

R. HOWARD BLOCH and STEPHEN G. NICHOLS, eds., *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Pp. vii, 496. ISBN 0-8018-5087-8 (paper). \$19.95.

A specter is haunting the field of medieval studies: it is the specter of the 'New Medievalism.' Only a few years after the contributors of a collection entitled *The New Medievalism* (ed. M.S. Brownlee, K. Brownlee, and S. Nichols, Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) limited their definition of this conspicuous term to a revisionist movement in Romance medieval studies, this 1996 volume makes a surprising claim for broader representation. In the five years between the two publications, Nichols and Bloch have been out searching for signs of the 'New Medievalism' in other disciplines and—finding natural allies in other current self-fashionings such as the 'New Philology' and the 'New Historicism'—decided that a general critical advance had occurred which warranted dropping the adjective 'New' in the title and appropriating the word 'Medievalism' to stress the now universal importance of their scholarly enterprise. The editors' introduction and the essays in the recent collection reveal, however, that the main thrust of this movement still originates in Romance medieval studies and that the inclusion of Lee Patterson and Haydn White's names and a few forays into German and British philology cannot possibly make up for the disregard shown for existing transdisciplinary work on 'Medievalism.' While there is ample recognition for Bloch, Haidu, Jauss, Nichols, Vance, and Zumthor, there is a telling silence about Norman Cantor (*Inventing the Middle Ages*, New York: W. Morrow, 1991), Leslie Workman's *Studies in Medievalism* and *Year's Work in Medievalism* (an entire journal and conference series [with several published proceedings] which have been negotiating the subject matter since the mid-1970s), or even the French (!) historian Jacques Heers (*Le Moyen Age, Une Imposture*, Paris: Perrin, 1992). The silencing of these more philology-oriented, contemporary scholars reveals the agonistically theoretical agenda of the 'New Medievalists.' They dismiss the 'Old' Philology as an elitist *cordon sanitaire* which prevented access to medieval texts, promoted the vice of decontextualization, and inhibited a dialogue between medievalists and specialists from other fields. At the same time, the 'New Medievalists' style themselves as upbeat (e.g.: 'WORD'S OUT: There's something exciting going on in medieval studies, and maybe in the Renaissance too,' p. 1) and progressive, forgetting that their own joyous dismantling of myths established by scholars of the 'modernist temper' unveils themselves as proponents of the myth of (post)modernity, the era in which the potential elimination of all myths has become a self-conscious goal.

While the universalizing/exclusionary agenda of the volume is somewhat disappointing, the individual essays, born out of this revisionistic struggle to historicize and thereby overcome the discipline's modernist philological fathers and grandfathers, are intriguing and thought-provoking. The contributors are especially productive when following Paul Zumthor's *Speaking of the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1986) which validated the study of formerly marginalized (often biographical) sources such as the private letters/conversations, unpublished notes, prefaces, title pages, and works of fiction by some of the founding figures of contemporary medieval studies. These documents are used with great success to demonstrate these precursors'

REVIEWS

(modernist/nationalist) mentalités which—in turn—are shown to motivate some of their methodological and interpretive choices as medieval scholars. Thus, readers will undoubtedly cherish the fresh perspectives on such venerable scholarly medievalist mythographers as E.R. Curtius, J. Bédier, E. Kantorowicz, F.J. Furnivall, W.P. Ker, E. Littré, Viollet-le-Duc, E. Auerbach, L. Gautier, l'Abbé Migne, the Grimm brothers, H.R. Jauss, E. Koehler, et al., and David F. Hult's essay on 'Gaston Paris and the Invention of Courtly Love' will prove fascinating reading specifically for all Arthurians who would like to know more about the paternal struggle, the gender politics, and the nationalistic spirit which inform the genesis of perhaps their most (in)famous working paradigm.

This volume is a highly welcome addition to understanding the meandering path of medieval studies because it sheds light on the particular ideological, regional, nationalistic, religious, or personal histories of the 'charter members' of that discipline. One can only wish that the practitioners of the 'New Medievalism' rethink their limiting dialectics of the constant battle fought by the '(post)moderns' against the 'ancients' and acknowledge the valuable efforts of those other contemporary medievalisms which are somewhat less theoretically inclined but nevertheless well worth discussing.

RICHARD J. UTZ
University of Northern Iowa