Editors' Introduction

Mountain haints: Towards a medieval studies exorcized

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That this issue's co-editors each have connections to Appalachia and that the influence of Appalachian culture is integral to this issue's project may come as some surprise. Like the most affecting ghosts, those of the Middle Ages are found shrouded in the corners where you least expect them. The Duke Talent Identification Program's summer courses at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, led one of this issue's editors to one of those corners. In 2006, Cord J. Whitaker was a Ph.D. candidate in medieval English literature when suddenly a plan for a course called 'Appalachian Tales: Ghosts, Hitchhikers, and Bluegrass' was bestowed on him by Vin Nardizzi, now of the University of British Columbia. All Whitaker had was the basic sketch Nardizzi drew up before other responsibilities called him away. It was on Cord to take over the course development and figure out how to teach it. Of course, there would be ghosts.

At the beginning of the project, Whitaker thought he knew who those ghosts would be. He expected they would be modern and would hail from no further than seventeenth-century America, at the earliest. But before long, he had a full-on medieval literature unit—one that informs Whitaker's teaching in such

courses as the History of the English Language even today. The best-known ghost haunting Appalachian literature is Jack of ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ fame. Though Whitaker had always been taught that his story is quintessentially American, the work of Christine Pavesic and other Appalachian Studies scholars soon revealed to me the tales’ medieval English roots (Pavesic, 2005, 3). Jack was born in late medieval English tales and appears as the trickster figure in *Jack and His Stepdame*, a raucous, if also abusive, fabliau extant in a fifteenth-century manuscript. Brought to the Appalachian Mountains during their settlement by Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jack took on a life of his own in communities that, due to hard terrain and cultural differences from those who lived ‘down the mountain,’ were often economically and culturally isolated. Jack now haunts those hills by featuring in distinct oral narratives preserved and performed by Appalachian storytellers. By some counts, the Jack tales number into the thousands. The mountains proved the perfect field for Jack the ghost to thrive.

Like any good ghost, Jack at once transcends time and inhabits multiple temporalities. Jack was already a medieval English ghost when he was popularized with such stories as ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ and the Grimms’ version ‘The Jew in the Thornbush’ in children’s literature in the nineteenth century (Pavesic, 2005, 5). Subsumed into Americana in that century, Jack became a ghost of the nineteenth century. For example, the editorial decision to recast ‘Jack and His Stepdame’ as ‘The Jew in the Thornbush,’ replacing the stepmother as Jack’s antagonist with the Jew who is called a ‘lousy swindler,’ reflects Victorian anti-Semitism and conforms to Victorian gender roles in which a boy abusing a young stepmother would be nearly unthinkable. Jack haunts 20th- and 21st-century America, too (Pavesic, 2005, 6). Jack’s tradition is alive with new stories developed, performed, and recorded all the time. In the Grimms’ tale, Jack’s bow and arrow are updated to a gun that will never miss its bearer’s target. In 21st-century mass media, Jack has featured in a number of television programs, including a 2014 episode of the long-running comedy series *Family Guy*. In that episode, a main character imagines himself as an adult Jack in a version of ‘Jack and the Beanstalk.’ This adaptation reflects 21st-century concerns about gender and masculinity when Jack obtains the golden goose and defeats the giant; Jack’s efforts solve his family’s financial troubles, but his and his wife’s ‘sexual troubles are still . . . are still very much alive’ (Vaux et al., 2014). Jack is at once a ghost of the fifteenth century, a legacy of the nineteenth century in which he was popularized, and a specter for our own time who is readily adapted to our 21st-century concerns. Indeed, reading Jack has taught me to look to the nineteenth century for the medieval ghosts who haunt modernity.

For Matthew Gabriele, it was a job that led to Appalachia, to a Land Grant institution, into an interdisciplinary department with colleagues trained in Appalachian Studies. There are real ghosts that haunt the region, that haunt Gabriele’s neighbors across several counties – the specters of poverty, of alienation,

of eugenics.¹ And a ghost of violence. Virginia Tech, in Appalachia, founded on the site of the Draper's Meadow massacre in the middle of the eighteenth century, endured another on 16 April 2007. In that latter instance, the killer's screed engaged the historically-twinning language of Christianity and violence, evoking the so-called medieval 'Crusades.'² That hateful, violent rhetoric implied a rainbow connection – a link between present and past unmediated by time and history. But further investigations revealed the *catena* of associations, from twelfth-century chronicle to nineteenth-century historians, to the academic and popular production of the 21st century. It was, it seems, the nineteenth century that wanted, that sought, that constructed this rainbow connection. They read their primary sources directly, believing they had the decoder ring to unlock all their sources' hidden secrets. That decoder ring, however, was calibrated by their own concerns, their own definitions of religion, of history.³ This massacre was in part inspired by medieval rhetoric. Americanized and filtered through the experience of nineteenth-century brahmins, crusading rhetoric was then made manifest at a school nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains.

Lest this special issue present the nineteenth century's medievalist ghosts as hemmed in by Appalachia's peaks, the current news cycle belies such limits. Rather, the medievalism that has informed modern Appalachia and its influence on broader American culture illumines and demonstrates dynamics that are at work globally. While this introduction was in preparation, on 15 March 2019, in Christchurch, New Zealand, a 28-year-old Australian gunman entered one mosque and then another. He was greeted and welcomed. He opened fire and mercilessly killed 50 worshippers and injured another 50 (Guy and Holcombe, 2019). Minutes before the shooting began, the assailant published online a manifesto titled 'The Great Replacement.' The document's crusading rhetoric is unmistakable. Throughout, it refers to Muslims living in the West, including Australia and New Zealand, as 'invaders.' The text asserts that its author reached out to the 'reborn Knights Templar' to inform them of the attack and that they gave it their 'blessing.' That the murderer should use the rhetoric of the Crusades, which saw the development of permanent crusader settlements in the Levant, to label modern-day Muslim immigrants 'invader' colonists, is ironic. But it is not at all out of step with the nineteenth-century deployment of the Middle Ages as a tool of imperial domination: take, for instance, the use of Chaucer in anglophone Caribbean colonial education. Though Chaucer and medieval literature have the potential to resist imperial legacies and to disrupt 'the very concept of modernity that underwrites the racial politics of imperialism,' they have nonetheless been used to undergird and maintain the authority of colonizing cultures (Warren, 2015, 81). The violences – corporeal, psychological, and spiritual – that the Middle Ages have been used to enact in the nineteenth century, as now, are global – from Appalachia to Australia and New Zealand to the Caribbean.

The scholars whose approaches, concerns, and prejudices have at least in part facilitated terrible violences were shown to haunt Appalachia when terror struck

1 See Dorr (2008).

2 See Gabriele (2016).

3 See Masuzawa (2007) and Novick (1988).

in 2007. Now, in a moment when medieval objects and symbols, from Crusader flags to the Holy Roman Empire's black eagle, are trotted out to bolster white supremacist agendas, it is clearer than ever that the ghosts of scholarly racism and imperialism also have the potential to haunt the future of medieval studies (Flags and Other Symbols, 2017). In order to understand the nature of their haunting, it is necessary to examine medievalism in the context of its development and establishment. That means taking seriously the continuities between nineteenth-century and 21st-century medievalisms while also giving attention to the discordances between them.

One such discordance is to be had in the dynamic relationship between scholarly and popular medievalism. That the nineteenth century still speaks to the 21st should not surprise us. Nor should it surprise us that Frederick James Furnivall, the indefatigable founder of the Early English Text Society, the Wyclif Society, the Ballad Society, the New Shakespeare Society, the Browning Society, and the Shelley Society, never held a university post and was also an avid rower who founded the Girls' Sculling Club in order that 'working girls' could scull on the Thames on Sundays (Dinshaw, 2012, 25). Neither should it come as a surprise that Cornell professor George Lincoln Burr, specialist in Crusades history, heresy, and witchcraft; founding member of the Medieval Academy of America; and president of the American Historical Association, also helped the United States Department of State settle a border dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana. In the nineteenth and early 20th centuries, medievalism was academic and public, personal and political, and it readily muddled together discourses and compartments that, in the 21st century, can seem disparate unto irreconcilable.

But these historical realities are indeed surprising because, through the 20th century, popular and academic medievalism grew into separate entities. 'Medieval Studies' retreated into the university, became the purveyor of arcane knowledge, and developed an association with 'high' culture. 'Medievalism' remained forward-facing and engaged with the public and was relegated to 'popular' culture.⁴ More recently, the wine-dark sea separating the two has been narrowing, but there remains much work to do. This special issue, however, seeks the earlier moment, that of the meeting of Paris and Menelaus, before the departure and separation.

Our authors seek this moment because, despite the changing nature of medievalism, the specter of the nineteenth century continues to haunt us in myriad ways – from table manners to how we tell stories, from the organization of civil society to our expectations of personal morality. That century's conceptualization of intellectual life, perhaps most evident in the arrangement of scholarly disciplines, effectively set the boundaries of what is often considered 'proper' intellectual inquiry. Perhaps nowhere is this truer than in the study of the Middle Ages, where nineteenth-century modes of philological and historical inquiry continue to serve as the gold standards for scholarship. The nineteenth

4 See Matthews (2015).

century's refusal to distinguish between the academic, public, personal, and political has been superseded by the disciplinary distinctions and strictures on scholarly training that the same period brought into prominence.⁵

This special issue investigates the nineteenth-century ghosts that haunt medievalism by exploring how academic and popular medievalism diverged, even as they continued to consider many of the same questions about religious, national, and even racial identities. But the study of the past is also, always, about the present as well. As such, the essays here also seek to understand our present as a moment in which medievalism is a site of contestation: in which the scholarly, popular, personal, and public comportments of medieval studies come into deep tension.⁶ Whether they unify once more or fragment further remains to be seen, and the pressures that pull closer together medievalism and medieval studies or push them farther apart are the forces that concern this special issue. These pressures are the manifest apparitions of the nineteenth century's ghosts.

To this issue's editors, to its readers, these ghosts float through Appalachia, across the Mediterranean, to London and New York, to Christchurch, New Zealand. And they float across time as well, conjured from the nineteenth century into our own world. But perhaps if they are seen, they can be exorcised. The screen, the veil, they place between us and the past can perhaps be lifted, and can finally truly melt into air. Thus, the essays here focus on three key moments. First, they investigate the **origins** of medieval studies in the academy and its impact on the wider public. Second, they situate the **fragmentation** that followed in the cultural and social turmoil of the 20th century. Third, the essays' contributors **speculate** on the possibilities of the present moment and what the future may hold for the medieval past. Ultimately, this volume asks where and how we are haunted by the nineteenth century's medievalizing ghosts and if they can be, once and for all, exorcised.

The 1800s saw the zenith of European imperialism, and medievalism was deployed as a tool for the inextricable projects of nation-building and racialization. This issue's first essay, Joshua Davies's 'The Middle Ages as Property: *Beowulf*, translation and the ghosts of nationalism,' begins provocatively: 'Nationalism is a form of paranormal activity.' And in the English case, the struggle to claim *Beowulf* has haunted the national consciousness in ways that bleed into the 21st century. Next, Annie Abrams takes us across the Atlantic to rethink Frederick Douglass's American medievalism, with a particular focus on the 1840s and the Mexican-American War. Of particular interest is his use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon,' which seemed to offer both promise and peril in a time when black people's inclusion in the American project was hotly contested. In that decade, Douglass began to rework the valences of that

5 For discussions of the professionalization of scholarship, especially in philology and medievalism, within universities and its movement away from public engagement, see Gossman (1986), Utz (2002), and Dinshaw (2012). Take for example, the development of peer review. Patricia Cohen points out that peer review is 'an outgrowth of the professionalization of disciplines from mathematics to history – a way of keeping eager but uninformed amateurs out' (Cohen, 2010).

6 Take for example the debate raging between scholarly medievalists and popular medievalism as deployed by the radically conservative group known as the alt-right (alternative right) in the US. For context, see Lomuto (2016), Kim (2017), Ingram (2018). For an example of the popular political deployment of the Middle Ages and its inaccuracies, see Gabriele (2019).

term in a way that could include Black Americans. Cord J. Whitaker's 'B(l)ack Home in the Middle Ages' also explores the role of Black Americans in shaping the study of the Middle Ages in the aftermath of the nineteenth century. Focusing on Jessie Redmon Fauset, the most prolific of the Harlem Renaissance novelists during the period, Whitaker shows how she utilized the power of contemporary medievalism to agitate for racial justice. Together these essays illustrate medievalisms popular and scholarly, unified in their early iteration and later increasingly fragmented, and medievalism's ideological implications for empire as well as for racism's construction and disempowerment alike.

Necessary to medievalism's ideological deployments has been the entrenchment of medievalizing narratives in the service of very modern cultural and political ends in the 1800s and the centuries since. Courtney Booker's article highlights the dramatic sensibilities of both the ninth and nineteenth centuries. Booker asks if, for example, the story of the late Carolingians was a 'tragedy,' then who was it a tragedy *for*, and did that emplotment alter the way modern scholars presented the period? The answer to that question still shapes the histories we write about the period today. Similarly, representational traditions and entrenched methods inflect how we talk about medieval apocalyptic expectation, particularly the so-called 'Terrors of the Year 1000.' Matthew Gabriele traces the root of the confusion to the 1830 July Revolution and to an industrializing America around 1900 in order to reveal an underlying debate about the meaning of modernity that subsequent scholars have unconsciously replicated even after the year 2000. Another critical moment, well-known to almost all medievalists, is the Battle of Tours/ Poitiers in 732 CE. James T. Palmer explores the legend of this battle to disentangle an 'intellectual history that was deeply political, religious, and situational' and 'rarely neutral.' Each of these essays challenges its reader to examine historiography's deployments by identifying and criticizing its most fundamental, its most naturalized, positions – right down to the deceptively innocuous terms by which we refer to an historical phenomenon.

In considering the speculative future of the medieval past, this collection ends on a supremely presentist note. With their co-written essay on nineteenth-century art's influence on *Game of Thrones*, one of the most popular television dramas in recent history, Stephanie Downes and Helen Young analyze the deceptively innocuous legacies of medievalism in modern popular culture even as they consider their implications for the future of medievalism and medieval studies' interdependence. Downes and Young demonstrate just how unstable are the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' cultures, medieval studies and medievalism, and they reveal just how quickly those boundaries appear to be collapsing right now. The essay analyzes images of white femininity in nineteenth-century art and in *Game of Thrones* in order to understand how the show centers whiteness, consciously and unconsciously, and what damage that

does in the context of the show's claims to represent some version of the 'real' Middle Ages. Indeed, there may be no better way to close this special issue, not with a 'fairy-tale,' nor with 'fantasy,' but by considering instead a particular story – one whose tellers claim to disseminate historical truth while their narrative choices in fact reveal significant distance from the events and ideas of the past.

Just as it was for the nineteenth century's denizens of medievalism, popular and academic, today's medievalism is public, personal, and political. It is the hope of this issue's editors that examining the traditionally empowered narratives of the medieval past and exposing to view their creators' methods and teleologies, their presumptions and purposes, will help us to be more insightful analysts of our own motivations in medievalism. The ghosts of the nineteenth century live on, and to do the rigorous and critical work that responsible medieval studies requires is to recognize that we are the ghosts.

About the Authors

Cord J. Whitaker works on the development of racial ideology and its intimate relationship with medieval rhetorical theory as well as the roles of popular and scholarly medievalisms in nineteenth- through 21st-century racial politics. His *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019) argues the close relationship between race, medieval rhetoric, and modern politics. He is writing another monograph on African American writers' radical uses of medievalism and the Middle Ages in the Harlem Renaissance. Whitaker is also the editor of the award-winning *postmedieval* special issue 'Making Race Matter in the Middle Ages' (*postmedieval* 6.1, 2015). He is the recipient of fellowships and grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He is Associate Professor of English at Wellesley College (E-mail: cord.whitaker@wellesley.edu).

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