

INTRODUCTION

KARL CHRISTIAN ALVESTAD

The persistence and flourishing of medievalisms, both as a cultural phenomenon and as a field of study, in the twenty-first century demonstrates the continual lure of the Middle Ages to the modern mind. The manifestations of this allure can clearly be seen in contemporary culture, politics, and communities. This is exemplified by the use and abuse of the medieval period during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Here we have seen the medieval past being used to make sense of the world around us, as well as provide legitimacy for political action and ambitions.¹ During the Covid-19 pandemic, medieval scholars experienced an increased interest in knowledge about the black death,² as well as references to it in media, popular culture and

¹ Marples, David Roger, "Vladimir Putin points to history to justify his Ukraine invasion, regardless of reality," *The Conversation*, 07.03.2022. <https://theconversation.com/vladimir-putin-points-to-history-to-justify-his-ukraine-invasion-regardless-of-reality-177882>; Anna Reid, "Putin's War on History," *Foreign Affairs*, April 6, 2022. www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-06/putins-war-history-ukraine-russia.

² Knut J. Meland, "Eksplisiv interesse for svartedauden," USN.NO, 07.01.2021. accessed: www.usn.no/nyhetsarkiv/eksplisiv-interesse-for-svartedauden; Nükhet Varlik, "From Black death to Covid-19 pandemics have always pushed people to honor death and celebrate life," *The Conversation*, 26.10.2021. <https://theconversation.com/from-black-death-to-covid-19-pandemics-have-always-pushed-people-to-honor-death-and-celebrate-life-170517>; Robert Gonzalez, "Expert on the 'Black Death' puts Corona virus in Historical Perspective - Dr. Dodds talked to Robert Gonzalez," Florida State University 24.02.2020. <https://history.fsu.edu/article/expert-black-death-puts-corona-virus-historical-perspective-dr-dodds-talked-robert-gonzalez>.

politics. Whereas the leadup to the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 saw a conscious retelling of the medieval past, by the Kremlin, to legitimise their actions and policies.³ Yet, these examples are not unique in their use and interaction with the medieval past and its post-medieval memory. Other examples may include the Norwegian government naming its CO2-storing initiative “Longship,” and the 2016 Charlottesville Unite the Right Rally.⁴ These are some of many contemporary manifestations of medievalisms that build on a long tradition of memory and cultural interaction with the Middle Ages.

In the case of the Norwegian “Longship” project, the national historical memory and cultural sentiments seem to have been dominant in the creation, presentation, and reception of this medievalism.⁵ This national frame for medievalisms is to a great extent, a revival of the importance of national audiences and frames of reference in the political and cultural spheres. The revival of nationalism in the twenty-first century shapes the very nature of some contemporary medievalisms, their purpose, audiences, and the way we can understand them. Unlike late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century nationalist medievalisms, the medievalisms of the twenty-first century seem, as demonstrated by chapters in this volume, to be part of a much more diverse landscape of medievalisms. This landscape of medievalisms includes, as this volume shows, traditional political and cultural medievalisms, such as medieval films, tv-series, literature, activism, as well as personal experiences with the medieval through re-enactment and activism.

This diversity of manifestations of medievalisms has long been a part landscape of medievalisms. Yet, in the Anglophone world, Hollywood, along with other examples of Western film and TV industries, has been

³ Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.” Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia. 12.07.2021. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>; Beer, Daniel. “Putin’s centuries-long march into Ukraine.” The Washington Post 29.09.2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/books/2022/09/29/russian-history-books-review-putin-ukraine/>.

⁴ Olje og Energidepartementet. 2020. *Langskip – fangst og lagring av CO2*. Meld. St. 33 (2019-2020). Oslo: Olje og Energidepartementet. www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-33-20192020/id2765361/; Blake, Thomas. “Getting Medieval Post-Charlottesville,” in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*, ed. Louie Dean Valencia-García, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2020), 178-97.

⁵ Karl C. Alvestad, “Mainstream Norwegian Medievalism in the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change in Narrative and Form,” *Mirator* 21 (2021): 50-64. <https://journal.fi/mirator/article/view/102586>.

particularly visible through the genre of medieval film, with among seminal productions being Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975), Vikings (2013–2020), Game of Thrones (2011–2019).⁶ In recent decades the gaming industry has been growing in popularity,⁷ and that has contributed to developing a shared canon of medievalisms including, among other things, Crusader Kings II and III, Skyrim, The Witcher, Assassin's Creed, and others. This canon contributes to the broader medievalism culture and corpus of references and has significantly contributed to the transmission of medievalism tropes, stereotypes and myths, that easily can be used and abused for different agendas. Helen Young argued in 2020 that one of these tropes, the whiteness of the Middle Ages, actively influences the creation and consumption of medievalisms in gaming.⁸ Similarly, Sian Beavers and Sylvia Warnecke, and Daisy Black argued the same when it came to gender and gender stereotypes as presented in medievalisms.⁹

The active use and abuse of medieval narratives, symbols and tropes are still permeating culture both in the “West” and beyond. Although the Middle Ages is, often incorrectly, seen as a European, Catholic, homogeneous period, recent studies of medievalisms have demonstrated that the medieval is and has been culturally relevant beyond the

⁶ Bettina Bildhauer, “Medievalism and Cinema,” chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens, Cambridge Companions to Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 45–59. doi: 10.1017/CCO9781316091708.004.

⁷ Daniel T. Kline, “Participatory Medievalism, Role-Playing, and Digital Gaming,” chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens, Cambridge Companions to Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 75–88. doi: 10.1017/CCO9781316091708.006.

⁸ Helen Young, “Race and historical authenticity: *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*,” in *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism*, ed. Karl Alvestad and Robert Houghton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). Accessed November 28, 2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350167452.0009>.

⁹ Sian Beavers and Sylvia Warnecke. “Audience perceptions of historical authenticity in visual media,” in *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism*, ed. Karl Alvestad and Robert Houghton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 74–89. Accessed November 28, 2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350167452.0013>; Daisy Black, “Malevolent and marginal: The feminized ‘Dark Ages’ in modern card game cultures,” in *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism*, ed. Karl Alvestad and Robert Houghton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 105–118. Accessed November 28, 2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350167452.0015>.

European “origins” of the Middle Ages.¹⁰ Yet, at the same time there exists, as Andrew B.R. Elliott, Amy S. Kaufman, Paul Sturtevant and Daniel Wollenberg have reminded us of an extensive community of individuals who read and understand the middle ages as a white, homogeneous, heterosexual time in the past, which according to these communities is under threat, and need to be re-claimed and emulated.¹¹

The years since the dawn of the 21st century have seen an increase in scholarly interest in, and discussions about the various forms of medievalisms. At the same time this overarching trend of revival and continued innovation has taken place, scholars have observed and commented on some diversification of the nature of medievalisms, their purpose and their consumption. Scholars have demonstrated how medievalisms are alive and well in the 21st century, and how it has diversified and flourished for good and evil with the democratisation of the internet and the rise of populist politics. Some of these medievalisms have their roots in the nineteenth century, while others are more recent. Some are what the more traditional medievalisms, as defined by Pugh and Weisl as “the art, literature, scholarship, avocational pastimes, and sundry forms of entertainment and culture that turn to the Middle Ages for their subject matter or inspiration, and in doing so, explicitly or implicitly, by comparison, or by contrast, comment on the artist ’ s contemporary sociocultural milieu.”¹² While other examples fall more easily into what Bruce Holsinger describes as neo-medievalisms “a mode of appropriation that operates with a more overtly blatant disregard for historical veracity than its more imitative or avowedly ‘true-to-the-past’ medievalist counterparts.”¹³ The differentiation of these two categories

¹⁰ Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul, *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of ‘the Middle Ages’ outside Europe*. Rethinking Theory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Nadia R. Altschul, *Politics of Temporalization* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Helen Young and Kavita Mudan Finn, *Global Medievalism: An Introduction*, Elements in the Global Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), doi:10.1017/9781009119658.

¹¹ Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media*. NED – New ed. Vol. 10. Medievalism (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017); Amy Kaufman and Paul Sturtevant, *The Devil’s Historians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020); Daniel Wollenberg, *Medieval Imagery in Today’s Politics. Past Imperfect* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2018).

¹² Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 1.

¹³ Bruce Holsinger, “Neomedievalism and International Relations,” chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D’Arcens, Cambridge Companions to

of medievalisms can help us make sense of the materiality and memories within these medievalisms, at the same time as they also create a somewhat unnatural distinction between the discovered and the created when both have similar social and cultural purposes. At the same time, Pugh and Weisl while drawing on David Marshall warns against the categorisation of different medievalisms as this can limit our ability to fully engage with and study the long appeal of the medieval in a post-medieval world.

A growing trend is the use of medievalisms for social and cultural activism. We see this expressed in the invocation of Saint Wilgefortis in trans communities in the West,¹⁴ as well as in studies by Jonathan Hsy and Noëlle Phillips.¹⁵ Although these medievalisms, by their categorisations, are singled out from other political medievalisms, they aim at a more progressive development in politics and culture. It could be argued that their use of the medieval resembles more traditional nationalistic medievalisms. Whereas progressive medievalisms like those explored by Stenzel and Stenzel in this volume aim to stimulate individuals to build a more inclusive and better future,¹⁶ the more conservative aim at galvanising a community in fear or have been used to promote a more exclusionary aim as seen in Grigoli and Pascual's contributions to this volume.¹⁷

This volume which was planned as the inaugural volume of the Medievalism series published by Trivent Publishing explores examples of contemporary medievalisms in the 21st century. Consequently, the volume has sought to shed light on the vast spectre of medievalisms in the twenty-first century and to showcase how the Middle Ages are being

Culture. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 165–79. doi: 10.1017/CCO9781316091708.012, 165.

¹⁴ Cherry Kittredge, "Saint Wilgefortis: Holy bearded woman fascinates for centuries," *Queer Spirituality*. 20.11.2022. <https://qspirit.net/saint-wilgefortis-bearded-woman/>; Stephanie A. Budwey, "Saint Wilgefortis: A Queer Image for Today" *Religions* 13, no. 7 (2022): 616. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13070616>.

¹⁵ Jonathan Hsy. *Antiracist Medievalisms: From "Yellow Peril" to Black Lives Matter* (Arc Humanities Press, 2021); Noëlle Phillips, *Craft Beer Culture and Modern Medievalism: Brewing Dissent*. Collection Development, Cultural Heritage, and Digital Humanities (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

¹⁶ See chapter 13.

¹⁷ See chapters 10 and 14.

invoked, used and abused in local, national and global communities, as well as by the individual. The chapters in this volume are a collection of examples of how the medieval and medievalisms are present in our contemporary societies across the world.

The geographic scope of the chapters in this volume is the western hemisphere. While the temporal scope of the medievalisms discussed below, initially focused on the twenty-first century, stretches from the 1970s until the 2020s. These longer temporal ranges allow demonstrates how medievalisms in the twenty-first century are part of a long cultural continuity, even though some of the examples below have distinct features of this modern age. Yet, the core discussions in the chapters are engaging with how the medieval and medievalisms speak to modern audiences and contexts. They, as demonstrated especially in the chapters by Mickus, Capelli, Grigoli, Gassmann, and Seymour Klos show how universalised medievalist tropes influence cultural perceptions of the Middle Ages, and how we might unpick these tropes to see beyond the perceived knowledge of the period. At the same time, Justine Breton's chapter highlights how the well-known narrative of King Arthur might have distinct manifestations and nuances that do not transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries.

In the same way, Jean Christian Egoavil's, as well as Álvaro Garrote Pascual's contributions show how ideas of the medieval, medievalisms, and neo-medievalisms based on these ideas in many ways are local and regional phenomena in a globalised world. Egoavil investigates the medieval and medievalisms in Peru, especially considering its revival and re-popularisation in the 21st century. Pascual explores the use of neomedievalism by VOX, the Spanish far-right political party, in the Spanish political discourse. He stresses their use of neomedievalism in collapsing the Muslim invasion of Iberia in 711 with the Reconquista when dehumanising immigrants and immigration from North Africa in the modern age.

Interestingly, these examples, like those of Breton, and Ding, Freiden and Maffei, are contributions that deal with medievalisms in a non-anglophone context. Similarly to Breton's chapter, Ding, Freiden and Maffei's chapter studies the novel *Romanesque* (2016) in light of medieval romances and romantic love. Whereby, they argue that the book not only romanticizes the medieval romances and courtly love, but also the retelling of stories and that through this, the book transgresses the

boundaries between prose and fiction by simultaneously theorizing and performing the love and its story as told in the book. Breton, and Ding, Freiden and Maffei's chapters are focused on a French-speaking context. While Egoavil and Pascual's focus is on the Spanish-speaking world. As such, these chapters are focused on two global language communities contributing to the diversity of chapters in this volume. Thus, they offer important complementary studies to an expanding corpus of studies of medievalisms from an English-speaking context. Building on and complementing the ideas of Nadia Altschul,¹⁸ Louise D'Arcens,¹⁹ Jonathan Hsy²⁰ and others about medievalisms outside Europe and the United States, these texts can help scholars and students better appreciate the nuances and diversity of medievalisms and neo-medievalisms in the world around us.

In addition, the chapters by Francis Mickus on medieval film, Jürg Gassmann on modern medieval fighting, and Juan Manuel Rubio Arévalo on the game *Dante's Inferno*, discuss how contemporary medievalisms engage with accuracy and authenticity when attempting to present and re-create a medieval past in popular culture. They also highlight how contemporary medievalisms engage with historical sources and scholarship on the period often creating what Arévalo calls palimpsests blending perceptions of the past with contemporary cultural and economic sensitivities.²¹

Similarly, Dario Capelli's, and Meg Feller's chapters highlight how different contemporary sensitivities and cultural needs interplay in contemporary medievalisms in music, literature, and games. In Capelli's chapter, he examines the relationship between black metal and the Middle Ages as a dark and violent time, and through this analysis, he highlights that black metal is a rich source of materials for those who seek to study medievalism or the Middle Ages.²² Where Capelli examines a genre's relationship with the medieval, Feller focuses on one artistic universe—that of *the Witcher*. In her chapter, Feller, offers a discussion of *the Witcher* universe in light of contemporary Polish sensitivities and post-

¹⁸ Nadia R. Altschul, *Politics of Temporalization*.

¹⁹ Louise D'Arcens, *World Medievalism*. Oxford Textual Perspectives (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

²⁰ Jonathan Hsy, *Antiracist Medievalisms: From "Yellow Peril" to Black Lives Matter*.

²¹ See chapter 5.

²² See chapter 4.

communist anxieties, through which she highlights the interplay between the narratives in the games with the real lived experiences of Poles in the post-communist era.

Andrea Maraschi, Dawn A. Seymour Klos, and Elizabeth Allyn Woock all engage with questions of gender and medievalisms in the 21st century in their chapters with Woock examining the depiction of women in medievalist comic books. She especially focuses on the depiction of the chainmail bikini, and how it has evolved through time. In so doing Woock engages with feminism, women's liberation, sexual freedom, post-feminism, and the evolution of the medievalist trope of the chainmail bikini over time. Seymour Klos reflects on how the women of *Game of Thrones* allow us to stop considering medieval women like Isolde Pantulf as extraordinary, and that we, through the lens of popular culture, can better appreciate the complex lives of medieval women. Maraschi's chapter also engages with an extremely popular example of medievalism on the silver screen, namely *Frozen*. In this chapter, Maraschi demonstrates how a brief sequence that includes a reference to Joan of Arc in the film situates Elsa and her story as a post-feminist critique of Western society. Individually and combined these three chapters offer thought-provoking examples of contemporary medievalisms.

Consequently, this book offers the reader a selection of case studies giving thematic, material and contextual variety for studying medievalisms in the 21st century. As such, we hope this book will complement other works dealing with similar material, while also showcasing medievalism and medievalisms distinct from other examples and contexts previously examined. As this book explores different forms of medievalisms in the 21st century, as well as their audiences, communities and their relationship with identities in a globalising world, the chapters are arranged in groups of similar foci. It starts with five chapters exploring stereotypes and myths in medievalisms. Here we find Elizabeth Allyn Woock's chapter on comic books and their feminist readers, Francis Mickus' essay on how the Middle Ages are perceived in cinematic productions, and Jürg Gassmann's contribution on the stereotypes and realities of the medieval knight as presented in medievalism. Dario Capelli writes in his chapter about the richness of materials in Black-Metal medievalisms and how this defies the stereotypes of metal music, while Juan Manuel Rubio Arévalo explores

how ludo narrative dissonance and stereotypes of medievalism manifest in the game *Dante's Inferno*.

Succeeding this paper, are five chapters dealing with medievalisms that speak to particular communities and audiences. First out is Justin Breton's study of the French presentation of King Arthur in *Kaamelott* and how it speaks to its French audience. Meg Feller considers in her work how *The Witcher* opens a window to understanding Polish identity and cultural sensitivities in the post-communist age, thus shedding light on the resonances of this story in Polish cultural contexts. Leticia Ding, Philippe Frieden and Stefania Maffei Boillat offer us a study that explores how a story of love and romance in the novel *Romanesque* can be told, retold, and theorized about in the same novel through an experimental structure and approach from the author. They focus on how the author takes his readership on a journey that explores the transmission of narratives through time and space. Jean Christian Egoavil examines how medieval studies, and particularly medieval philosophy have been re-actualized in Peru in the 21st century with an acceptance of how the Middle Ages has contributed to the Peruvian cultural fabric. While Álvaro Garrote Pascual's chapter focuses on the use of political neomedievalism by the party VOX in Spain, and how this conveys certain political narratives to their audiences.

The last four chapters of this book belong to authors Dawn A. Seymour Klos, Andrea Maraschi, Monica J. Stenzel and Josephine C. Stenzel, and Leland Renato Grigoli, who all in their ways explore how medievalisms are impacted by or stimulate conversations of politics and gender. Klos focuses in her chapter on how an intertextual reading of Isolde Pantulf and the women of Game of Thrones can help contribute to a greater understanding of female agency past and present. Maraschi's post-feminist reading of Elsa from *Frozen* in light of an image of Joan of Arc broadens our horizons when it comes to understanding and conversing about femininity, masculinity, and the societal structures that impact our lives and our expressions. Stenzel and Stenzel's chapter takes the broadening of horizons further when discussing how fans of the Harry Potter books have taken up political activism likened to a medieval quest inspired by Herminie's campaign for the rights of house elves. They have shown in their essay how the world of Potter has given youths around the world the impetus to stand up for what they believe in. In the final chapter of this book, Grigoli reminds us about how medievalism

and neomedievalism in its evolution have been, and still are, tied to race and racism. He also demonstrates convincingly how acknowledging the affective relationships we have with the medieval past might contribute to breaking the far-rights hold on the medieval and medievalism.

As the excellent chapters in this book demonstrated, medievalisms old and new are alive and well in the 21st century, and by considering the manifestation of this through the examples in the 14 chapters of this book, it is safe to say that the study of medievalisms will have a fruitful future.

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