auto/biography](#) some years ago. A great contribution to Medievalism Studies.

## Making research lemonade

Susanne Hafner, German, Fordham University, USA

As we are hanging on to the semester by our fingernails, we have been so preoccupied with teaching, taking care of our families, and just plain surviving, that the only time we had available to think about our research was when we watched our summer plans evaporate: Kalamazoo is suspended in time, conferences are cancelled, papers postponed. But I wonder how this sequestration will change our research in the long run. In my case, it means that I won't be able to visit the archive which is crucial for my research, nor can I hope that the grant money for this trip will still be available next year. So I won't be able to write the article – which I need to apply for research grants – which will allow me to go on sabbatical – which will free my time to write the book ..... a scholar's nightmare, in other words.

This forces me to rethink my research agenda: What CAN I do, sitting in my Bronx apartment in my comfy pants? The result will be a different book, shaped by necessity, but also by opportunity: The opportunity to sit still and hear myself think. I'd love to know how many scholars, a couple of years from now, will be able to put their finger on a page in their work and say: "And this is where Covid-19 changed my research."

## Making the handbook, on music and medievalism

Kirsten Yri, Music, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada

In March, at long last, my copy of the [Oxford Handbook on Music and Medievalism](#) (shameless plug) arrived in the mail. Because it appeared just as the Ontario Government declared a State of Emergency to enforce ‘distancing’ and isolation at home, the book will forever be tied to the Covid-19 crisis. Over the next few weeks, I received notes of thanks from contributors, with updates on and concerns about the unfolding pandemic in their countries, but that yes, they were happy to report that the *Handbook* would receive pride of place in their COVID reading. Working remotely (like editing or writing...) can be lonely, so even the shortest of exchanges or a quick repartee can lighten the day. All the more when the banter involves a passage from a medieval text that is as relatable today as it was +600 years ago (as when one colleague quoted passages from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.) They say editing is a thankless task...but an enthusiastic, supportive co-editor (Stephen Meyer) and thoughtful contributors have proved that wrong.

## The Plague of memeing about hope

Fernando Rochaix, Art, Georgia State University



Plague history can serve as a comforting reminder that our own bumbling and painful responses with catastrophe predate modernity. But knowing things could be worse can only get us so far. During my extended family indoor vacation (ie quarantine), I’ve found something better than reassurance in the posts and comments of [r/dankdarkages/](#) and [r/MedievalHistoryMemes](#) on Reddit. Memeing about plagues of the past serves two functions. It brings fun to and engenders history with a common-sense vocabulary. Memeing let’s us feel at a time of disconnection. In so doing history can help us handle uncertainty and imagine the past in ourselves.

## Vanishing communities of medievalism

Susan Aronstein, English, University of Wyoming, USA

Tison Pugh, English, University of Central Florida, USA

In mid-March this year, COVID-19 closed America’s medieval playgrounds. Las Vegas’s Excalibur Hotel went dark; Disney promised guests that dreams would still come true even while locking down Magic Kingdom’s iconic castle; and Medieval Times sent its knights and royalty home. Watching videos shot from drones flying over empty castle courtyards and other deserted fairy-tale landscapes, it strikes us how many of our fantasies of the Middle Ages stem from a longing for community, for a long-lost Golden Age of shared village life. These now-empty spaces were designed to foster mingling: the bustling fair, the ball, the feast, the celebration. Without the happy crowds, these spaces look desolate yet bloated, cavernous yet almost wistful. They stand as a mute commentary on a world where Boccaccio seems more relevant than *Camelot*, and where the cruelest oxymoron of the English language, *social distancing*, reminds us of the pleasures of community—a pleasure that should have never needed the fantasies of medievalism in the first place.

## After continuities, continuities

Jan M. Ziolkowski, Medieval Latin & Comparative Literature, Harvard U; Director, Dumbarton Oaks, USA

The COVID-19 crisis has set in motion unprecedented woes and worries. Simultaneously, it has accelerated a chain reaction of other trials and tribulations that was already underway, whether detected or not. Tough times will follow afterward, but we have the power to ensure that the new realities to emerge do not reenact the grimnesses of the 1930s or of postapocalyptic movies. To make proverbial lemonade of lemons, those of us passionate about literature and culture should hasten and improve our efforts to communicate with larger audiences, while not abandoning the ambition to advance knowledge. By example, we must argue the case for the values of engaging with the past, appreciating the extraordinary variety of human creativity, and sharpening our abilities in interpretation and articulation. Good can come of what is beginning to play out.

Breathtaking progress has been achieved in remote learning, telework, and online entertainment and edification. Human imagination and adaptation have been on display as never before in my lifetime. Most of my waking hours have continued to go into administration, just as before, but when free from its demands I have tried to put my money (and for scholars, time is money and vice versa) where my mouth or keyboard is.

In modest contributions in this vein, I wrote a short piece for the newsletter of Classics, my department at Harvard, about a ninth-century Latin masterpiece and the relation of its reception to the development of my field: “The Poem of Walter and the Creation of Medieval Latin.” In due course it will be accessible on <https://harvard.academia.edu/JanZiolkowski>. Likewise, I produced two posts for the blog of OpenBookPublishers, which relate to my six-volume open-access study of the *jongleur de Notre Dame* that they brought out in 2018 [LINK]. One was on a bizarre telefilm (called “The Young Juggler”) by Tony Curtis that aired in 1960 [LINK], another on the death of the children’s book author and illustrator, Tomie dePaola [LINK]. A third is on the way, about a stained-glass representation of the climactic episode in the story. Ideas for further posts are steeping.

In less public-facing work, I have been determined to complete two long-overdue books for which collaborators fulfilled their obligations a decade ago. By temperament I tend not to need reminding of mortality, but events bring home on a daily basis the desirability of *carpe diem* ... which for humanists who are researchers can be synonymous with *carpe librum* and *carpe stylum*. On April 19, 2020 my *Doktorvater*, Peter Dronke, died. His world was distinct from the one he inherited from Ernst Robert Curtius and Erich Auerbach. Ours differs far more. Discovering and demonstrating the connectedness of the Middle Ages with later centuries, including this brave new one today, remain pursuits of paramount importance. The people of all those bygone days committed their fair share of mistakes: that is, famously, inherent in being human. While recognizing and righting past wrongs, it is up to us to maintain good old traditions—and to establish even better new ones. The present tells us, as if we had to be told, that the future will never have required the past as urgently as it will in the coming year.



## A Grail in the Philippines

Stephanie Matabang, Comparative Literature, UCLA

A Bikolano adaptation of the Perceval story is preserved on microfilm at the University Library of UP Diliman in Quezon City, Philippines. This particular rare copy of *Agui-Agui ni Percibal asin ni Rouchenec Reina Encantada sa Palmira* was published in 1951 by the Cecilio Press of Naga City, Philippines. Despite the relatively recent date, *Percibal* may provide an unexpected glimpse into the Perceval tradition's early European medieval stage. It was likely first transmitted to the archipelago during the Spanish colonial period (16-19<sup>th</sup> century). Of note is the absence of the Grail and the presence of a fairy queen, Rouchenec, who transports Percibal to her Otherworld kingdom. The arguably Breton origin of the name 'Rouchenec' and the positioning of Percibal's father as the king of Scotland, further digs into the tale's Celtic roots. *Percibal* reveals the potentiality of the Philippine metrical romance corpus as not only a representation of global post-medieval imaginings, but as a textured lens into a medieval literary past.

## Médiévisme v. Médiévalisme

Anne Berthelot, Literatures, Cultures & Languages, University of Connecticut

When I arrived in the United States more than thirty years ago, I quickly discovered I was no longer a “médiéviste” but a “médiévaliste”, which seemed a little odd to me, as was the translation of “spiritisme” by “spiritualism”, which is not the same thing. [But at the time this was not a major problem, much less so than the absence in English of the false “médiéval”-“moyenâgeux” doublet. Indeed, without this doublet, how to make English speakers understand that Walter Scott and Viollet-le-Duc create “moyenâgeux” works which are not very “médiéval”, and that their idea of the Middle Ages, like that of most of their 19<sup>th</sup>-century contemporaries, has little to do with the subject of “médiéval” studies proper? In French, at least, when a colleague declared tongue-in-cheek (hopefully so!) during a department meeting that such-or-such practice was “medieval”, that is to say barbaric and worthy of the “Dark Ages” preceding the Enlightenment, one could point out to him that the term he was looking for was not “medieval”, but “moyenâgeux”.]

Since that time, three decades ago, the Middle Ages have experienced an unexpected resurgence, in the form of a plethora of novels, films, games, comics, and so on: in short, creative works, whether of good or poor quality – that is not the question – which reproduce or draw inspiration from medieval times. The accumulation of these works has led to a new corpus, not “médiéval”, but “médiévalisant” (another of those terms that the spell checker refuses to translate). And quite naturally, this corpus has generated its own scholars and critics, who may not be connoisseurs of the original Middle Ages (we can even say it is often preferable that they are not, in order to avoid comparisons unfavorable to one or the other of the periods considered ...), scholars and critics who are therefore not, technically, “médiévistes”—but “médiévalistes”.

Their field of expertise, their set of values, their global perspectives are not the same as those of médiévistes: they focus on the contemporary reception of their corpus, its implications for and its effects on 20<sup>th</sup>- or 21<sup>st</sup>-century culture, while the “médiévistes” focus on medieval works, without necessarily being interested in their modern “significance” or “impact”. The official distinction between two different fields thus makes it possible for “médiévistes” and “médiévalistes” to coexist more or less peacefully, while the confusion between the two categories created by the linguistic

undifferentiation of English in this particular case can only generate tensions that are sometimes acute.

## **Medievalism musings**

Juanita Feros Ruys

From the time I first arrived as a student at the University of Sydney, I immersed myself in medieval history, Old and Middle English, and Medieval Latin. Following my PhD, my career centred on palaeography, producing editions and translations of Medieval Latin manuscripts. Perhaps my proudest achievement was my first-time publication of the interlinear glosses in a twelfth-century Latin manuscript, which I thought showed that the text was used to teach schoolboys grammar.

But where was my connection to the world of twenty-first-century Australia? In 2015, drawing from my research on medieval demons, I began work on a documentary that explored how the [Devil's Coach House](#), a cavern in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, came by its diabolic name. My research took me from convict stories and settler histories to a place I hadn't expected: the violence, still only partially acknowledged, of the mid-nineteenth-century frontier wars waged by European colonists against the Indigenous peoples of Australia. This was the first time in over twenty years that my research had prompted me to consider contemporary real-world concerns.

Having left academia in 2018, I now work as a grant-writer in regional Australia, an area of massive social and economic disadvantage, particularly for First Nations Australians. The insights I gained through my investigations in medievalism have helped me understand this context better. And now my proudest achievement is helping a local Indigenous group gain funding to reawaken their traditional language. A career in Medieval Studies that segued into the social engagement of medievalism has in turn led to the meaningful community work that grounds me in the heart of where I live.

## **Medievalism lost: A lament for the 2020 season of Texas's Sherwood Forest Faire**

Lorraine Kochanske Stock, English, University of Houston, USA

Recently, I contributed a chapter to the forthcoming volume, *The United States of Medievalism*, in which I showcase the historically grounded, immersive entertainment Sherwood Forest Faire (hereafter SFF) in McDade, Texas <https://www.sherwoodforestfaire.com/>. SFF offers its visitors—both faithful “playtrons” and occasional “mundanes”—opportunities generally to experience the imaginary simulacrum of life in early period England and, per SFF's title, particularly the legend of Robin Hood, his outlaw cohort, and the Plantagenet royals in his orbit. As I regularly teach a course, Robin Hood in Culture, at the University of Houston, this arrow of immersive medievalism “slit the wand” for me. SFF mirrors the carnivalesque goals and achieves the philanthropic effects of actual local parochial Whitsun-ales, May-games, and Robin Hood Revels, celebrated from the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries in England. Money collected from patrons at the May-games' community feasts supported the parish's financial needs, whether to build a new church roof or to succor needy parishioners. Folk-plays performed at the Whitsun-ales, celebrating the theme of Robin's robbing the rich to aid the poor, rendered him a natural money collector. Replicating the medieval May-games' fundraising function, SFF's proprietors George Appling and Zane Baker contribute part the faire's revenues to the Make-a-Wish Foundation. Mirroring the original medieval

parochial paradigm, SFF also donates to RESCU, “Renaissance Entertainers Services Crafters United,” a nonprofit established to promote the medical well-being of employees of Renaissance Faires, largely itinerant and seasonal workers lacking health insurance. <https://rescufoundation.org/>



Unfortunately, like most other American entertainment venues, because of covid-19, SFF closed after the first weekend of the Spring 2020 season. In the fundraising spirit of medieval fairs and its own medievalism-inspired philanthropy, SFF endeavored to raise money for its now-unemployed performers by broadcasting a virtual “faire” on its YouTube channel for four consecutive Saturdays of its cancelled 2020 season. Loyal audience members were invited to experience SFF, if not literally, then virtually, and to contribute to a fund financially supporting its performers. <https://www.sherwoodforestfaire.com/virtual-faire>. I fervently hope that SFF will survive this pandemic-enforced cancellation of its tenth season and that my forthcoming essay, celebrating SFF’s successful engagement with medievalism, will not be its obituary.

### **Learning from literary texts**

Ann F. Howey, English, Brock University, Canada

I find myself becoming more and more interested in texts that represent acts of reception of medievalism. They may not necessarily recreate the medieval, but they include fictional characters responding to medieval texts, thus modeling a form of medievalism. From Charlotte Yonge’s young adults arguing the merits of Malory (*The Heir of Redclyffe* 1853), to T. H. White’s imagined reader exploring the ruins of a medieval castle (*The Sword in the Stone* 1938), to Meg Cabot’s sarcastic first-person narrator commenting on the way people romanticize the Middle Ages (*Avalon High* 2006)—there is a thread of medievalism, particularly in young people’s literature, that teaches us how to respond to and use appropriately the medieval, that teaches us the value of the medieval and of texts that represent it—texts teaching generations of readers to be medieval(ism)ists.

### **Research continuity in dire times**

Luiz Felipe Anchieta Guerra, History & Political Cultures, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil

As a Brazilian I am seeing the shorter end of an already very short stick, our president being one of the few who remains in utmost denial about the pandemic. Consequently, our academic world is filled with uncertainty and gloom: with research funds and scholarships being cancelled and the public Universities staying under constant threat from the very organs who should support them. However, we medievalists, historians and scholars in general are finding other ways to be active, and bridges have been built despite the adversities. A Facebook group called [Medievalistas em Pandemia - Ferramentas de Pesquisa em História Medieval](#) (Medievalist in times on Pandemics – Research tools for Medieval History) is connecting students, professors, researchers and enthusiasts of the subject. And these virtual interactions are also allowing not only social distancing, but also for physical barriers to be overcome, with some research groups having successfully transferred their presential sessions to a digital environment, allowing for professors and students from other cities, states and even countries to contribute to said meetings. One such example, in which I have the honor of being participating, despite not being a member of the group, is the student-led GEHM (Study Group in Medieval

Studies) from the State University of Montes Claros who has regular meetings every Wednesday. These initiatives are specially important not only to keep our research flourishing, but also to alleviate the generalized sense of dread and to help building and maintaining support networks and some resemblance of a “normal” routine, which is paramount to help us preserve our mental health, as best as we can, during this dire times.

### My thoughts on medievalism

Yoshiko Seki, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kochi University, Japan

I read a paper last year about William Morris’s versification – how his way of writing poetry at his workshop while working together with Edward Burne-Jones on the production of beautiful book-prints at the same time helped his poetical works to get more medieval atmosphere. Now I am trying to revise the paper into a journal article, but interrupted by the need to prepare online lectures from home. As a private/domestic project, I am also working on embroidery to make a height chart for my newborn baby, who will arrive in late July. Doing writing work at home as well as occasionally stitching, I often imagine how people would have been working at the pre-industrial age, when people worked at home and children were looked after at home, not at nursery or at school.

Another small topic. After the corona outbreak, a three-legged mermaid called “Amabie” became popular in Japan through SNS. According to the legend, the mermaid said to a man: “If disease spreads, show a picture of me to those who fall ill. They will be cured.” Now the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in Japan uses the image for the campaign of stopping spreading Covid-19. Although the legend is not as old as from the Middle Age but from the Edo period, the mid-nineteenth century, I thought it very mediaeval. Feel free to use the image as a talisman.



<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/10900000/000620717.jpg>

[https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000164708\\_00001.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000164708_00001.html)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amabie#/media/File:Stop\\_Kansen\\_Kakudai\\_Covid19\\_2020.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amabie#/media/File:Stop_Kansen_Kakudai_Covid19_2020.jpg)

### The Middle Ages for Educators

Laura Morreale, Independent Scholar, Washington, DC, USA

A new project I have been working on these days is *Middle Ages for Educators* ([middleagesforeducators.com](http://middleagesforeducators.com), *MAFE*). The site was created in response to the challenges facing

medievalists at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. What started in late March 2020 as an offhand Twitter exchange between myself and a few friends expressing a desire to help colleagues as they made the rapid transition to digital teaching soon led to a serious discussion about resources we could provide, the wealth of medieval studies materials already available online, and the need to centralize all of these resources in a single place. By April 2, 2020, less than two weeks after our initial exchange, the newly-minted MAFE co-editors had launched our website, designed according to needs expressed by colleagues in a survey disseminated during the planning phase. Marketing for the project took place on social media outlets, but also through the [Medieval Academy of America's April 6 blogpost](#).

The success of such a hastily-compiled resource has been astonishing. Our analytics demonstrate that beginning on April 4, during the first three weeks of collecting site-usage data, almost 3,000 sessions were initiated and users clicked on our site pages over 6,000 times. During the same period, nearly 2,000 unique users signed on from locations around the globe. Contributions and interest have poured in from medievalists throughout the US and Europe who have offered to add material to the site, whether in the form of small videos, supplementary links, or translated primary sources. Users are enthusiastic about the content we present, and medievalist colleagues are eager to join in with the project's aims by contributing their own materials. Given its initial planning goals, MAFE has been a massive success, due in great measure to our fellow medievalists who, feeling those same sentiments expressed in our early Twitter exchange, brought their skills and expertise to the project so generously.

Contributions from medievalists of any professional standing are welcome, and we are pleased to feature independent scholars, alt-ac medievalists, academic librarians, newly-minted PhDs, and university professors of every rank on the site's video section. Please reach out to us if you would like to add your expertise to the site as well. It's been a wonderful project, one that has given much to me during this time of isolation, allowing us all to see our colleagues well, looking healthy, and doing what they do best.

### **Modernités Médiévales**

Vincent Ferré, Literature and Human Sciences, U of Paris-East Créteil, France

I thought I would let everyone know about Modernités Médiévales. Since 2004, our association has been engaged with the study of the academic and non-academic reception of the Middle Ages, especially the recreation and representation of medieval culture in the 19th, 20th, and 21st century, from Romanticism, symbolism, through modernism, and from fantasy through young adult literature. As an organization that is wide open to numerous fields and approaches, we represent the subject of "medievalism studies" in France; and we interrogate the complex term, medievalism, and the practices connected with it, together with other European and American colleagues. Our monthly newsletter (in French) is received by 270 subscribers, from 17 countries, including Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, United States. Check us out at: [Modernités Médiévales](#).



## Health and Healing

Huriye Reis, English, Hacettepe University, Turkey

Trying to deal with the conflicting and confusing reports about the Corona virus, wondering whether we have really made any significant progress from the days of the Black Death in terms of developing means of effective protection and treatment of such diseases are part of my varying responses to what I call “our new lifestyle”. For his compilation in [Medievally Speaking](#), I would like to say a few words about my recent engagement with potential health and healing, response, and remedy in Chaucer’s dream poems. My research, clearly, has a long way to go. So far, I have completed only the part of reading the *Book of the Duchess* as a plague poem of unhealth in its presentation of grief and extreme numbness towards life, defined as (post)plague sickness by the narrator. That the poem presents a potential for renewal, although the poem’s characters are only fledglings in that sense, and life thus regenerated takes a new form and turn seem relevant to our global experience now. “Speaking of Sickness and Healing in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*” will become a chapter in a book called *Health and Healing in Literature and Culture*, which is planned to be published by the end of June.

## Banal medievalism?

Jan Alexander van Nahl, Icelandic & Comparative Cultural Studies, U of Iceland, Iceland

Following daily media, it is uncomfortably easy to notice (allegedly) medieval notions enacting a part within the anew growing tendency in Western society to think in categories such as ‘we’ and ‘the others’. In his 2017 monograph *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media*, media theorist Andrew Elliott claimed a transition in popular culture towards the emptying of such notions of any earlier (pseudo-scientific) meaning, and turning them into easily-recognizable memes now used to convey (extreme) black-and-white ideologies. Elliott proposed the term ‘banal medievalism’ to grasp this semantic shift, with a superficial reference to Hannah Arendt’s 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, pursuing “a similar kind of amalgamation of serious ideological issues into everyday discourse.” With this catchy phrase being introduced, the question arises as to how to follow up on this potentially powerful connection. If ‘the medieval’ today is unconsciously being absorbed by extremism, how do all those specialists in medieval studies plan to address this serious “act of half-remembering but also of half-forgetting”? Answers are due.

## Politics and Medievalism (Studies): *Studies in Medievalism XXIX*, 2020

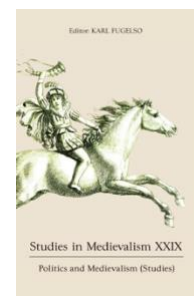
Karl Fugelso, Art + Design, Art History, Art Education, Towson U, USA

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## Impossible Pastimes: Playing In, With, and Through the Middle Ages

### 35th International Conference on Medievalism

[Old Dominion University](#), Norfolk, VA, November 12-14, 2020

Kevin A. Moberly, Conference Host

Play is one of the most significant sites of production in contemporary medievalism. As evidenced by the popularity and ubiquity of medieval-themed games, it is one of the primary ways through which the dominant, consensus view of the Middle Ages is reproduced as a political, historical, economic, and cultural reality in both mass culture and the popular imagination. Play, as such, functions to reify many of the most problematic aspects of traditional medievalism, including the persistent racial and gendered stereotypes that explicitly imagine the Middle Ages as a period of profound cultural crisis—a crucible of violence and want in which masculine white privilege was tested and emerged in its nascent, modern form to exercise sovereignty over the peoples and cultures that, despite their threat, were simultaneously shown to be inferior.

Yet by the same token, play inherently calls this vision of reality into question. As Johan Huizinga writes, play interpellates participants in a magic circle in which space and time are suspended—an imaginary situation that, according to Lev Vgotsky, is a manifestation of “desires and tendencies of what cannot be realized immediately.” Play, in this sense, is not an expression of what is but of what is denied. Facilitated through ritual and performance, it represents an attempt to make material and therefore real a fundamentally occult vision of what its participants want their worlds to be. Play, as such, inherently calls into question the veracity of its own productions. In the context of the medievalism of the contemporary moment, it foregrounds the fact that many of the problematic worldviews that are constructed as historical reality by contemporary medievalism are themselves fantasies.

What is more, play simultaneously recognizes that other fantasies are possible. In its ability to at once conjure and critique reality, it foregrounds the fact that there are always other ways of re-imagining ourselves and our circumstances via the Middle Ages or any number of other impossible sites of desire. Conceived as an experiment in playing with—which is to say, re-imagining the generative possibilities of the Middle Ages, the 2020 ISSM conference seeks to interrogate the doubled potential of play as it is manifested not only in contemporary medieval-themed games, hobbies, and pastimes, but in any of the myriad ways that we play with the Middle Ages through art, scholarship, or other forms of critical inquiry and cultural production broadly defined.

Please send abstracts of c. 300 words for individual papers or entire sessions on medieval-themed games, hobbies, pastimes and all other kinds of medievalisms (which is to say, other forms of medievaesque play) by June 15 to Kevin Moberly ([kmoberly@odu.edu](mailto:kmoberly@odu.edu)). For the wide range of topics of interest to the study of medievalism, please visit the table of contents pages of *Studies in Medievalism* and *The Year's Work in Medievalism*, and the reviews published in *Medievally Speaking*. This year's conference will be hosted by *Old Dominion University*, located in Norfolk, Virginia. We are not certain at this time whether or not Old Dominion's campus will be closed due to precautions surrounding the COVID-19 Pandemic. Therefore, we have not determined whether or not the 2020 ISSM Conference will take place physically, virtually, or as a mixture of both format. However, the organizing committee will announce the format of the conference once we have more information about the status of the university in the Fall.

When reposting or quoting this compilation, we request you **attribute** its first place and time of publication: "Medievalism in the Age of COVID-19: A Collegial Plenitude," comp. & ed. Richard Utz, *Medievally Speaking*, May 4, 2020:  
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