

Introduction

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The present volume of *The Year's Work in Medievalism*¹ devotes over half its pages to topics in nineteenth-century art and literature. On the one hand, this is not surprising, for the era saw an immense revival of interest in things medieval, notably among the Pre-Raphaelite painters and prominent Victorian poets, and a re-working of them to elevate and validate high Victorian ideals. In light of such, Graham Johnson's re-evaluation of "Pelleas and Ettarre," from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, as the "pivotal idyll" in linking female sexuality and ensuing adultery to the downfall of Camelot (not something Malory holds to be a major cause), adds a new dimension to scholarship in this area and pinpoints the cause of that common misreading of Malory by modern and contemporary authors reworking the myth. Tennyson's mainstream distrust, even horror, of female sexuality and promiscuity can only be so effectively expressed by radical reworking of Malory's material to express received Victorian views.

On the other hand, high Victorians also appropriated medieval Arthurian and other motifs and imagery to do something very different and not so frequently recognized. Erika Bein, for example, contrasts Tennyson's *Idylls* to William Morris's "Defense of Guenevere," a far less popularly well received text then — and today — because of Morris' use and glorification of Guenevere's sexuality, strength of character, and independence to justify her and Lancelot's adultery as an ideal of courtly love in his own reinvention of the Middle Ages and of the chivalric ideal. Moreover, Bein notes, Morris's version more closely recreates Malory's vision. It also happens to dovetail neatly with the nascent feminist movement Marilyn Board sees imbuing George Frederic Watts's paintings of "Madonnas, Magdalenas, and Eves." Board demonstrates how, within the context of what she terms "Post-Darwinian Theology" but with radical departures from received Victorian views on women, Woman's natural physical and psychological fitness for influence and power in the public (male spheres of employment and politics) is advocated by Watt's work. Medievalism, indeed, of a nature not much explored to date.

Jen Gonyer-Donohue's study of Carlyle's *Past and Present* also begins with the body — male, this time — but moves into Carlyle's attempt to revitalize religion in that Post-Darwinian world. While returning to

Carlyle's (again mainstream Victorian views, Gonyer discovers a new application for nineteenth-century medievalism in the *re-imagining* of a golden past of monolithic Christian faith as the basis for *re-creating* that mythic past to replace contemporary spiritual sterility.

Richard Utz's study of medieval cathedrals and their continued cycle of use — rejection — re-adaptation as medieval precedents of power and regionalism / nationalism (as much as religious practice from late medieval times to early modern provides the present collection with its own "pivotal idyll." As Utz points out, smaller abbeys, parish churches, and the like tended to receive aristocratic/royal attentions in medieval times, for a variety of purposes ranging from the spiritual to the propagandistic, while cathedrals tended to be civic endeavors. However, from late medieval times to the late nineteenth century, the cathedral again and again receives the attention of kings and emperors, even revolutionary "citizen" leaders, to legitimize various claims and political programs by recalling an imagined medieval past. Looking both backward and forward from the (again pivotal nineteenth century, Utz's essay allows the reader of this volume to do the same.

Karl Fugelso and Jesse Swan return us to the Renaissance in painting and in literature, with re-examinations of appropriations of the medieval for the purposes of legitimizing religious (Fugelso) and rejecting early modern (Swan) views of the period. Swan's essay on Elizabeth Cary's "closet drama" is particularly incisive, at once asserting a radically new reading of what has previously been accepted as Cary's support of white supremacy, based on the parallels in the play with medieval anti-semiticism, as classical-humanist ridicule of racism on all levels, and also asserting the heavy influence of a woman entrusted with a prince's rearing on the future king's views. Fugelso, on the other hand, traces an evolution of socio-religious perspective through visualizations of Dante's *Divine Comedy* rather than revolutionary departure.

Which brings us to the modern period. Jane Toswell returns to an apparently familiar subject — Auden's use of the Anglo-Saxon poetic (primarily, but not exclusively, concentrating on alliteration and stress in his poetic endeavors — but again offers a very different slant on the results: Auden's verse is at once retrospective and revolutionary for its adaptation of early medieval technique to modern subject and sensibility. Her proofs — previously unpublished letters by Auden about his poetics — may themselves be as important to Auden scholars as her analysis.

Finally, Martin Walsh moves from the early twentieth century to the present, from the Old World to the New, with a fascinating exploration of the only truly American mystery play — *The Hill Cumorah Pageant* presented by the Mormon Church each summer as an outdoor theater celebration of Mormon theology. Addressing everything from production

details, to structure and setting, to Mormon beliefs, Walsh's first venture into indigenous American cycle drama, based on indigenous American theology and myth, presents an astonishing, if unconscious, example of contemporary medievalism in practice. His brief account of the 75-year evolution of the Hill Cumorah phenomenon opens the door to serious examination of/comparison with medieval predecessors.

The 2000 *Year's Work in Medievalism*, then, continues the explorative ventures of last year's volume into living medievalism, as well as more established venues of scholarship and the, by now, established challenge of that scholarship. This demonstrates the continued growth of medievalism as an approach within and subject for critical and scholarly interests across genres and periods. We hope that the spirit of Leslie J. Workman, which slipped quietly away on April 1, 2001, is gratified and proud at where his pioneering work in the field of medievalism has led and to which it continues to aspire. His intellectual innovation and perseverance led to the establishment not only of the *Year's Work in Medievalism* series, but of the journal *Studies in Medievalism*, the International Conference on Medievalism, and established sessions at the International Conference on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo and the International Medieval Congress in Leeds. From these endeavors, the fruits are many and sundry, as books, journals, conference sessions, and university courses on medievalism, or using it as a tool of study have burgeoned in recent decades. To Leslie J. Workman, then, we dedicate this volume of *The Year's Work in Medievalism*.

In Memoriam

NOTE

- ¹ The volume is based primarily on final versions of papers presented at the Fifteenth International Conference on Medievalism, hosted by Hope College in Holland, Michigan, during September 2000.