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## MEDIEVALISM AND THEORY: Toward a Rhizomatic Medievalism

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This essay provides an overview of recent French-language scholarly work in the field of medievalism studies, with a particular emphasis on possible and real theoretical pitfalls and shortcomings. In doing so, it argues for a greater dialogue between Anglo-American and continental European approaches to the field, and shows how the articles in the present collection might illustrate a new, more rhizomatic medievalism.

The present special issue of *RELIEF* originated as a response to several recent developments within the field of medievalism studies. These included, as its most direct catalyst, a conference we organized in July 2010 on “Transatlantic Dialogues / Speaking of the Middle Ages”, at the joint initiative of the U.S.-based group of scholars around the journal *Studies in Medievalism* and the French-based association *Modernités médiévales*; five of the eight articles included here are based on papers first presented at that conference.<sup>1</sup> The original conference had several aims. The guiding theme “Transatlantic dialogues / Speaking of the Middle Ages today” was inspired both by its European venue, and by the legacy of one of the greatest medieval scholars of the twentieth century, Paul Zumthor, who started his academic career at the University of Groningen (where the original conference was held) in 1948 and whose book *Parler du Moyen Age (Speaking of the Middle Ages)* remains still one of the seminal works of academic medievalism. As a Swiss scholar who worked in the Netherlands and later emigrated to North

America, Zumthor represented an outstanding example of the border-crossing nature of medieval and medievalist studies, and specifically of the French-language and continental European tradition within medieval and medievalism studies, which our conference wished to showcase and critically interrogate.

Indeed, the conference and the present collection of essays arose from our desire, as scholars on both sides of the Atlantic working on similar medieval(ist) artifacts and themes, to engage in a dialogue that had, until then, too often been lacking, for both linguistic and institutional reasons. We felt that, working in relative isolation from one another, continental European and Anglo-American traditions of medievalist scholarship were beginning to develop along distinct lines – lines that we felt it might be fruitful to confront to one another, and to engage in a more substantial critical dialogue. At that time, since the two major groups working on medievalist material were to be found in the United States and France, it was between the French and American traditions that we first noted this developing difference of focus. At the risk of oversimplifying the situation, it seemed to us that French medievalist scholars were largely following a text-focused path that foregrounded theoretical issues, inspired in part by the institutional strength of literary studies and philology in French universities, while American scholars tended to show more interest in empirical approaches, focusing often on the products of contemporary popular American (visual) culture. More broadly, while the Middle Ages we refer to today are European, it appeared that it was Anglo-American scholarship in particular that was developing new ways of conceptualizing this era as the object of a distinct field of *medievalism* studies, dealing not with “the Middle Ages” but with the imaginative recreation of the medieval past in ensuing periods. Ever since it came into being in the late 1970s, modern medievalism as a subfield within cultural studies has tended to have a strong Anglo-American focus, overwhelmingly privileging the study of examples drawn from the Anglo-American world and from English-language arts and literature in particular. Within the field of medievalism, medievalist phenomena from other geographic areas subsequently did not receive nearly the amount of attention they might seem to deserve.

This existence of nationally distinct approaches to the medieval – of which some are better-known than others, for reasons both intellectual and geopolitical – certainly seemed to invite further questioning. As the conference unfolded, our initial hunch was confirmed, for several papers presented there convincingly

illustrated how the dominant Anglo-American paradigm of medievalism studies could be enriched by drawing on insights from other geographical and cultural contexts – in the first instance, the French tradition, but as the conference demonstrated, also other ones. One of the revelations of the conference – for instance – was the enormous richness of Hispanic and Lusophone engagements with the medieval, ranging from the ideologically-motivated defenses of the medieval elaborated by Spanish historians exiled in South America during the Franco years, to postcolonial Brazilian “medievalizations” of the country’s own geographical peripheries. Both these elements, furthermore – exile and peripheries – opened new vistas for medievalist theory, by their cultural and geographical displacement of the traditional “centres” of medievalist academic discourse. And while the academic tradition of medievalist studies developed in France, which was the primary focus of our original conference, may not at first blush appear to be terribly “peripheral”, in fact all these traditions, taken together, have the potential to subtly decentre the dominant Anglo-American paradigm.

### **Medievalism and theory: why now?<sup>2</sup>**

Illustrating this thesis with the national tradition most prominent during the original conference, let us briefly examine how French scholars, for their part, have theorized medievalism during the past decades. The programmatic title of a volume Vincent Ferré edited in 2010 – *Médiévalisme, modernité du Moyen Âge* – is emblematic, for it was meant to be explicit but also slightly ironic. The title, in fact, was not particularly original, and contained (in French) two ambiguous terms and one neologism. First, it constituted a medley of expressions often encountered elsewhere: “Modernité du Moyen Âge” was for example the title of a series of public lectures organized at the Centre Beaubourg in 1979; it also recalled the title of a volume of essays published as a tribute to Roger Dragonetti in 1996, *Le Moyen Âge dans la modernité*. Add to this the subtitle *Le Moyen Âge aujourd’hui* (used at the conference where the articles presented in the 2010 volume were first presented in 2009), and we have here the key terms used in many of the research seminars, conferences and books that have tackled the subject of medievalism in recent years in France: “Tolkien aujourd’hui” (symposium, 2008), “Le merveilleux médiéval aujourd’hui” (symposium, 2006), “Le Moyen Âge contemporain” (research seminar, 2004-2006), not to mention the society founded under the name “Modernités médiévales” in 2004. In fact, one

can go back in this vein as far as the nineteen-eighties, with *Modernité au Moyen Âge* (Stanford symposium, 1988) and the title of a 1983 special issue of the journal *Europe*, “Le Moyen Âge maintenant”.

In these expressions, moreover, two ambiguous terms are variously strung together: besides the word *modernité* itself, what exactly does the notion of *Moyen Âge* encompass even in terms of periodization? Some of the papers presented in this volume demonstrate that the answers to this question, which would seem quite evident, are not. We can however assume, for the time being, that the title of the present special issue of RELIEF, *Speaking of the Middle Ages Today: French and Francophone Perspectives*, acknowledges the presence of the Middle Ages “rooted in [our] diffuse, collective sensibility” without negating the differences between this period and our own (Zumthor, 36).

Finally, the subtitle of the 2010 volume contains a neologism: *médiévalisme*. While *medievalism* is a term readily accepted in current Anglo-American academic discourse, it defies translation elsewhere. *Médiévalisme*, a rare word in French, is not usually used in a sense close to the English one when encountered in French, most often in library catalogues. It has been used – not uncontroversially, in France – to spur reflection on the object and methods of medievalism, primarily to offer a short, but practical and provisional description of the reception of the Middle Ages in later centuries (especially from the nineteenth up to the twenty-first century) in the areas of creativity and erudition.

Before discussing this particular term, let us examine another question. Why theory, now? The critical bibliography on medievalism contains a great many entries,<sup>3</sup> but methodological, general or theoretical studies constitute a rare and relatively recent occurrence in this vast, plethoric output. Truth be told, the work is only beginning in France. The symposium that was held at Malbrouck Castle and in Metz, on November 2009<sup>4</sup> was meant precisely to further the elaboration, in France, of a theoretical and methodological framework for research on *médiévalisme*. The aim was to consider the reference to the Middle Ages in literature, cinema, music, history, politics, architecture and comic books while adopting, in each case, a global viewpoint, rather than a monographic approach dealing with a particular author or example (however interesting in themselves), as is too often the case in compilations on medievalism. This endeavor was, thus, an interdisciplinary one. Its primary aim was to explore the “conditions of possibility” for study in this field; as Gaston Bachelard wrote: “Above all, one must know how to state problems. And, irrespective of what one

might assume, in scientific life, problems do not arise by themselves [...] Nothing is obvious. Nothing is given. Everything is constructed" (Bachelard, 14).

A general overview of French and (some) Anglo-American studies focusing on the reception of the Middle Ages in later periods will allow us to examine the terminology used to conceptualize the French *médiévaliste* approach.

### **The situation in France: (Recent) beginnings of a theoretical reflection**

Closer study of the bibliography of critical works published in recent decades in the field of medievalism reveals increasing activity, not only in England and the United States, but also in France, as well as a profound imbalance between criticism and theory.

Contrary to preconceived notions, studies on the reception of the Middle Ages in the arts, particularly in literature, have been flourishing in France (and in French-speaking countries) in the last thirty years. Among the pioneering works, *L'image du moyen âge dans la littérature française de la Renaissance au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in the journal *La Licorne* (1982) deserves special recognition, in addition to the conference organized at Stanford (and whose acts were edited in 1990 by Brigitte Cazelles and Charles Méla) and the 1983 special issue of the journal *Europe, Le Moyen Âge maintenant*, both of which we have already mentioned. The nineties saw a burgeoning of scholarly events, with the AMAES symposium ("Association des Médiévistes Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur") in 1994, published by Marie-Françoise Alamichel and Derek Brewer in 1997; the Cerisy symposium in 1995, edited by Jacques Baudry and Gérard Chandès; and the one organized by Michèle Gally in 1995, published in 2000 (under the title *La Trace médiévale et les écrivains d'aujourd'hui*).

The mention of these names, titles and dates offers a glimpse of these activities, but it should be emphasized that each decade was characterized by an acceleration of undertakings in this field. In the 2000s, several seminars were organized by a number of the authors of articles included in the present volume: Nathalie Koble and Mireille Séguy between 2004 and 2006 (at the École normale supérieure de la rue d'Ulm, proceedings published in Koble and Séguy), by Michèle Gally in 2005-2006 and in 2009-2010 (at the École normale supérieure de Lyon and the Université de Provence), and by Vincent Ferré at the Université Paris 13, then in Paris Est Créteil from 2012. Coincidentally, the "Modernités médiévales" society has been coordinating an annual symposium devoted to literature and the arts – Lorient in 2005, Arras in 2006, Aix in 2007, Bordeaux in

2008, Paris 13 in June 2009 (Durand-Le Guern, Besson and White, Burle and Naudet, Abiker et al., Besson et al.), and finally Lausanne in October 2010 – duplicated since 2008 by events organized by society members, such as the symposium called “Tolkien aujourd’hui” in Rambures, June 2008 (Devaux, Ferré and Ridoux), the Metz-Malbrouck symposium (November 2009) and the Groningen conference in July 2010.<sup>5</sup>

The studies, monographs or academic proceedings that have seen publication in the past twenty-five years can nonetheless be regarded, in most cases, as a *critical* enterprise, by the extension and diversification of their objects, as Gérard Chandès pointed out during the fourth “Modernités médiévales” symposium (Bordeaux, 2008): “Most studies have proven more descriptive than analytical, which is to be expected in a field of study that is still being charted” (Chandès 393). One has to wonder if a limit has been reached in this profusion of critical commentary. The repetition of topics would suggest that this indeed is the case, as the same subjects are beginning to reappear from conference to conference, and from publication to publication.

One of the most telling signs of this state of affairs is that, in most of the compendiums, collective works and academic proceedings that have been produced, readers can turn only (if at all) to the introduction to present a framework or discourse operating on a higher level of abstraction than the case studies that follow. More often than not, however, the introduction to these volumes, if not positively absent, is limited to a mere listing of articles. Correspondingly, only a few of the proceedings provide, in the form a conclusion, a global assessment of the work achieved collectively: rare examples include Michèle Gally’s book *La Trace médiévale*, and Laura Kendrick, Francine Mora and Martine Reid’s *Le Moyen Âge au miroir du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (1850–1900)*, published in 2003.

The “anthological” nature of these works is evident from the very first entry (chronologically speaking) of this bibliography, the special issue of the journal *La Licorne* on the theme of *L’image du moyen âge dans la littérature française de la Renaissance au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1982). Successive essays, corresponding to the half-day sessions of the original conference, are partially categorized by genre: one is devoted to playwrights (Maertelinck, Audiberti, etc.), another to poetry (Boileau, Péguy, Aragon and others), then a strange category called *fantaisie* (containing Rabelais, Diderot, Chateaubriand, but also Giraudoux and Queneau) breaks off the series, which is taken up again with the novel (Sade, Huysmans and others).

The volume ends with a section on politics (with saint Louis and Saint-Simon). One would, therefore, reasonably expect an introduction to unify the contents, yet the twenty lines of the “introductory note” merely highlight the evident choice of Poitiers, “medieval city”, as the venue for the symposium, and the wish of organizers to call on specialists of various periods in order to provide “a first survey, or general overview, supported here and there by specific discussions” (i) – a rather advantageous way to put it, since most of the works presented *are* case studies.

In other collections, focusing primarily on medieval studies, articles dealing with the reception of the Middle Ages in the modern period are simply placed at the end. To provide two examples among many: the distinction between the two fields of medieval studies and *médiévalisme* is barely made explicit in the proceedings of the Fifteenth Conference of the International Arthurian Society in 1991. The last four papers, dealing with the twentieth century, are thus integrated in a series of articles on “the expansion of the ‘matter of Brittany’ and the adaptations and reworkings of the latter”, without these four exceptions (simply described in the introduction as studies on “the survival of the ‘matter of Brittany’ in our time”, Van Hoecke et al. x) being in any way distinguished from those concerned with the medieval period, and without the “adaptations and reworkings” being regrouped in a section of their own. The layout of the book seems implicitly dictated by literary history and chronology. Similar remarks could be made about the proceedings edited by Claude Lachet (*L'œuvre de Chrétien de Troyes dans la littérature française*, 1997), in which the objects of study seem legitimated by their very recurrence in academic works concerning the reception of the Middle Ages, producing an entirely unconscious tautology: such-and-such a film (Cocteau's *L'Éternel retour*, Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*) or book (by Roubaud or Gracq) is thus considered an obvious topic because already studied so often.

But let us, rather, end this bibliographical survey with the mention of a few promisingly-titled, yet ultimately somewhat disappointing collections, at least from a theoretical perspective. Such is the case, for example, with *Le Moyen Âge dans la modernité*. These *Mélanges offerts à Roger Dragonetti* contain papers on medieval literature (the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Vengeance Raguidel* and others), classical and modern literature (Pascal, Hölderlin) up to the twentieth century (Genevoix, Butor and Proust). In this volume, the articles are laid out in an intertwining pattern intended to highlight Dragonetti's multiple areas of interest,



yet no preface is offered to clarify this choice, nor the link between *médiévalisme* and medieval studies, since the sole introductory text is a biographical and bibliographical note. One has to wonder, in the end, if medieval studies attach any kind of importance to *médiévalisme*, which seems to linger on the sidelines, born out of them, welcomed by them, but devoid of any status of their own.

In this bibliography dominated by the work of medieval specialists, a few texts are especially noteworthy for their reflexive approach, particularly *La Trace médiévale et les écrivains d'aujourd'hui* by Michèle Gally and the two collective works edited by Nathalie Koble and Mireille Séguy (*Le Moyen Âge contemporain: perspectives critiques*, 2007; *Passé présent. Le Moyen Âge dans les fictions contemporaines*, 2009). These three books each favor one specific angle. The first offers a reflection centered around a fascinating image, that of *remanence*, memory, and reiteration of the auctorial act; the second is a plea in favor of deliberate anachronism, which, from the standpoint of medieval studies, is a statement in itself; finally, the third explores ties between the “experimental” literature of modern times and medieval literature.<sup>6</sup> Equally worth mentioning is Brigitte Cazelles and Charles Méla’s important introduction in *Modernité au Moyen Âge: le défi du passé* (1990); this text is, in fact, concerned with “modernity in the Middle Ages” (Cazelles and Méla, 7), i.e. traits of this period that might today be considered modern, a perspective altogether distinct from the *médiévaliste* approach. Lastly, Gérard Chandès, the only scholar mentioned here who does not work exclusively on the Middle Ages, can also be given the distinction of considering these issues in the most general and theoretical framework, in his monograph *Sémiosphère transmédiévale: un modèle sémiopragmatique d’information et de communication appliqué aux représentations du moyen-âge* (2006). This analysis (his *habilitation* thesis), embracing a diverse corpus, discusses the image of the medieval period among several types of audiences, associated connotations, perception of the past and causes of the prevalence of the Middle Ages in the collective imagination.

It will thus be apparent that, compared to the situation in the Anglo-American world, French research on the reception of the Middle Ages is prominently led by specialists of the Middle Ages, and that – no doubt because of this other disciplinary anchoring – it does not, in general, operate from a distinctly *médiévaliste* theoretical standpoint.

### **Anglo-American medievalism since 1980s**

In contrast to the French situation, more than thirty years after the first issue of *Studies in Medievalism* (1979), a medievalist approach seems quite natural and widely accepted in Anglo-American scholarship; or rather, it is seen both as a legitimate course of research and as a field of study in constant need of self-reassertion.

We may start our inquiry with one of the many monographs dealing with a constituent and exemplary element of the Middle Ages taken up again in later centuries. In *The Legend of Arthur in British and American Literature* (1988), Jennifer R. Goodman explores the origins of the character, and the shaping of the literary myth from the earliest medieval accounts up to the twentieth century. The investigation, however, remains purely descriptive; the very brief preface enumerates a series of platitudes on the persistence of the myth, without ever discussing the causes or forms of this longevity. The work is presented as an overview of the history of Arthur in literature, and legitimates its superficiality by resorting to comparisons with aerial photography. Goodman does not for the rest justify the questionable choice of a primarily Anglo-American corpus, in which continental European literature assumes a largely subordinate role (viii).

Even those books that seem to favor a more theoretical approach because they flaunt the word *Medievalism* in their title, for example, contain less theory than critical essays: such is the case of *Medievalism and Orientalism. Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* by John Ganim (2005). The one-hundred-page volume contains three loosely related essays, without an afterword to summarize the argument, nor any explicitly theoretical reflections on medievalism (in the introduction).

Here too, exceptions to this largely descriptive approach are eminently noticeable. In the introduction to the book which she edited in 2001, *Medievalism and the Quest for the "Real" Middle Ages*, Clare Simmons presents an engaging history of medievalism and defines her understanding of the term, relating it to medieval studies. Issued three years before, a book in honor of Leslie Workman contained an interview where Workman retraced his own intellectual journey, not unlike Zumthor's, and the circumstances that had brought him to this field of study (Utz and Shippey). One must indeed emphasize the pivotal role of *Studies in Medievalism*, launched in 1979 by Workman, who edited (alone or with collaborators) the first nine volumes of the series; David Metzger, Tom Shippey and Richard Utz, among others, helmed the following issues, before Karl Fugelso

took charge, in 2007, of a series that lies at the heart of Anglo-American medievalism studies, with Workman remaining a tutelary figure throughout. The twenty volumes published to this day, however, were chiefly concerned with practical demonstration, rather than real theoretical reflection, up until the latest issues. So the titles tell us: most refer to geographical areas or definite time periods (*Medievalism in England, Medievalism in America, Twentieth Century Medievalism, Medievalism in France, Medievalism in France 1500–1700, German Medievalism, Medievalism in Europe, Medievalism in North America*) and ultimately repeating themselves (*Medievalism in England, Medievalism in Europe II*). Attempts at formalization are rare before 2009, which was a watershed year, since no less than four volumes attempting to “define” this field of research were announced then (Fugelso).

The relatively recent publication date of these four volumes, that appeared a full thirty years after the series’ inception, as well as the comparatively small place of these theoretical volumes in the Anglo-American medievalist bibliography, in relation to the abundance of case studies, are both worth noting. Such observations are, however, hardly surprising if we consider that medievalism (such as we know it today) is no older than thirty years, and that any new field of research must pass through a critical phase of describing and staking out the ground before moving on to a phase of theoretical consolidation. Thus, while Zumthor was writing *Parler du Moyen Âge* in 1979 (it was published the next year), the first volume of *Studies in Medievalism* was already being issued, which demonstrates very different stages of maturity in the two spheres.

If theoretical reflection, as a comparison of French and Anglo-American studies shows, is relatively scarce and recent, we shall see, moreover, that the very designation of the field of research concerned with the reception of the Middle Ages in later centuries is neither fixed nor very stable.

### **French *médiévalisme* and medievalism**

One of the aims of the Metz symposium in 2009, and of the book published a year later) was to assess the usefulness and relevance of the noun *médiévalisme* to designate, in French, the field of research that has emerged in the last thirty years; for there was an urgent necessity to agree on a definition of terms, in order to lessen (if not eliminate!) common misunderstandings, and to establish the methodological framework needed to avoid the usual stumbling blocks.

It must be acknowledged that this lack of a proper, shall we say “official” terminology among French researchers is symptomatic of the methodological vagueness of numerous studies. Indeed, at this point in time, we are still left with a clutter of expressions referring to *la modernité du Moyen Âge*,<sup>7</sup> *le Moyen Âge aujourd’hui* or *le Moyen Âge contemporain* alongside interesting images that surface from time to time, like that of *remanence* (Gally). Without commenting further on the difficult interpretation of these various expressions, let us examine the French terms *néo-médiéval* (neomedieval) and *néo-médiévaliste* (neomedievalist). The first of these, although it seems transparent enough if it is used to qualify a work of literature (e.g. in Larue), raises more questions than it answers (of what nature exactly is the reappropriation indicated by the prefix *néo*, what is considered *médiéval*?); moreover, the logically associated noun, *néo-médiéviste*, conjures up a new kind of medieval researcher, adhering to new methods; finally, “*néo-médiévaliste*” may seem (to French ears) uselessly redundant, contrary to the rules of lexical derivation, and borderline confusing. The neologism *neomedievalism*, which had to be coined eventually, is found under the pen of Umberto Eco as early as 1986 (in the English translation of his famous essay, “Dreaming of the Middle Ages”, 63)<sup>8</sup>; it resurfaced in 2009 in the title of two issues of *Studies in Medievalism*, published in 2010: *Defining Neo-Medievalism(s)*.

It might seem wiser, then, to consider established usage, and the degree of precision required in each context, thus allowing for different levels of terminological strictness: *néo-médiéval* can adequately qualify a work of literature, only casually referred to in the context of a study otherwise unrelated to this subject; however, if the relation to the Middle Ages is the primary concern, *médiévalisme* (and similarly *médiévaliste*, as a noun referring to an individual, or as an adjective referring to a work of literature) has the benefit of lexical consistency (in its derivation), among other advantages. Indeed, it immediately recalls its English equivalent: this was the basis for the name of a book series entitled *Médiévalisme(s)*, launched by CNRS Éditions in September 2009;<sup>9</sup> it also informed the name of the Groningen symposium, “Transatlantic Dialogues / Parler du Moyen Age”, that emphasized the relation with Anglo-American *medievalism*. Furthermore, the word *médiévalisme* is rather unfamiliar to French speakers, and thus gives a sense of chronological distance (the transfer between the Middle Ages and later centuries), reminding us to tread carefully – unlike *médiévalisant*, *moyen-âgeux*, etc.<sup>10</sup> Although not a neologism in the strictest sense, its meaning needs to be reassigned, for in standard French, *médiévalisme* refers almost

exclusively to medieval studies; thus, in catalogs, it is treated as a synonym for *médiévisme* by means of a cross-reference pointing to medieval studies (“voir médiévisme”).<sup>11</sup>

To reject this term *a priori* on account of its novelty (which may be its greatest asset) seems, therefore, inconsequent all the more so in view of the similar (although lesser) semantic fragility of the term *medievalism* in English. To cite only one example, chosen for its authoritative status: the meaning given by Stephen G. Nichols in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper* (edited with R.H. Bloch, 1995), is indeed that of medieval studies; it frequently crops up in Anglo-American studies, as shown by the symposium organized in his honor at The Johns Hopkins University in September 2008.

To make better, more rigorous use of categories, and to monitor the manner and the instruments of our research is also indispensable if we are to avoid a major pitfall: namely, failing to consider what differentiates the Middle Ages from later periods, which in itself is the only barrier preventing the (admittedly tempting and convenient) transposition of critical and theoretical instruments. This difference was eloquently pointed out in an issue of *Littérature* entitled *Altérités du Moyen Âge* in 2003,<sup>12</sup> mostly based on the earlier work of Jauss (“The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature” is from 1977); one also thinks of Paul Zumthor, who emphasized the fact that the very notion of *literature* is problematic in the case of the Middle Ages: the importance of oral tradition, the fine delimitation of what constitutes literature, mean that special care should be exerted when dealing with the “obvious facts” (36).

An illustration of this methodological quicksand may be found in one of the volumes of *Studies in Medievalism* that sought to theorize medievalism before the 2009 issues in this case in relation to cultural studies. This Volume X (*Medievalism and the Academy II. Cultural Studies*, 2000) evidences problems that can arise from inappropriate cultural and historical transfers: one of the most shining examples of this<sup>13</sup> can no doubt be found in an article assessing post-colonial criticism using methods derived from the thinking of Augustine. In “The Manichean Problem in Post-Colonial Criticism”, Michael Bernard-Donals first examines a commentator’s interpretation of *Kim* (by Kipling), an interpretation informed by Manichaeism; he then proceeds to correlate these analyses to the quarrel between Augustine and Manichaeism. This double transposition is never made explicit, nor are the logical consequences of this amalgamation analyzed; the author gives no thought to the notional “loss” engendered by the initial

recourse to a model that severed from its historical roots the simplified “Manichaeism” put together by the the *Kim* commentator.

What can we do to avoid such problems, and to demand while this field is still being “constructed” and formalized that medievalist research be conducted with the strictest rigor and a certain amount of reflective hindsight? Given the sheer size of the task, a promising course might be to establish a collective project in which the work of specialists of medieval “literature”, of historians, of art historians, of “modernists”, etc., could intersect more closely. Such is indeed the aim of the present collection, in which each contributor speaks from the vantage point of his own discipline. Modernists, for example, might be inclined to think that comparative literature, as well as medieval studies, is especially well-equipped to examine the methodological issues of medievalism, because of its perennial interest in otherness, and because (owing to its institutional status, in France at least) it is constantly required to reevaluate its own methods. The reader may judge if, beyond the vast array of subjects, some common denominators can be discerned, some practices that may serve as a starting point, their legitimacy confirmed through common experience; and she may judge if this collection succeeds in unearthing unthought-of elements, questioning our habits, and pinpointing difficulties that are usually left unspoken.

### **The present collection**

Taking into account this tradition of French reflection on the medieval, the present collection of essays seeks to explore, specifically, how French and Francophone medievalist theory and practice can contribute to a theory of medievalism, in many instances also complicating the dominant Anglo-American medievalism paradigm. We deliberately chose to publish most of these essays in English, and indeed had several of them especially translated for this issue of *RELIEF*, in order to make some significant examples of French-language medievalist scholarship available to an English-speaking audience. A further, complementary cluster of essays, that also originated partly in the Groningen conference but focusing more specifically on post-colonial and Iberian medievalist scholarship, will appear in 2015 in *Studies in Medievalism*. Collectively, the articles in this first collection interrogate the notion of national medievalisms, as well as the centre-periphery relations unconsciously at work in much current medievalist theorizing. Besides bringing together a number of articles addressing Francophone medievalisms, the volume illustrates how these

other national perspectives have *always* historically had the potential to complicate current Anglo-American views, for we also include here English translations of two classic, mid-twentieth-century but surprisingly hitherto-untranslated pieces by the Belgian philologist Robert Guette.

Given the powerful impulse given to the field of medievalism studies by the work of Paul Zumthor, this collection quite naturally falls into two broad sections, a first one exploring medievalist traditions before Zumthor, i.e. before medievalism had a name (in English), and a second part dealing with two specific strands of post-Zumthor medievalism: theoretical engagements with the field of medievalism, and transatlantic perspectives on the medievalist artefacts that are the object of our scholarship.

The issue opens with a series of essays focusing on medievalist practices in France from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. Carolina Armenteros addresses the ways in which nation-builders in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century turned back to the medieval past in the quest for a new, unifying national ideology. She thereby traces the process by which medieval traditions that had once been regarded with condescension became rallying-points for a new cultural memory, and how it was history's "losers" – the royalists who were marginalized by post-revolutionary politics – who were, in this first phase of medievalist fervour, perhaps most closely associated with the medieval. William Calin then examines a more traditionally nationalistic – or more accurately, regionalistic – translation of medieval troubadour traditions in nineteenth-century Provence. This first section on medievalism before Zumthor closes with Aurélie Basso's essay on Francophone Canadian engagements with an imagined, exoticized medieval past around 1900, which she views as part of artists' and writers' quest for a new regionalist identity during that period.

Lest this volume's focus on a pre-Zumthor and post-Zumthor medievalism give the erroneous impression that before Zumthor's *Speaking of the Middle Ages*, medievalism as such had not yet been thought, we round off this section by publishing English-language translations of two texts by a medieval scholar who worked before Zumthor, yet whose ideas and approaches testify to a sophisticated level of engagement with theoretical questions related to the scholarly study of the medieval. These texts are translations of two seminal essays on medieval poetry, by the Belgian medievalist Robert Guette, that have not previously been available in English. Himself a peripheral figure by his Belgian institutional context – French-speaking, but not quite French – Guette's

importance in first focusing attention on the formal aspects of medieval poetry has gone largely unrecognized. We felt it useful to introduce English-speaking readers to the work of this important precursor of Paul Zumthor.

The issue's third part, entitled "Speaking of the Middle Ages after Zumthor", illustrates the kind of theoretical reflections on medieval scholarship that Zumthor generated, and continues to generate today. Michèle Gally asks the leading question: what are we actually doing when we speak of the medieval, are we speaking of the past, or is it really of ourselves that we are speaking, and how can this "speaking" itself be conceived as a particular kind of visceromotoric, somatic engagement with our present-day world and experience? Véronique Dominguez, in her analysis of Gustave Cohen's reenactments of medieval theatre, pushes further this interrogation of the relations between medieval studies and medievalism, by focusing on the figure of the scholar himself. This brings us back to one of the volume's central questions: of what use is medievalism to a medieval studies scholar, and what can philologists and creative re-enactors of the medieval learn from one another?

Finally, the volume explores a new subfield that is opening up within the broader field of medievalism studies, i.e. that of transatlantic or even postcolonial medievalisms. The final two articles thus focus on cultural translations, dislocations and discursive spaces located between traditionally defined nations and their accompanying medievalisms. These are both cultural translations between different geographical spaces, and across historical epochs. Both articles in this subsection focus on a specific literary genre: medieval poetry, and the particularly rich cross-cultural, diachronic translations it has generated: into modern Brazilian literature, in the case of the troubadours studied by Roy Rosenstein in his article; and into avant-garde modern American poetry, in Nathalie Koble's contribution. It is thus with the medieval poetry that was the cornerstone of Paul Zumthor's theorization of medievalism that this volume, fittingly, ends, demonstrating that in speaking of the Middle Ages today, we are still speaking largely in the language and with the conceptual building-blocks that Zumthor first provided.

But the essays in this collection do more, we hope, than merely illustrate once again Paul Zumthor's stimulating ideas. Indeed, one of the themes that emerges from the essays is that of borders, peripheries, and shifting relations between national traditions. Collectively, the articles in this issue thus also suggest the possibility of a new way of speaking of the Middle Ages today that



divests itself of the notion of centres and rootedness – or the impossible foundational text, whose quest Paul Zumthor among others proclaimed to belie the medieval tradition of *mouvance* itself – and instead adopts an approach in which the notion of origin or originary meaning could be replaced by that of relation and translation. As in the Deleuzian concept of the rhizome, such a conception of the medieval would renounce notions of identity conceived on the model of the single, stable *root*, that would exclude all other filiations, and instead would opt for the biological concept of the *rhizome*, a plant that extends itself through an underground, horizontal, tuber-like root system, a growth marked by its in-betweenness, its connections between the one and the other. This would be a horizontal, relational medievalism, i.e. a medievalism that seeks to link different epochs, worldviews, and disparate historical experiences, subtly unsettling the idea of the originary, “authentic” Middle Ages.

Such a relational, rhizomatic medievalism need not, however, devolve into a celebratory discourse of multicultural, travelling medievalist identities, or a cultural free-for-all. Not only is a rhizomatic medievalism, as several of the articles in the present collection suggest, also a site of contestation or even conflict, just as the original rhizome is itself a kind of predatory growth, sometimes stifling the other in its never-ceasing competition for available nutrients. More importantly, rhizomes too have roots, even if these are complicated ones and not immediately visible to the eye. Cultural translations, and of course borders and peripheries, owe their existence to national and other entities that function thanks to their appeal to – imaginary or otherwise – roots. It is perhaps, then, this dialectic between roots and connectivities, between centred and dislocated discourses, between different (and differently rooted) national traditions, that constitutes the unique contribution that a “medievalism between nations”, as tentatively outlined in this volume, could make to the field of medievalism at large.

## Notes

1. The following scholars also took part in the 2010 conference in Groningen : Juan Gomis (University of Valencia), Jaume Aurell (University of Navarra), Jeff Rider (Wesleyan University), Simon Doubleday (Hofstra University), Nadia Altschul (The Johns Hopkins University), Solène Bertrand (Paris), Michael Evans (Central Michigan University), Sebastiaan Faber (Oberlin College), Karl Fugelso (Towson University), Bruce Holsinger (University of Virginia), Katie Garner (Cardiff University), Jelle Koopmans (University of Amsterdam), Joep

Leerssen (University of Amsterdam), Peter Raedts (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen), John Sharpe (University of Delaware), Piotr Toczyski (Polish Academy of Sciences), Richard Utz (Georgia Tech), Anton van der Lem (Leiden University), Mathilde Van Dijk (University of Groningen), Kathleen Verduin (Hope College), Maggie Williams (William Paterson University), Andrea Worm (Universität Augsburg). A selection of the other articles based on the conference papers is forthcoming in *Studies on Medievalism* 24 (2015).

2. The following section is a translation and adaptation of Vincent Ferré's introduction to *Médiévalisme, modernité du Moyen Age*.

3. See the online bibliography maintained by Richard Utz and Aneta Dygon ("Perspicuitas": <http://www.perspicuitas.uni-essen.de>) and, in French, the one found on the *Modernités médiévales* website: <http://www.modernitesmedievales.org>.

4. See the full program on <<http://medievalisme.hypotheses.org/>>.

5. Since then, another "modernités médiévales" conference took place in November 2012 in Aix, before a conference in Cerisy-la-Salle on "Tolkien and the Inklings" in July 2012.

6. Only books are examined here, but among articles offering a good synthesis, let us mention Rochebouet and Salamon's "Les réminiscences médiévales dans la *fantasy*". The authors provide numerous, well-defined examples from medieval literature as a means to assess the status of references to this corpus (direct, indirect, intertextual, allusive).

7. Besides the names of the symposiums and seminars already mentioned, the *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* feature a section called "Modernité du Moyen Âge" since 2007; in addition, the *Modernités médiévales* society was founded in 2004.

8. Rochebouet and Salamon point out the difference with the original Italian version, published in *Sugli specchi e altri saggi* (1985).

9. I have used this term (in French) in articles published since 2007: "Limites du médiévalisme" and "La critique à l'épreuve de la fiction".

10. On this subject, see the terminological discussion by Burde.

11. The word appeared on search engines around 2007, the year of the *Modernités médiévales* symposium in Aix-en-Provence: two of the papers presented there used it in their title. Françoise Michaud-Fréjaville's paper ("Le 'médiévalisme' de la *Jeanne d'Arc* de Péguy (1897)"), although earlier, only appeared online in June 2008 in the *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* (2005).

12. See, in particular, Nichols' warning: "it is also important to show how, and to which extent, the Middle Ages are different from later (or previous) historical periods" (3).

13. Not counting an analysis presented in Ferré 2008.

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