
Editors' Introduction

Medieval presence, postmedieval dispersal

Lara Farina^a and Myra Seaman^b

^aDepartment of English, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, USA.

^bDepartment of English, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, USA.

postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies (2017). 8, 396–403.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-017-0073-z>

Since our inaugural publication in 2010, *postmedieval* has prioritized the themed collection, dedicating some or all of every issue to a topic in which the medieval can mingle with other temporalities. We are fortunate in having been able to publish a dazzling array of collections by our guest editors, who have assembled issues around capacious subjects like nostalgia, translation, racial ‘mattering,’ accumulation, the senses, cognition, ecology, comedy, imagined encounters, creative criticism, mobility, disability, mediation, and even the history of the human face. We’ve thrilled to the ‘flirtatious’ juxtapositions,¹ alternative chronologies, formal experiments, and variant histories they have offered us. Indeed, our collaborators’ labor has made possible our very ability to publish at a moment when fewer and fewer resources are available to editors of scholarly research.

Alongside these collections we also receive, review, and publish individually submitted ‘Open Topic’ essays. Like our themed issues, these discrete articles work at putting past(s) and present(s) in dialogue, and they pursue innovative subjects, approaches, and/or forms. In this issue of *postmedieval*, we offer a collection of Open Topic articles showcasing an international array of authors creating a present-minded medieval studies. Tackling the topics of global travel,

1 The term is from Kłosowska (2.3).



the legacies of colonization, the sociology of laughter, non-human histories, and the possibilities in remediation, our contributors draw inspiration from theorists like Franz Fanon, Bruno Latour, Aleka Zupancic, and Scott McCloud. Helen Price seeks out the missing bee in an Old English riddle about mead. Alfie Bown tells us how the ‘ape’ makes the ‘jape’ in Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale*. Matthew Vernon reads Gerald of Wales as Fanon’s ‘colonized intellectual,’ one struggling to revise ideas of genealogy and history. Elena Mironesko Bielova provides a view into traveler-cultures through the negotiations anticipated in medieval Russian phrasebooks. And finally, Rebecca Clark reassembles Thomas Hoccleve’s ailing body in graphic form, treating us to a comic/manuscript that is as delightful as it is provoking.

In the wake of unsettling events in medieval studies and at places of learning, we take this issue as an opportunity to reaffirm our journal’s intellectual and political commitments to international, interdisciplinary, multiethnic, and trans-temporal investigations of a diversely embodied past. In our following remarks, we trace just a few such connections between the essays collected in this issue and the journal’s prior publications.

The year preceding the publication of this issue has seen a rise in the visibility of far-right, nationalist, ant-immigrant, and racist politics around the globe. From white supremacist ‘knights’ rioting in Charlottesville to Marine Le Pen’s styling of herself as a modern-day Joan of Arc, fascist bids for power made use of neomedieval fantasy to lay claim to ‘pure’ genealogies for modern nation states. *postmedieval* has addressed the troubling intersection of medievalism with fascist aesthetics, histories, and agendas in several of our prior issues, most notably in *Comparative Neomedievalisms* (5.1) and *The Holocaust and the Middle Ages* (5.3), but also in individual articles in other collections, such as Nicola Gilmour’s discussion of novelist Cesar Vidal’s Francoist rejection of Spain’s Muslim heritage (7.2). In the spirit of countering racist ‘purifications’ of medieval history, we begin December 2017’s issue with Matthew Xavier Vernon’s examination of the complex ethnic affiliations to be found even within medieval individuals. Vernon’s analysis of Gerald of Wales, the prolific and problematic apologist for Norman imperialism, proposes that we need to resist the urge to straighten ‘what is crooked’ in Gerald’s life and work and instead understand its contradictions as akin to those experienced by Franz Fanon’s ‘colonized intellectual.’ For Fanon, the colonized intellectual is a ‘hybrid subject’ who is at once ‘dependent on and at odds with a dominant political regime and its self-mythologizing.’ Vernon’s portrait of Gerald resists the simplification and merging of genealogy and allegiance, and in this it also complements the work collected in *Making Race Matter in the Middle Ages* (6.1), a *postmedieval* issue that historicizes ‘race,’ diversity, and imperialist erasures of peoples (and that contributed to our sixth volume’s receiving the 2015 Codex Award from the Council of Editors of Learned Journals).



Elena Mironesko Bielova's essay considers another kind of intersectional subjectivity in the Middle Ages, one occasioned by the literal movement through crossroads. She opens her essay on medieval Russian phrasebooks with a quote from Leo the African: 'I come from no country, no city, no tribe. I am a son of the road.' Leo's words command a decentering and dispersal of the nationalist geographies that situate medieval studies in the territories of modern European states. Her study of travelers' culture through the genre of the phrasebook both re-orientates the history of medieval pilgrimage toward the routes and destinations traversed by Orthodox Christians and shows us imagined communities in flux – including the reconstitution of Russian Orthodox Christendom away from Tsargard (Constantinople) and around the Grand Duchy of Moscow.

In doing so, she advances some of the critical initiatives undertaken in *postmedieval's* issues on *Medieval Mobilities* (4.2), *Our Sea of Islands* (7.4), and *Thinking Across Tongues* (8.3). *Medieval Mobilities* examines the trajectories through which 'things' – people (Crooke), disease (Kelly), language (Hsy), manuscript remains (Bamford), institutions (Hartnett), and even 'stone and dust' (Harris) – cross boundaries in the Middle Ages. The volume's editors provocatively suggest that places themselves can travel (as do contributors Bolendar and Aldred), a hypothesis that is supported by Bielova's mapping of the shifting center of the medieval Orthodox world. As if joining Leo the African's declaration 'I am a son of the road,' the editors of *Medieval Mobilities* argue that 'to focus on mobilities is to pause on the road,' in the knowledge that 'arrival' is always temporary. If *Medieval Mobilities* seeks to shift the context of medieval things away from a citizen-like residence in a static place, *Our Sea of Islands* similarly critiques conventional conceptions of 'territory,' this time by questioning the very identification of political communities with occupied *ground*. Taking Fijian sociologist Epeli Hau'ofa's water-centered mapping of Oceania as a challenge for rethinking medieval archipelagoes, the issue's contributors try out alternative geographies for Britain, Europe, and the Atlantic rim. We see Britain as located in a 'Sea of Darkness' in the extreme 'seventh climate' described by Al-Idrisi (Chism); as part of a 'Bermuda-assemblage' (Mentz); or as a stop on mercantile sea-roads (Staley).

Finally, as a study of not only movement but the language contact that comes of it, Bielova's work continues our journal's interest in histories of translation, most recently evidenced in our previous issue, *Thinking Across Tongues* (8.3).² That collection's focus on multi-lingual histories in process, histories in which the medieval has not stopped moving across tongues metaphorical and literal, 'dislodge[s] modern alignments of language and nation' in a manner parallel to the decoupling of nation and land in *Our Sea of Islands*. Bielova's focus on the humble yet rich genre of the phrasebook adds new material to *postmedieval's* studies of literary, artefactual, and ideological translation, and her essay demonstrates the potential of such pragmatic sources for understanding the dialogic and ephemeral cultures of 'the road.'

2 See also *Philology and the Mirage of Time* (5.4) and *Contemporary Poetics and the Medieval Muse* (6.2).



Boundary-crossing is the subject not only of *postmedieval* issues on mobility and translation, but also of those issues dedicated to rethinking humanist divisions between forms of life – as in *The Animal Turn* (2.1) – and between forms of matter more generally – as in *Ecomaterialism* (4.1) and our inaugural issue, *When Did We Become Post/human* (1.1/2). In *Becoming Media* (3.1), Whitney Anne Trettien’s ‘Plant→animal→book: Magnifying a Microhistory of Media Circuits’ gave us a particularly striking example of movement across temporal and material categories, by tracing how medieval plant-like animals influenced early modern investigations of comparative anatomy and demonstrating how this understanding was aided by the medium of the printed book. Such a re-situating of ideas about the ‘human’ also motivates the close readings of canonical medieval English texts offered by the next two articles in this issue: Helen Price’s consideration of the bee in the Exeter Book riddle describing mead and Alfie Bown’s analysis of laughter and animality in the *Miller’s Tale*. By reading the ‘complexity of networks at play and their multitude of actants’ in the mead riddle and pursuing the ways the text resists the bifurcation of ‘nature’ and ‘culture,’ Price’s essay participates in a number of ongoing conversations about material entanglement in *postmedieval*, contributing an Old English touchstone to these. Like Kathleen Coyne Kelly’s contribution to *Medieval Mobilities*, in which she traces the movement of the plague through its living host, Price’s essay models the benefits of Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory to reading premodern events. A forthcoming issue of the journal will turn from the animals and inorganic objects that have occupied its pages to date (from roads to toads, relics to feces, and machines of every sort) to the botanic world, with a focus on ‘Premodern Plants’ (9.4).

LikeCarolynn Van Dyke’s foray ‘in vernacular ethology’ (7.2), both Bown and Price show medieval humans learning through the animal. Bown works to disentangle medieval humor from ‘base’ and animalistic human features with which it is often associated. In so doing, his essay may appear to reverse what posthumanists (1.1/2) and ecomaterialists (4.1) aim to do: while those scholars dismantle the carefully crafted and arduously maintained boundary between human and animal, Bown may seem to be firmly re-drawing it. Yet his essay works against the dichotomy as well, by refusing the claim that divides medieval from modern affect and expression: ‘Rather than showing the underlying animality within apparently civilized performances (such as those of Absolon),’ Bown writes, Chaucer’s fabliau ‘suggests that in apparent animality we can find secret underlying civilization.’ Bown demonstrates how laughter in this tale is used not to reveal inner animality, but to construct hierarchies that actively keep certain Others out. It’s ‘the laughter of the human at the ape.’



Careful attention to comedy and the comic, in medieval and medievalist texts, has regularly enhanced understanding of both past and present in the journal's special issues and its Open Topic articles. Louise D'Arcens has contributed to this in various ways, among them a special issue she edited on *Comic Medievalisms* (5.2) and two different articles, one on 'mirthful faces' in the film adaptation of *The Name of the Rose* (8.1) and another on satire and nostalgia in medievalizing tourist attractions (2.2). A comic mode of address was used to wonderfully productive ends in 'BEYOND UTM: The organism that therefore the academy is,' by Ethan Gould and Wythe Marschall in *Critical/Liberal/Arts* (6.4), and a sly humor animates another experimental contribution, Matthew Bryan Gillis' rewriting of Augustine's autobiography as a Lovecraftian horror story in his 'weird tale' for us (5.1).

postmedieval has, from its beginnings, valued scholarly experiments with form. Our inaugural issue collected 33 short reflections on the theme of the posthuman, massing numerous perspectives together to reflect the cross-disciplinary surge of interest in the subject. Two later issues, *New Critical Modes* (2.3) and *Critical/Liberal/Arts* (6.4), called for individual contributions that voice critique by means of creative compositions. In *New Critical Modes*, scholars engage their subjects through 'antiphons' (Remein), dialogue (Bryant and Pyrdum), autobiography (Godden), an abecedarium (Cohen), 'empathetic codicology' (Brown), and time-traveling mash-ups (Kłosowska, Joy, Howie, MacKendrick). *Critical/Liberal/Arts* features an analysis of the modern university presented satirically as a biotech venture (Gould and Marschall), sample posters from an 'Inner Climate Change Project' (Zurkow et al.), and a page that can be torn out for use as a 'Fiery Flying Roule' of resistance poetry (Steinhoff). More recently, our *Hoarders and Hordes* issue (7.3) paired essays inspired by the Staffordshire Hoard with an artists' drawn imagination of the Hoard's depositing (Fetherolf), stills from a digital/sculptural work (Haycraft), and discussion of a staged discovery of a 21st-century cache of belongings (Bradbury, et al.).

We are happy to continue our inclusion of alternative scholarly forms here with Rebecca Clark's translation of Middle English verse into the visual medium of comics. Her contribution, 'Good grief: notes on (re)animating Thomas Hoccleve in comics,' renders the fifteenth-century poet's 'My Compleinte' in graphic panels, including frames that reference iconic comics artists like Charles Schultz. With its focus on Hoccleve's poor health, the poem is especially well suited to a visual and spatial exploration of the ways in which bodies fragment and cohere in linguistic representation. Clark's cells cut and contain the poem's content differently than do its meter and line arrangement, shifting the work's emphasis, pacing, and effect. Further, the flexibility of scale allowed by the comics form lets her zoom in on the



body parts referenced in the poem, allowing them to become characters in themselves and rendering the self as somatic dialogue. Clark's commentary on the process of reassembling Hoccleve strikes us as an unforeseen but felicitous example of the 'empathetic codicology' called for in *New Critical Modes*.

Nearly every issue of *postmedieval* concludes with a book review essay in which a scholar (or sometimes two) guides our readers through an extended engagement with recent publications that collectively address a topic, methodology, theory, or scholarly question posing a challenge to and providing opportunities for medievalists and early modernists. In the spirit of that encouragement to scholarly exchange through contact with critical work both well-known and unfamiliar, we take the opportunity in this issue to publish in a permanently freely available form – and thereby circulate to even more readers and users – the crowd-sourced online bibliography facilitated by Julie Orlemanski (*postmedieval* book review essay editor) and Jonathan Hsy (co-editor of 8.3, contributor to 4.2 and 6.2) in the summer of 2017. The goal of this living bibliography has been to broadcast the significant scholarly work done on race, religion, language, and nation in the Middle Ages from the perspective of contemporary medievalists of color and of ethnic and religious minorities – work too often neglected in scholarly conversations in print and elsewhere. We are thrilled to be able to co-host this bibliography.

About the Authors

Lara Farina has been an editor of *postmedieval* since 2015 and is Associate Professor of English at West Virginia University. She is the author of *Erotic Discourse and Early English Religious Writing*, and has published articles on medieval and modern reading practices, queer theory, tactility, and 'disabled' sensation. She is currently working on a book about the sense of touch, a website for affective collections, and an article on medieval pharmacopeia (E-mail: Lara.Farina@mail.wvu.edu).

Myra Seaman has edited *postmedieval* since its beginning in 2010 and is Professor and Chair of English at the College of Charleston. She has edited a number of print collections (most recently, *Fragments for a History of a Vanishing Humanism*, with Eileen A. Joy) and was a member of the editorial collective behind the *Open Access Companion to the Canterbury Tales* (<https://opencanterburytales.dsl.lsu.edu/>). She continues to work on the many household environments of Manuscript Ashmole 61 (E-mail: seamanm@cofc.edu).



References

- Bamford, H. 2013. Ruins in motion. *postmedieval* 4(2): 192–204.
- Barrington, C. and J. Hsy. 2015. Remediated verse: Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* and Patience Agbabi's 'Unfinished Business.' *postmedieval* 6(2): 136–145.
- Becoming Media*. 2012. Ed. J. Boyle and M. Foys. *postmedieval* 3(1): 1–133.
- Bolendar, D.J. and O. Aldred. 2013. A restless medieval? Archaeologies and saga-steads in the Viking Age North Atlantic. *postmedieval* 4(2): 136–149.
- Brown, C. 2011. Manuscript thinking: Stories by hand. *postmedieval* 2(3): 350–368.
- Bryant, B.L. and C.S. Pyrdum. 2011. On medieval blogging. *postmedieval* 2(3): 304–315.
- Chism, C. 2016. Britain and the sea of darkness: Islandology in al-Idrīsī's *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq*. *postmedieval* 7(4): 497–510.
- Cohen, J.J. 2011. An abecedarium for the elements. *postmedieval* 2(3): 291–303.
- Comic Medievalisms*. 2014. Ed. L. D'Arcens. *postmedieval* 5(2): 115–268.
- Comparative Neomedievalisms*. 2014. Ed. D. Lukes. *postmedieval* 5(1): 1–114.
- Contemporary Poetics and the Medieval Muse*. 2015. Ed. D. Hadbawnik and S. Reynolds. *postmedieval* 6(2): 115–240.
- Critical/Liberal/Arts*. 2015. Ed. J.A. Mitchell, J. Orlemanski, and M. Seaman. *postmedieval* 6(4): 359–513.
- Crooke, W. 2013. Der guote Gêrhart: The power of mobility in the medieval Mediterranean. *postmedieval* 4(2): 163–176.
- D'Arcens, L. 2017. Mirthful faces in *The Name of the Rose*. *postmedieval* 8(1): 51–66.
- D'Arcens, L. 2011. Laughing in the face of the past: Satire and nostalgia in medieval heritage tourism. *postmedieval* 2(2): 155–170.
- Ecomaterialism*. 2013. Ed. J.J. Cohen and L. Duckert. *postmedieval* 4(1): 1–123.
- Fetherolf, C. 2016. Thieves and reivers. *postmedieval* 7(3): 352–355.
- Gilmour, N. 2016. Contemporary Spanish fictional representations of ethno-religious *convivencia* in Medieval Iberia: César Vidal's medievalizing novels. *postmedieval* 7(2): 257–272.
- Godden, R.H. 2011. Getting medieval in real Time. *postmedieval* 2(3): 267–277.
- Gould, E. and W. Marschall. BEYOND UTM: The organism that therefore the academy is. *postmedieval* 6(4): 385–405.
- Harris, A.F. 2013. Virtual mobility: Landscape and dreamscape in a late medieval allegory. *postmedieval* 4(2): 205–219.
- Hartnett, D. 2013. Have Dante will travel: On the limitaitons of personal mobility. *postmedieval* 4(2): 150–162.
- Haycraft, J. 2016. Implementations. *postmedieval* 7(3): 388–392.
- Hoards and Hordes: Responses to the Staffordshire Hoard*. 2016. Ed. K.E. Overbey and M. M. Williams. *postmedieval* 7(3): 337–468.
- Howie, C. 2011. Means of transport. *postmedieval* 2(3): 328–338.
- Hsy, J. 2013. Mobile language-networks and medieval travel writing. *postmedieval* 4(2): 177–191.
- Joy, E.A. 2011. Like two autistic moonbeams entering the window of my asylum: Chaucer's Griselda and Lars von Trier's Bess McNeil. *postmedieval* 2(3): 316–328.



- Kelly, K.C. 2013. Flea and ANT: Mapping the mobility of the Plague, 1330s–1350s. *postmedieval* 4(2): 219–232.
- Łosowska, A. 2011. Flirting as a critical mode: Barthes, Alcibiades, Sartre. *postmedieval* 2(3): 278–290.
- MacKendrick, K. 2011. Always already new: The possibilities of the enfolded instant. *postmedieval* 2(3): 339–349.
- Making Race Matter in the Middle Ages*. 2015. Ed. C.J. Whitaker. *postmedieval* 6(1): 1–110.
- Medieval Mobilities*. 2013. Ed. M.B. Shichtman, L.A. Finke, and K.C. Kelly. *postmedieval* 4(2): 125–252.
- Mentz, S. 2016. The Bermuda assemblage: Toward a posthuman globalization. *postmedieval* 7(4): 551–564.
- New Critical Modes*. 2011. Ed. J.J. Cohen and C. Howie. *postmedieval* 2(3): 239–385.
- Our Sea of Islands: New Approaches to British Insularity in the Late Middle Ages*. 2016. Ed. M.B. Goldie and S. Sobocki. *postmedieval* 7(4): 469–580.
- Philology and the Mirage of Time*. 2014. Ed. M.R. Warren. *postmedieval* 5(4): 387–516.
- Remein, D. 2011. A critical poetics of allure; 10 antiphons for the bringing-to-appearance of the place of allure as a complicity of human and non-human matter in writing, or, the *Physis* of the Whale in Anglo-Saxon England. *postmedieval* 2(3): 242–266.
- Steinhoff, E. 2015. Making nothing happen: Poetry and sabotage. *postmedieval* 6(4): 417–428.
- Staley, L. 2016. Fictions of the Island: Girdling the sea. *postmedieval* 7(4): 539–550.
- The Animal Turn*. 2011. Ed. K. Steel and P. McCracken. *postmedieval* 2(1): 1–114.
- The Holocaust and the Middle Ages*. 2014. Ed. H. Johnson and N. Caputo. *postmedieval* 5(3): 269–385.
- The Medievalism of Nostalgia*. 2011. Ed. H. Dell, L. D’Arcens, and A. Lynch. *postmedieval* 2(2): 115–238.
- Thinking Across Tongues*. 2017. Ed. M.K. Hurley, J. Hsy, and A.B. Kraebel. *postmedieval* 8(3): 267–392.
- Trettien, W.A. 2012. Plant→animal→book: Magnifying a microhistory of media circuits. *postmedieval* 3(1): 97–118.
- Van Dyke, C. 2016. Touched by an owl? An essay in vernacular ethology. *postmedieval* 7(2): 304–327.
- When Did We Become Post/human?* 2010. Ed. E.A. Joy and C. Dionne. *postmedieval* 1(1–2): 1–289.
- Zurkow, M., U. Chaudhuri, O. Kelhammer, and F. Ertl. 2015. Unthinking survivalism: Inner climate change. *postmedieval* 6(4): 439–456.