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Medievalism: Whence and Whither?

Вступительное слово доктора Ричарда Утца, президента Международного общества изучения средневековья. В этой небольшой и в чем-то интимной заметке исследователь рассуждает о факторах, влияющих на оптику ученого, о «я» познающего субъекта и о «публичных» средневековьях и средневековьях.

Ключевые слова: дилетант; Другой; любитель; средневековье.

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An introduction to this volume provided by Dr. Richard Utz, President of the International Society for the Study of Medievalism. This personal and short foreword covers the topics of affect, the public, and the «I» of the investigating subject.

Key words: amateur; dilettante; medievalism; Other.

ДЛЯ ЦИТИРОВАНИЯ

Utz R. Medievalism: Whence and Whither? [Электронный ресурс] // Vox medii aevi. 2019. Vol. 2(5). С. 48–51. URL: <http://voxmediiavei.com/2019-2-utz-1>

FOR CITATION

Utz R. Medievalism: Whence and Whither? [Digital Resource] // Vox medii aevi. 2019. Vol. 2(5). P. 48–51. URL: <http://voxmediiavei.com/2019-2-utz-1>

Medievalism: Whence and Whither?



An entire scholarly career ago, when trying to write my doctoral dissertation on the interconnections between Ockhamist philosophy and theology and Geoffrey Chaucer's late medieval poetry, I was first confronted with questions of reception and how multiple layers of reception in different cultural and historical contexts create the complex palimpsest in which I encountered medieval persons, thought, and artifacts in the 1980s. A little later, when moving from Germany to the United States, the teaching of medieval literature and culture in a country without physical remnants to the "real" Middle Ages, I decided to make virtue of necessity and focus on the myriad ways in which my students chanced upon medievalia, mostly in the form of recreations (for example: architecture, literature, film, games), reenactments (for example: Society for Creative Anachronism), and scholarship (historical linguistics, and various other subfields of medieval studies). The regular exchange and collaboration with Leslie J. Workman and Kathleen Verduin, the founders of "medievalism studies" in the English-speaking world, later with Tom Shippey, Gwendolyn Morgan, William Calin, and many other colleagues who had embarked on similar intellectual journeys in the International Society for the Study of Medievalism, gradually provided the theoretical framework for a deeper understanding of the cultural phenomenon of **medievalism**. Expressed most succinctly by Paul Zumthor, I believe that "[j]ust as any interpretation of space is made on the basis of here, and that of the other on the basis of I, inversely, the antiquarian delusion which might lead one to speak of the

past otherwise than on the basis of now would render outdated and futile whatever interpretation of it one might make¹. Reception study, I determined, provides a healthy caveat against narrow, exclusivist, and ideological readings of the past.

As the ongoing reception of medieval culture in post-medieval times, **medievalism** has existed as a polyvalent English term since the first half of the nineteenth century, when it was mostly used as a synonym for the medieval period and as a conservative cultural response to continental — ism terms and revolutionary movements like “democratism,” “republicanism,” “socialism,” and “communism” that seemed to invade the British Isles². As a linguistic performance responding to particular pressures inside and outside the academy, the concept can be shown specifically to be the product of what Reinhart Koselleck called the process of “temporalization” (*Verzeitlichung*) which marks the transition from early modern mentalities to modernity and the modern university. Rejected as the complete “Other” of academic medieval studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by scholars who desired to demarcate their own practices from those of their enthusiastic dilettante predecessors, the English term survived probably due to the unique continuity postmedieval British people have felt with their medieval past throughout early modernity, modernity, and beyond.

The distinction between “medieval studies” and “medievalism”, between the so-called amateur or dilettante on the one hand and the professional scholar has never sat comfortably with me. After all, in my academic work I have always been at various stages between a beginner and a specialist, moving in and out of familiar and new fields of expertise, and collaborating with colleagues themselves who were either ahead or behind me on their own research paths. The explosion in the availability of information on the Middle Ages and all other possible and impossible subjects in the 21st century has only increased my conviction that, in the end, all scholarly medievalists are in fact only also contributing various theories and recreations to the larger phenomenon of medievalism. Therefore, with Kathleen Verduin, I hold that “[I]f ‘medievalism’ [...] denotes the whole range

1. Zumthor P. *Speaking of the Middle Ages* / trans. by S. White. Lincoln, 1986. P. 33.

2. On this process, see: Utz R. *Coming to Terms with Medievalism* // *European Journal of English Studies*. 2011. Vol. 15. №2. P. 101–113.

> 3. Verduin K. *Shared Interests of SIM and MFN* // *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*. 1997. Vol. 23. №1. P. 33..

> 4. For a recent discussion on this question, see: Matthews D. *Putting on the Armour: A Response to Richard Utz* // *Práticas da História, Journal on Theory, Historiography and Uses of the Past*. 2017. Vol. 4. P. 237–243; Utz R. *Recensão a Medievalism: A Critical History*, de David Matthews // *Práticas da História, Journal on Theory, Historiography and Uses of the Past*. 2016. Vol. 3. P. 155–161. For illustrative examples of the public medievalism I hope to promote, see: Utz R. 1) *Of Monks and Medievalists* // *Medievalists.net*. 24.05.2019. URL: <http://www.medievalists.net/2019/05/of-monks-and-medievalists>; 2) *Should Medievalists be Teaching Game of Thrones* // *Medievalists.net*. 07.04.2019. URL: <http://www.medievalists.net/2019/04/should-medievalists-be-teaching-game-of-thrones>; 3) *We Want Wall. We Want Knight. Not. — Medievalism and the Atlanta Super Bowl* // *Medievally Speaking*. 03.02.2019. URL: <https://medievallyspeaking.blogspot.com/2019/02/we-want-wall-we-want-knight-not.html>; 4) *Were Women Ever Sacred? Some Medieval and Modern Men Would Like Us to Think So* // *Medievalists.net*. 14.10.2018. URL: <http://www.medievalists.net/2018/10/were-women-ever-sacred>; 5) *Whose (Medieval) Congress Is It Anyway?* // *Inside Higher Ed*. 02.08.2018. URL: <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/08/02/critique-debate-over-medieval-studies-opinion>; 6) *Deggendorf, and the Long History of its Destructive Myth* // *The Public Medievalist*. 31.08.2017. URL: <https://www.publicmedievalist.com/deggendorf>; 7) *Game of Thrones among the Medievalists* // *Inside Higher Ed*. 17.07.2017. [4]>

of postmedieval engagement with the Middle Ages, then ‘medieval studies’ themselves must be considered a facet of medievalism rather than the other way around”³. As a consequence, I no longer make a strict epistemological distinction between myself and the many extra-academic lovers of medieval culture. The only difference I see between these two kinds of “lovers” manifests in the degree to which professional medievalists depersonalize their desire for the past, sublimate that desire into scientific and science-like practices, and share their research with a lamentably small number of academic colleagues. To me, then, **medievalism** has become an opportunity to abandon speaking to and lecturing others from a position of expert knowing. Instead, I now seek to speak and learn together with others regardless of their formal academic preparation. To do that, I had to abandon wearing my professional armor, lower the drawbridge, and become a public medievalist⁴.

The *Manifesto* was the moment in my career when I was ready to share my experience with my colleagues. In the booklet, I want to exemplify how to speak from a perspective of “**now**” when dealing with medieval texts, artifacts, and persons; from a perspective of “**I**” because our desire for engaging with medievalia always has some personal and affective foundation; and from a perspective of the “**public**” for whom and with whom we should work⁵. I hope it inspires many readers to consider following a similar path⁶.

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< [4] URL: <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/07/14/why-game-thrones-shouldnt-be-used-effort-recruit-future-medievalists-essay>; 8) Cupid at the Castle: Romance, Medievalism, and Race at Atlanta’s Rhodes Hall // The Public Medievalist. 04.04.2017. URL: <https://www.publicmedievalist.com/rhodes-hall> (URLs accessed 28.04.2020).

5. I have sketched out more of these foundational thoughts in the short piece. *Utz R. Don’t Be Snobs, Medievalists* // The Chronicle of Higher Education. 24.08.2015. URL: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Dont-Be-Snobs-Medievalists/232539> (accessed 28.04.2020).

6. I provided a short overview of the *Manifesto*’s reception between 2017 and January 2019 for the ARC Humanities Press blog: *Utz R. The Manifesto Received* // ARC Humanities Press blog. 20.03.2019. URL: <https://arc-humanities.org/blog/2019/03/20/the-manifesto-received> (accessed 28.04.2020). Berit Kjærulff recently published a review article “Medievalism and the post-medieval Middle Ages” in *Orbis Litterarum* with a substantial response to the *Manifesto*. (*Kjærulff B. Medievalism and the postmedieval Middle Ages* // *Orbis Litterarum*. 2018. Vol. 73. P. 458–470).