
About the Cover



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Those working in medieval studies have been aware, for a very long time now, of the love affair between right-wing nationalist, ethno-separatist, and fascist groups and the cultural-historical archive of the Middle Ages – a ‘Middle Ages’ that, for these groups, is decidedly white and also European, where ‘European’ codes as ‘Western,’ ‘Nordic,’ ‘Germanic,’ ‘Christian’ (‘Pagan,’ for some), ‘civilized,’ racially ‘pure,’ etc. As Andrew B.R. Elliott writes in his essay ‘A Vile Love Affair: Right Wing Nationalism and the Middle Ages,’ from Hitler forward, these groups have ‘employed’ the Middle Ages

as a seemingly benign mode of nostalgia. In a tense climate of economic depression, widespread misinformation, wounded national pride, and knee-jerk racism, each successive movement promoted a return to the past. The past they invoked was a putatively shared national identity – shared by those whom they considered racially ‘pure’ – that allowed for a nostalgic



use of the past. Such ideas are designed to make extremist ideologies more palatable, more mainstream, and more inclusive. (Elliott, 2017)

Knowledge of this ‘vile love affair’ is not primarily scholarly, if we take the recent hit horror film *Get Out* (2017) as one example of a very pointed pop-cultural awareness of the Far Right’s passion for medieval symbols and cultural artifacts. In this movie, about one white community’s abduction of African Americans for the purposes of harvesting their bodies (in a sort of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*-style plot whereby whites co-opt black bodies as ‘shells’ for their own immortality), the hero Chris Washington (who is African American) discovers a medieval Templar helmet in the car of the family who has abducted him, and from whom he is attempting to escape. For one brief moment, while sitting in the driver’s seat, Chris holds and lifts up the helmet and looks at it with an expression of bemused disgust before dropping it and speeding off. In the commentary accompanying the DVD release of the film, director Jordan Peele says that he developed ‘a whole mythology and lore about how they [the villainous white family] are descended from the original Knights Templar.’ In a more tragically realist associative vein, we can recall here that the far-right Norwegian terrorist, Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway in a bombing and shooting rampage in 2011, believed he was a modern-day Templar knight, and he wrote a lengthy manifesto (over 1,500 pages) in which he railed against Muslims and feminists for ushering in the ‘cultural suicide’ of Europe (Berwick, 2011; see also Wollenberg, 2014).

It may be, as some have argued, that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States somehow accelerated the far Right’s fascination with and strategic deployment of medieval culture and history (S.N., 2017), and medievalists have been busy for a while now investigating this fascination and the resulting (often malignant and misinformed) cultural appropriations (see, for example, D’Arcens and Monagle, 2014 and Holsinger, 2007). But the events in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 11–12 of this year could be argued to have effected a sort of tear in the Real, whereby medievalists became much more deeply concerned and politically energized over the erroneously maleficent uses of their field’s subject matter (see, e.g., Perry, 2017 and Sturtevant, 2017). This was the moment when a loose collocation of white nationalist groups first converged at the University of Virginia for a torch-lit evening march across campus, chanting ‘blood and soil’ and ‘Jews will not replace us,’ and then the next morning gathered at a local park for a soon-to-be cancelled ‘Unite the Right’ rally, during the mayhem of which a young woman was murdered by a white supremacist purposefully driving his car into a crowd of counter-protestors. Earlier that day, this same white supremacist had been photographed carrying a medieval-styled shield emblazoned with the logo of the white supremacist group American Vanguard – an eagle carrying a fasces (itself a throwback to ancient Rome). The caveat that



one's scholarship should be politically neutral was, for many of us within medieval studies, no longer an option.

The editors of *postmedieval* have therefore decided, with this issue, to include a crowd-sourced bibliography on Race and Medieval Studies (facilitated by Jonathan Hsy and Julie Orlemanski) that we hope will be an invaluable resource for those who want to teach a Middle Ages that is global, rowdily diverse, inclusive of minority voices, and most importantly, 'woke' with regard to racist disfigurements of the medieval past. Our cover image for this issue is thus a photograph, taken in 2016, of a knight-reenactor in Slovakia, whose political leanings we can only guess at – nothing is known of either the context of the photograph or the identity of its subject, such that the image, much like the Middle Ages for many, remains as a sort of blank screen for various fantasy scenarios and cultural projections. This is both a danger, and an opportunity...

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