

R. HOWARD BLOCH and STEPHEN G. NICHOLS, eds., *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996. Pp. vii, 496. ISBN: 0-80118-5087-8 (paper). \$19.95.

The essays collected here are of two kinds. Scholars selected for individual treatment are Gaston Paris, Bedier (two essays), Auerbach, Kantorowicz, Curtius, and Migne. The remaining essays deal with French national identity, feminism, 'the myth of medieval romance,' 'Germany and the origins of German studies,' and similar topics, grouped under the headings *Founding the Discipline*, *Continuators of the Discipline*, *The Discipline and Its Others*. 'The discipline' is identified as medieval studies, but is almost exclusively romance studies. The essay by Bloch which forms the core of the preface has already appeared twice (Thrift, thrift, Horatio!), once in *The Modern Language Quarterly* (March 1993) and again in an excellent collection, *The Future of the Middle Ages*, edited by William D. Paden (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994). Bloch has published a book on Migne (1994), who sits here like a clay pot among the iron vessels of scholarship; and if we are concerned with scholarship we could better have used something on, for example, the Ecole des Chartes. Nichols has previously approached the subject of modernity in the Paden volume and in *The New Medievalism*, edited by Marina S. Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore and London: John Hopkin's University Press, 1999). I mention these points only because the editors have not followed the convention of giving this information.

The thesis of this collection is apparently a relation between the coincident emergence of medieval studies and modernism in France in the 1860s. This may have been an important stage in the development of medieval studies or medievalism in France, but to call it the beginning of either is absurd. On the whole, readers will find the account of modernism in the volume *The New Medievalism* more helpful. The parallel between modernism and medievalism is certainly suggestive, but no connection is shown.

Unfortunately I feel obliged to focus my attention here on the disturbing and apparently random misuse of the term *medievalism*. The first sentence of this book refers to 'something exciting going on in medieval studies.' The next sentence, however, turns to 'the study of medieval literature and culture,' which is a very different matter indeed. These 'signs,' which clearly involve much more than the 'New Medievalism,' include appointments at major universities, renewed interest among graduate students, the founding of scholarly journals, and special issues of established journals. An interesting omission is the one journal devoted to medievalism. For the New Medievalism, I am obliged to turn back to the volume by that name. 'As a term, "new medievalism" denotes a revisionist movement in romance medieval studies...a disposition to interrogate and reformulate assumptions about the discipline of medieval studies broadly conceived' (1). One thing must be made absolutely clear at once: the English term *medievalism* does not and never has referred to *medieval studies*.

Ever since John Ruskin introduced the term mediaevalism in 1853 it has meant, to cite the NED, 'the system of belief and practice characteristic of the Middle Ages; Mediaeval thought, religion, art, etc.; the adoption of or devotion to mediaeval ideals or usages.' To quote a more recent standard handbook, medievalism is '[a] spirit of

sympathy for the Middle Ages along with a desire to preserve or revive certain qualities of medieval life' (*A Handbook to Literature*, 7th ed., eds. William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman [Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996]). A substantial descriptive article on medievalism may be found in the *Arthurian Encyclopedia*. Incredibly, the philologists editing this volume do not seem to have consulted a dictionary.

'The New Medievalism,' write Bloch and Nichols, 'thus placed in historical context the cultural appropriation of the study of the Middle Ages as it has been practiced since the middle of the eighteenth century... From the outset we imagined a history of medievalisms aimed at exploring the ways in which medieval studies have been determined by the specific ideological or local, nationalistic or religious, political or personal interests of those who have shaped them' (4). Much as I hate to deprive Bloch and Nichols of their innocent pleasure in having reinvented the wheel, I could scarcely have stated better what the editors of *Studies in Medievalism* have been doing since 1976, but I do not think we need a 'new' medievalism to do this.

The problem appears to have originated with *Speaking of the Middle Ages* by Paul Zumthor, translated by Sarah White with an introduction by Eugene Vance (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1986). Here, the French term *médiévisme* is consistently translated 'medievalism,' which it most emphatically is not. A recent work on French medievalism comments, 'Even French linguistic usage reflects the uncertain status of the subject since the term *medievisme* is still not fully established. The form *médiévalisme* is used by some scholars, though it does not occur in the *Grand Robert* or the *Trésor de la langue française*' (Michael Glencross, *Reconstructing Camelot: French Romantic Medievalism and the Arthurian Tradition* [Woodbridge, England: D. S. Brewer, 1995], p. 1). According to Larousse, *médiévisme* refers to study or knowledge of the Middle Ages and may include 'a taste for the Middle Ages.' It has rarely if ever done so, because this has not been a significant feature of French culture: indeed, for Paul Zumthor it did not exist. 'For several years now,' he wrote, 'many signs have proclaimed a renewal of medieval studies... We must distinguish two aspects of this renewal: one concerns the researchers' basic approach; the other, the curious but uninitiated public' (8). Even for someone writing in French this is a rather cavalier dismissal of the entire Medieval Revival.

Ignorance of the difference between *medievalism* and *medieval studies* produces endless confusion, as I have discovered in twenty years of editing *Studies in Medievalism*. Of course the terms will always overlap: how can you separate the singer from the song, the scholar from the study? German is fortunate in having two terms of clearly distinguished meaning: *Medievalistik* (medieval studies) and *mediaevalismus* (medievalism), and I think we could use something like this in English, *medievalism* as it is now used and <medievism>, conforming to French usage, for medieval studies. There is after all an encouraging analogy in the terms *romance studies* and *romanticism*, with which we have managed to live very comfortably for more than a century.

Since 1970 the usage of *medievalism* in English has expanded and needs to expand further in terms consistent with its history and development. The Medieval Revival and indeed the whole development of medievalism in English and American culture since the sixteenth century are too well established to be casually brushed aside.

REVIEWS

Indeed, the whole field of medievalism is expanding rapidly and taking Protean forms. What we do need is dialogue.

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