

JOURNAL PROSPECTUS

postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies

a co-production of Palgrave Macmillan and the BABEL Working Group*

*[The BABEL Working Group](#), founded in 2004, is a collective of scholars (primarily medievalists, but also including persons working in other areas, such as early modern and Victorian studies, critical and cultural theory, film and women's studies, and critical sexuality studies) in North America, the U.K., and Australia, who have been working to develop new cross-disciplinary alliances between the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and the arts in order to formulate and practice new "critical humanisms," as well as to develop a more present-minded medieval studies.

1. BACKGROUND

The subject field of the journal is medieval cultural studies, an area of critical inquiry that was given one of its important public articulations in 1995 at Georgetown University in Washington, DC at an international conference, "[Cultural Frictions: Medieval Cultural Studies in Post-modern Contexts](#)," devoted to the ways in which medieval literary studies were being reconceived and redefined with the models for social and cultural history developed in contemporary work on cultural studies and postmodern theory. Some of the questions posed by the organizers were: What does cultural studies offer medieval studies? Or, more importantly, what does medieval studies offer cultural studies? How does medievalism harmonize with the critical practices that change society and the ways we conceive history? One of the insights of the conference, articulated there by Paul Strohm, is that cultural studies—whether medieval or more contemporary—must attend to both texts (and to discursive practices in general) as well as to the materiality and social impact of texts in particular times and places. This relates to how Richard Johnson defined cultural studies in his much-cited 1987 essay "What Is Cultural Studies, Anyway?" where he wrote that cultural studies attend to the "social life of subjective forms at each moment of their circulation," whether in texts or in other cultural objects. Attending to the materiality and social impact of texts and other cultural objects, as Strohm also argued, also entails elaborating upon "some provisional standpoint, and some point of attachment," for our critiques, which raises the question—which becomes one of cultural studies' tasks to investigate—of where we want to position ourselves in relation to our objects of study (what is "at stake" for us—socially, culturally, politically, ethically, etc.?). Postmodernism, for all of its critics' contentions to the contrary, does not evacuate the question of meaningfulness or of ethical commitments.

The formation of the BABEL Working Group was partly inspired by the proceedings of this conference, which led to several books in medieval studies that collectively represent important forays into medieval cultural studies: Kathleen Biddick's [The Shock of Medievalism](#) (Duke Univ. Press, 1998), Glenn Burger and Steven Kruger's [Queering the Middle Ages](#) (Univ. of Minnesota, 2001), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's [Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages](#) (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999) and [The Postcolonial](#)

[*Middle Ages*](#) (St Martin's Press, 2000), Carolyn Dinshaw's [*Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*](#) (Duke Univ. Press, 1999), Karma Lochrie's [*Heterosyncracies: Female Sexuality Before Normal Wasn't*](#) (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005), and Paul Strohm's [*Theory and the Premodern Text*](#) (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000). One of the primary aims of BABEL's first edited essay volume, published in 2007 in Palgrave Macmillan's New Middle Ages series, [*Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages*](#) (edited by Eileen Joy, Myra Seaman, Kimberly Bell, and Mary Ramsey), as well as of its special issue of the *Journal of Narrative Theory*, "[Premodern to Modern Humanisms: The BABEL Project](#)," was to address the call for medieval cultural studies articulated at the Georgetown University conference and further developed afterwards by some of that conference's participants (Biddick, Burger, Cohen, Dinshaw, Kruger, Lochrie, Claire Sponsler, Vance Smith, Strohm, and Michael Uebel) along with a small handful of other scholars (such as Bruce Holsinger, Aranye Fradenburg, David Wallace, and Angela Jane Weisl), but for the most part left undeveloped in medieval studies at large.

Another prod to BABEL's publishing and other projects has been the longer-standing field of [studies in medievalism](#), which has also been called medievalism studies and [medieval cultural studies](#): most broadly speaking, scholars working in this field (such as Leslie J. Workman, Richard Utz, David Matthews, Larry Scanlon, Stephanie Trigg, Helen Fulton, Thomas Hahn, Louise D'Arcens, William Paden, Ruth Evans, Jenna Mead, Howard Bloch, Stephen Nichols, Norman Cantor, and John Ganim, among others), have been concerned with the reception and representation of the Middle Ages across various periods, genres, and media, and they have been especially concerned as well with all of the ways in which the Middle Ages have been *invented* and *constructed* by writers and scholars from the Renaissance forward, and with the genealogies of the professional *academic* discipline of medieval studies, which is often at pains to distinguish itself from a "medievalism" believed to not be concerned enough with a so-called "real" medieval history. The question of the alterity of the medieval past is critical here because, for scholars working in the vein of traditional historicism, the Middle Ages is always "other" to the present, whereas for some scholars working in studies in medievalism, such as [Tom Prendergast and Stephanie Trigg](#), "the medieval" (whatever that might ultimately mean) is always partly a function, product, and *effect* of any particular present trying to grapple with the epistemologies of the Middle Ages as well as with its relation (or supposed non-relation) to the modern and postmodern. Studies in medievalism thus demonstrate the always intersecting trajectories of the medieval, modern, and postmodern and also reveal the ways in which the academic field of medieval studies is itself a form of medievalism, for as David Matthews has argued, "in medieval studies we are always only dealing with representations of the middle ages, not delivered presences." Related to studies in medievalism, much ongoing and current work in medieval Mediterranean studies (including studies in Orientalism and postcolonial studies), has also been preoccupied with various tensions between alterity and presentist valences in studies of the past, as witnessed by recent books such as Vince Barletta's [*Covert Gestures: Crypto-Islamic Literature as Cultural Practice in Early Modern Spain*](#), Karla Mallette's [*The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100-1250: A Literary History*](#), Brian Catlos's [*The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims in Catalonia and Aragon, 1050-1300*](#), and Sahar Amer's [*Crossing Borders: Love Between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures*](#).

It is partly BABEL's objective with this journal to enter into productive dialog with the trajectories of medieval scholarship outlined above, especially with the hope of helping to develop an inter-disciplinary, cross-temporal, and socially interventionist (and therefore,

also publicly intellectual) medieval cultural studies that would bring medieval studies into mutually beneficial critical relations with scholars working on a diverse array of post-medieval subjects, including critical theories that remain un- or under-historicized. It is also hoped that a concerted focus on the *question* of the relations between the medieval and modern in different times and places will help us to take better stock of the different roles that history and various processes of historicizing have played in the shaping of various presents and futures. At the same time, BABEL is also concerned to further develop new methods for approaching and articulating all of the ways in which the medieval past remains both intransigent and silent, yet is also voluble and variable (in terms of how many of its material artifacts, textual and otherwise, still surround us), and therefore, the question of history and what it ultimately can and cannot account for as regards the “realism” of the medieval past remains as a pressing concern.

It will be admitted that attempts to define “cultural studies,” in any period, have been vexed over the years, although it has very distinct histories in the U.K. (where it was originally connected to the founding of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964, which had definitive Marxist, [Frankfurt School](#), and [Gramscian](#) orientations) and America (where it has been most often associated with the analysis of subjective relations to the ephemera of mass popular culture). For the purposes of this journal, we take as a given that cultural studies do not comprise a unified field of approaches and objects, but rather constitutes an open field of inter- and multidisciplinary debate regarding the material, discursive, and other relations between cultural objects, practices, and institutions and the realms with which they come into contact: history, society, politics, commerce, religion, globalism, the body, subjectivity, and the like. To develop and practice a *medieval* cultural studies will be to ask, not only what longer historical perspectives can provide to contemporary cultural theories, but also how the Middle Ages—its mentalities, social forms, culture, theology, political and legal structures, ethical values, and the like—inflect contemporary life and thought. It will also mean understanding, as Ruth Evans, Helen Fulton, and David Matthews argue in their *Introduction to Medieval Cultural Studies: Essays in Honour of Stephen Knight*, that placing “medieval” and “cultural studies” side by side “does more than simply give 'cultural studies' a diachronic dimension or make the middle ages relevant to today. Rather, it is about continuous provocation.”

Currently, whereas journals in contemporary theory and cultural studies have proliferated and flourished beyond number, there are only three journals in medieval studies that are primarily dedicated to contemporary theoretical approaches, new “writing approaches,” and/or theoretically-inflected historicisms: *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, published by Maney Publishing and Duke University Press, and *New Medieval Literatures*, published by Brepols. None of these journals can be said to have a sharply focused mission for the vigorous integration of medieval studies with other disciplines and with work in more contemporary periods. Further, there are only two book series solely devoted to new critical approaches to medieval studies: Palgrave Macmillan’s [New Middle Ages series](#) and Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture, launched in 2008 at Ohio State University Press. The only outlet solely dedicated to books in medieval studies that take up contemporary theoretical approaches before Palgrave’s and Ohio State’s series was the Medieval Cultures series at the University of Minnesota Press, and it has since closed down. The popularity and health of Palgrave’s New Middle Ages series, however, is a strong indicator that a new journal in medieval studies published by Palgrave Macmillan and edited by BABEL members would be a welcome addition to the field.

Through its national and international conference roundtables, special journal issues, participation in symposia in medieval studies but also in cultural theory, weblog and other digital media ventures, grant applications, and book projects, BABEL has formed alliances and working group relationships with many of the scholars working at the forefront of medieval cultural studies and medievalism studies, as well as with scholars working in other fields in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and the arts. It is one of the primary purposes of BABEL to form productive cross-disciplinary alliances between premodern and more modern studies, partly to re-envision and re-invigorate medieval studies within newly innovative interdisciplinary contexts and to also take advantage of new modes for the production and transmission of knowledge. As an example of BABEL's approach, which would also be on display in the journal in the themed issues (see below under **2. Aims and Scope**), our new essay collection, [*Fragments Toward a History of a Vanishing Humanism*](#) (under review at Ohio State's Interventions series), takes up the question of the post/human from a variety of premodern, early modern, and modern perspectives. Collectively, the essays delineate the historical and critical problematics surrounding the attempts (both in the past and the present) to delineate "the human" as a singularity (whether as an individual or as a unique species), and they also foreground the ethico-cultural dilemmas that arise when "the human" is marked off from what is supposedly nonhuman or inhuman. Different chapters consider instants of modern critical thought and/or culture (such as, for example, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid modernity," the surrealist biology of Roger Caillois, the iPod, and the Showtime television series *Dexter*) in relation to the slower currents of premodern thought and culture that still inhere in the present (such as, for example, the heroic quest, the devotional manual, the Oedipus myth, and the idealized Lady of troubadour poetry).

Most practitioners of what can now be called post/humanism or the post/humanities (such as Cary Wolfe, who is the editor for the University of Minnesota's new [posthumanities book series](#)) work primarily in the modern and postmodern periods—literary, historical, biological, and otherwise—and rarely include in their projects the voices and thought of premodern studies, while at the same time they continually evoke the importance of history and historicism in their work. Because BABEL is seriously invested in demonstrating the important significance of the longest possible historical perspective to contemporary questions, issues, and problems, especially those that circulate around the vexed terms *human*, *humanism*, and the *humanities*, we have purposefully staged interventions into contemporary theoretical debates where medieval studies is often not present, and it is our intention to continue doing so in active collaboration not only with other medievalists but also with scholars working in more contemporary areas. The members of BABEL are concerned with making new and provocative connections between histories, ideas, cultural artifacts, discourses, and texts that have traditionally been perceived to be too disparate from each other to be brought into productive relation. It is therefore also our intention to engage with scholars working in all periods over the *question* of periodization itself and of the ways in which the production of disciplinary knowledges is bound up with historical chronologies and teleologies that have become sedimented *over time*. It is our aim to problematize these teleologies and to also work toward innovative modes of temporal thinking that would be productive of new critical theories for better understanding the relations between past, present, and future.

2. AIMS AND SCOPE

Vision/Editorial Statement:

postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies is a cross-disciplinary, peer-reviewed journal in medieval studies that aims to bring the medieval and modern into productive critical relation. The journal will work to develop a present-minded medieval studies in which contemporary events, issues, ideas, problems, objects, and texts serve as triggers for critical investigations of the Middle Ages. Further, we are concerned to illuminate the deep historical structures—mental, linguistic, social, cultural, aesthetic, religious, political, sexual, and the like—that underlie contemporary thought and life, and therefore, we are also interested in attending to the *question* of the *relation* of the medieval to the modern (and vice versa) in different times and places. We want to also demonstrate the important value of medieval studies and the longest possible historical perspectives to the ongoing development of contemporary critical and cultural theories that remain under-historicized. Finally, we will advocate for and support the continuing development, from any and all disciplinary directions, of historicist, materialist, comparatist, and theoretical approaches to the subjects of the Middle Ages.

Plan of Contents:

The journal will be published three times a year (in print and online)—two issues (nos. 1 and 3, April and November) will be themed issues edited or co-edited by guest scholars and designed around the perspectives of a medieval scholarship attuned to a pressing concern of contemporary thought and life, alternating with an open-topic issue (no. 2, July) specifically designed to help facilitate the application of innovative methodological paradigms to medieval studies (without any predetermined parameters as to what those paradigms might turn out to be, and hopefully pushing beyond the usual categories of traditional critical theories and well-worn cross-disciplinary approaches). While the themed issues will primarily feature work by scholars in medieval studies (in as many humanities disciplines as possible: literature, history, philosophy, art history, religious studies, archaeology, foreign languages, musicology, and the like), scholars working in more contemporary fields from a variety of academic disciplines (both within and outside of the humanities) will be invited to contribute responses. In some cases, the work of a particular scholar working on a contemporary topic—such as nationalism or sexuality or the post/human—will be the spur to a particular issue, and we will include them in that issue as a respondent. For example, one themed issue already in the pre-planning stages, “*When Did We Become Post/human?*” (styled after N. Katherine Hayles’s award-winning 1999 book, [*How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*](#)), will feature medieval and early modern approaches to the question of the historicity (the “when”) of the post/human as an intellectual, social, cultural, philosophical, and scientific category of thought as well as a state of material reality. This issue will be co-edited by Eileen Joy and guest editor Craig Dionne (co-editor of *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, published in 2004 by the University of Michigan Press, and editor of the *Journal of Narrative Theory*).

Each issue will also feature a book review essay, and unlike most other medieval studies journals, we will not be incorporating reviews of individual books (with, say, five to ten reviews of single titles per issue). Rather, each issue of the journal will include a review essay (of 6,000-8,000 words) that will address a particularly pressing theme or topic within medieval studies and the humanities more broadly, and it will include books that

are related to each other within the rubric of this theme or topic. These reviews will include books written by medievalists as well as by scholars in other fields and periods in order to draw for our readership what we see as the very important connections and conjunctions between work in medieval studies and contemporary thought. These reviews will be written by scholars in medieval studies whose work is connected to the theme or topic of the books collectively under review, thereby ensuring a review that will not just remain on the surface of these books, but which will make a critical contribution to the subject(s) addressed in the books under review.

3. EDITORIAL STRUCTURE

postmedieval will have two Editors and one Book Review Editor drawn from the BABEL Working Group: [Eileen Joy](#) (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville), [Myra Seaman](#) (College of Charleston), and [Holly Crocker](#) (University of South Carolina), respectively. The two chief Editors (Joy and Seaman) will share all editing tasks related to the content of each issue (not counting the themed issues that may be entirely guest-edited or co-edited between one of the chief Editors and a guest editor). The primary point and contact person for the journal will be Eileen Joy, but both chief Editors will work together on managing external reviews of submissions to the open issues, editing accepted articles, determining the layout of each issue, and facilitating the work of guest editors. They will also work together in collaboration with members of the Editorial Board to determine and solicit topics, editors, and authors for themed issues. Holly Crocker will be solely responsible for conceptualizing and editing the book review essays in each issue, as well as for contracting authors for those essays.

The Editorial Board for the journal is culled from the membership of the BABEL Working Group and from a roster of scholars whose work has inspired the projects of BABEL or who have already collaborated with BABEL on its various conference and publishing projects. The Board represents many of the most significant and innovative scholars working today in medieval studies in North America, the U.K., and Australia, as well as scholars working in other, more modern areas. More specifically, we have assembled this Editorial Board with an eye toward:

- 1) representing multiple disciplines within medieval studies;
- 2) having a balance between established scholars working at the forefront of theoretical medieval studies and less established scholars who are nevertheless already distinguishing themselves on this same forefront;
- 3) maintaining a mix of scholars working in North America, the U.K., and Australia (with an eye toward expansion in the future into other global areas); and
- 4) including scholars who represent non-medieval disciplines but who are invested in collaborating with medievalists on contemporary critical issues.

Editorial Board:

- [Sahar Amer](#), Medieval French and Arabic Literatures, Arab-European Relations, Arabs and Muslims in France, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Postcolonial Studies (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
- [Vincent Barletta](#), Medieval/Early Modern Iberian Literature, Aljamiado Literature, Linguistic Anthropology (Stanford University)
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- [Sarah Rees Jones](#), Medieval English History, Medieval Urban History, History and Computing (University of York)

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