

# Medievalism. Historiographic Markers\*

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**Abstract:** The present study aims to shed light on the intellectual origins of medievalism studies, on the evolution of this historical research approach and the primary directions of inquiry employed in this field at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and over the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main focus of the present article is placed on the institutionalization of the research on medievalism (conferences, journals, editorial collections, university courses) and on the formation of several scholarly groups around the special research programs in this field (Kalamazoo, Yale, Medieval Electronic Multimedia Organization). Moreover, the present paper approaches the debates circling the contemporary historiography, particularly regarding the terminology (medievalism, neo/medievalism) and the establishment of medievalism as a research field (the relations with medieval studies, with literary and cultural studies, as well as with postmodernism and post-postmodernism).

**Keywords:** Medievalism, Medieval Studies, Historiography, History of Historiography, Popular Culture, Cultural Studies

**Rezumat:** Prezentul studiu își propune să facă lumină asupra originilor intelectuale ale studiilor medievalismului, asupra evoluției acestui demers al cercetării istorice și asupra direcțiilor primare de investigație folosite în acest domeniu la sfârșitul secolului XX și pe parcursul primelor două decenii ale secolului XXI. Accentul principal al prezentului articol este pus pe instituționalizarea cercetării asupra medievalismului (conferințe, reviste, colecții editoriale, cursuri universitare) și pe formarea mai multor grupuri academice în jurul programelor speciale de

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cercetare în acest domeniu (Kalamazoo, Yale, Medieval). Electronic Multimedia Organization). De asemenea, lucrarea de față abordează dezbaterile care înconjoară istoriografia contemporană, în special în ceea ce privește terminologia (medievalismul, neo/medievalismul) și stabilirea medievalismului ca domeniu de cercetare (relațiile cu studiile medievale, cu studiile literare și culturale, precum și cu postmodernism și post-postmodernism).

**Cuvinte cheie:** medievalism, studii medievale, istoriografie, istoria istoriografiei, cultură populară, studii culturale

## Introduction

My interest in neo/medievalism originated from certain aspects of daily life and was triggered by two pieces of news that caught my attention. The first regarded the war in Ukraine. The recount mentioned the existence of a Ukrainian female sniper, depicted as a prototype of the war heroine associated with the Medieval French heroine Joan of Arc.<sup>1</sup> The use of a medieval motif in the construction of a journalistic discourse drew my attention towards the more general phenomenon of using medieval themes and motifs in the context of the contemporary culture – in other words, towards the process of symbolically depicting the Middle Ages from the viewpoint of different historical periods. This process of “continuously reinventing” the Middle Ages is called neo/medievalism.

Moreover, there was a news story about the international medieval studies congress held on 9-14 May 2022 in Kalamazoo. An overview on the subjects of the presentations showed 20 texts that approached neo/medievalism and 23 texts that approached Tolkien.<sup>2</sup> Approaching the issues of medievalism as part of the professional debates held by the medieval historians turned into a challenge: What does medievalism actually mean? What is the relation between neo/medievalism and medieval studies? Is medievalism a separate field of study? In an attempt to answer these questions, we aim to cover the origins of medievalism, the institutionalisation process, the evolution of this research direction and the efforts made for its establishment as a means of approaching the Middle Ages, even from outside the academic sphere.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Rotarescu, “S-a măritat Ioana D’Arc a Ucrainei! Lunetista și-a cunoscut soțul pe front” [Joan of Arc of Ukraine got married! The sniper met her husband on the front], *Click pentru femei* [Click for women], <https://clickpentrufemei.ro/ghid-de-viata/evenimente/foto-s-a-maritat-ioana-darc-a-ucrainei-lunetista-2213443.html> (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>2</sup> R. Utz, “Kalamazoo 2022: What the Congress Program Tells Us,” *Medievalists.net*: <https://www.medievalists.net/2022/05/kalamazoo-2022-what-the-congress-program-tells-us/> (Accessed in November 2022).

The approach proposed in the present paper is part of the history of historiography horizon. The sources are represented by scholarly literature on medievalism and neo-medievalism, from periodicals (both in print and online), editorials, websites, edited collections and monographs, as well as the programmes of the conferences and congresses held on this topic and the interviews and debates published in the scholarly publications or in the wider-circulation newspapers and magazines.

## 1. Prestige and notoriety

Medievalism / neo-medievalism was established as a cultural movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Its rise was emphasised by two researchers, both of whom had published remarkable studies on the Middle Ages. One of these two researchers is none other than the famous analyst of medieval poetics, Paul Zumthor. In a book published in 1980 (translated into English in 1986), entitled *Speaking of the Middle Ages*, the Swiss author noted that “The Middle Ages besiege and challenge us from all sides.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, P. Zumthor expressed his conviction that it is an “illusion ... to speak of the past in any other way than from the present.”<sup>4</sup> The second researcher, the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco,<sup>5</sup> several years earlier, in 1983 (in Italian), also noted that the contemporary western society’s return to the medieval subjects and motifs was “obsessive.” The initial observations, from the viewpoint of the medieval presence in the post-medieval Italian culture, from his lecture in 1983 at the San Gimignano<sup>6</sup> conference, was later expanded to both the European culture and the culture across the Atlantic.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Zumthor, *Speaking of the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 8: “For several years now, despite a certain pessimism in universities, many signs have appeared that proclaim a renewal of medieval studies, affecting both their procedures and the interest they arouse. We must distinguish two aspects of this renewal: one concerns the researchers’ basic approach; the other, the curious but uninitiated public.”

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Umberto Eco, “Dreaming of the Middle Ages,” in *Faith in Fakes* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), 61-72.

<sup>6</sup> Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri reconstructed the contents of U. Eco’s lecture in *Il medioevo nel fumetto*, in vol. *Il fumetto nel Medioevo*, a cura di Massimo Miglio (Rome: Nella Sede Dell’Istituto Per Il Medio Evo, 2021), 163, note 17: U. Eco, “Dieci modi di sognare il medioevo,” in *Sugli specchi e altri saggi* (Milano: 1985), 78-89; *Idem*, *Il sogno del medioevo. Il revival del medioevo nelle culture contemporanee* (Relazioni e comunicazioni del convegno, San Gimignano, 11-12 novembre 1983), *Quaderni medievali* 21 (1986): 187-200 (reprinted as a book in 2018); the study was also included in vol. *Idem*, *Scritti sul pensiero medievale* (Milan: 2013), 1093-1108 (the Romanian translation was entitled “Zece moduri de a visa Evul Mediu,” *Scrieri despre gândirea medievală* (Iași: Polirom, 2016), 663-672).

What did the two scholars, P. Zumthor and U. Eco, mean by this massive presence of the Middle Ages in the popular culture from end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? On the one hand, the approach to the expansion of the studies conducted in the research field around medievalism and, on the other hand, the massive presence of the medieval topics in popular culture (cinema, television, radio, theatre, arts, new media – games, comic books, social media) are the elements that make up the obvious signs of the siege, the challenge and the obsession to which the two scholars referred. Moreover, U. Eco noted that this nostalgia for the Middle Ages, on a cultural level, emerged immediately after the respective period ended. If P. Zumthor observed the explosion of medieval themes in the contemporary popular culture, U. Eco was among the first to propose a systematic analysis of this massive presence, both from a diachronic viewpoint and as a typology for populating the contemporary society with a wave of such cultural motifs. The theme of medieval chivalry appears in Renaissance poetry, and motifs and themes from medieval chronicles were borrowed by the literature of the Renaissance era (Shakespeare used elements from Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* in *Hamlet*). In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Cervantes introduced a character, Don Quixote, whose behaviour was shaped by the dominant chivalric literature of the time. The novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with authors like Sir Walter Scott and Victor Hugo, also influenced the view on the Middle Ages in a certain way.<sup>7</sup> Zuleyha Cetiner-Oktem,<sup>8</sup> who conducted a highly insightful analysis of Umberto Eco's essay in 2004, noted that, in Eco's opinion, the reason for this massive presence of the Middle Ages was the eternal "search for roots" or origins. From this viewpoint, the aforementioned researcher showed that our modern world inherited everything from the medieval model. The inventory compiled by Eco, containing this inheritance, can be summarised as follows: "Modern languages, merchant cities, capitalistic economy (...) are intentions of medieval societiu. (...) the rise of modern armies, of the modern concept of the national state (...) the idea of a supernatural federation (...) the struggle between the poor and the rich, the concept of heresy or ideological deviation even our contemporary notion of love as a devastating unhappy happiness (...) the conflict between church and state, trade unions ... the technological transformation of labour."<sup>9</sup> In Eco's view, "The Middle Ages represent

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 65-67.

<sup>8</sup> Zuleyha Cetiner-Oktem, "Dreaming the Middle Ages: American Neomedievalism in *A Knight's Tale* and *Timeline*," *Interactions* 18 (2009): 43-56, and especially 44-49. For Umberto Eco's contribution to the analysis of medievalism, see also Domenico Pietropaolo, "Eco on Medievalism," *Studies in Medievalism* 18 (2009): 135.

<sup>9</sup> Eco, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages," 64.

the crucible of Europe and modern civilization.”<sup>10</sup> The proposed typology for cataloguing dreams/forms of the imaginary that depicted the Middle Ages in the present was as follows: as a manner and pretext, ironic, barbaric, romantic, as *philosophia perennis*, elaboration of national identities, Carduccian (or “antidote to modernity”), as medieval studies, as tradition (mystical and syncretic), as the *anticipation of the Millennium*.<sup>11</sup>

The transformation of U. Eco’s text into a mere argument used in the discourse of legitimacy, prestige, and notoriety is proven by its publication and republication in different formats, in periodicals, collective volumes or author’s volumes, in addition to the redundant references to these texts (as well as to P. Zumthor’s), repeatedly made in the scholarly literature about medievalism and the transformation of the Italian author’s phrases into commonplaces (*Dreaming on the Middle Ages* and *Living in the Middle Ages*).

## 2. Origins, institutionalisation, evolution

Established and enshrined by the intellectual notoriety of P. Zumthor and U. Eco, the approach characteristic to medievalism has deeper roots and implies a theoretical construction and the establishment of the intellectual networks that do not directly concern the two researchers. The founding father of medievalism, as an academic research field, is considered to be historian Leslie J. Workman.<sup>12</sup> He was born in London, but his career flourished across the Atlantic. As early as 1971, he was the one to define medievalism as “the study of the Middle Ages as an imaginative construct in Western society, beginning with the late Middle Ages.”<sup>13</sup> Leslie J. Workman consequently defined medievalism as “the continuous process of creation of the Middle Ages.”<sup>14</sup> In 1987, L. Workman formulated a concise definition of medievalism: “the study of the Middle Ages, the application of medieval

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<sup>10</sup> Idem, “Zece moduri,” 666.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 667-670; Tison Pugh, Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms. Making the Past in the Present* (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Utz, “Medievalism in the Making: A Bibliography of Leslie J. Workman,” *The Year’s Work in Medievalism* XV (2000): 127-132; see also Richard Utz and Tom Shippey (eds.), *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of Leslie Workman* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998); K. Verduin, “The Founding and the Founder: Medievalism and the Legacy of Leslie J. Workman,” *Studies in Medievalism* 17 (2008): 1-27; Davis Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Leslie Workman, “Medievalism Today,” *Medieval Feminist Forum* 23, 1 (1997): 32. <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1380&context=mff> (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 30.

models to contemporary needs, and the Middle Ages as inspiration for all forms of art and thought”<sup>15</sup>

In Workman’s opinion (and according to others as well), the assertion of medievalism was largely due to romanticism, with which it had a complex historical relationship.<sup>16</sup> Thus, a certain number of researchers believed that medievalism was rather an epiphenomenon of romanticism.<sup>17</sup> The enfranchisement of this conviction was also observed by Paul. E Szarmach. The initial assumption was that “medievalism was a romantic reaction to the medieval past, a general projection of the medieval past according to the interests and conception of the present”, or that “it was primitive reflex, a feature of the romantic revival,”<sup>18</sup> or even that “medievalism implies any post-medieval response to the Middle Ages...from politics to fantasy.”<sup>19</sup> This definition for medievalism became the commonplace, in synthetic terms, and it was reproduced by the works dedicated to this field in recent years. One such recent work mentioned the definition of medievalism as a means of “reception, interpretation or recreation of the European Middle Ages by post-medieval cultures.”<sup>20</sup>

L. Workman’s efforts focused not only on identifying and defining a new historical research topic, but also on building an institutional network that would permanently establish this field as a subject of historical research. Thus, in 1971, he organised a panel on medievalism at the International Congress of Medieval Studies at the University of Michigan, Kalamazoo. Several years later, he laid the foundations for the publication of a journal that was meant to shed light on these concerns regarding the study of medievalism, entitled *Studies in Medievalism*. The journal was published under his editorial coordination between 1979 and 1999. During the first period, until 1990, the journal was financed by

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<sup>15</sup> Idem, “Editorial,” *Studies in Medievalism* 1 (1987): 1. See also Richard Utz, “Contesting the Critical Site: Philology, Mittelalter-Rezeption, and Medievalism in Germany,” *The Year’s Work in Medievalism* 10 (1999): 239. Richard Utz and Thomas Shippey, “Medievalism in the Modern World: Introductory Perspectives,” in *Medievalism in the Modern World*, Richard Utz and Thomas Shippey (eds.), 5. See also R. Utz, “Speaking of Medievalism: An Interview with Leslie J. Workman,” in *ibid.*, 439.

<sup>16</sup> L. Workman, “Medievalism,” in *The Year’s Work in Medievalism* X (1999): 226.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Leslie J. Workman, “Medievalism and Romanticism 1750-1850,” *Poetica* 39-40 (special issues for 1993): 1-44; Elizabeth Fay, *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Paul L. Szarmach, “Medieval Studies and Medievalism: Emergent Relations,” in *The Year’s Work in Medievalism* X (1999): 228-229.

<sup>19</sup> Williams D. Paden, “‘New Medievalism’ and ‘Medievalism’,” in *The Year’s Work in Medievalism* X (1999): 233.

<sup>20</sup> Louise D’Arcens, “Introduction: Medievalism: Scope and complexity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1.

private funds. Subsequently, it was taken over by the Boydell & Brewer publishing house and its publication continues to the present day. As Karl Fugelso, its current editor-in-chief, noted, the journal maintained its initial editorial policy: "Since then, *Studies in Medievalism* has blossomed into thirty volumes of articles ranging from broad definitions of the field to minute exploration of plain chant in videogames, with myriad essays on such timely and important subjects as discrimination, politics, and commercialism. Ever adapting to the many fluid contexts and ways in which the Middle Ages continue to be reimagined and redeployed, this serial looks forward to many more years informing, inspiring, and improving perhaps the most diachronic and dynamic area of the Humanities."<sup>21</sup> In 1992, a new periodical appeared, based on the same intellectual efforts, entitled *The Year's Work in Medievalism*.<sup>22</sup>

In 2010, a new journal joined the list of periodicals in this field, namely *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*.<sup>23</sup> Today, it is edited by three researchers: Shazia Jagot (University of York), Julie Orlemanski (University of Chicago) and Sara Ritchey (University of Tennessee, Knoxville). Its stated purpose is that of an "experimental engagement" with the Middle Ages: "Our aim is to facilitate collaborative, ethical, and experimental engagements with the medieval – with its archives and art, its thought and practices, its traces and its enduring possibilities."<sup>24</sup>

Leslie J. Workman is also credited with the establishment of an international conference on medievalism, launched in 1986; similarly, between 1996 and 1998, he organised a summer camp at the University of York. Beginning with 1994, what had taken place in Kalamazoo was mirrored in Europe through the congress in Leeds, where the theme was "Medievalism and the reception of the Middle Ages."<sup>25</sup> After 2010, this topic was approached through another international congress, held in Scotland (Saint Andrews, 2013) and in England (Lincoln, 2015; Manchester, 2017) initially; afterwards, it was moved to the continent, namely to Rome (2018). This congress was initially organised by "The Middle Ages in the Modern World."<sup>26</sup> Once these gatherings and conferences were established

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<sup>21</sup> "Studies in Medievalism," *Proofed. A Boydell & Brewer Blog*: <https://boydellandbrewer.com/blog/medieval-history-and-literature/studies-in-medievalism/> (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Workman, *Medievalism*, 227.

<sup>23</sup> D'Arcens, *Introduction*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Postmedieval journal*: <https://sites.google.com/view/postmedieval/about> (Accessed in November 2022). From 2010 to the present day, it had several editors-in-chief: Lara Farina (2015-2020), Eileen Joy (2010 - 2019), Myra Seaman (2010-2020).

<sup>25</sup> Matthews, *Medievalism*, 166-167.

<sup>26</sup> Tommaso di Carpagna Falconieri, Pierre Savy, Lila Yawn (eds.), *Middle Ages without borders: a conversation on medievalism* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2021), 1-8.

as practices in the academic field, they proved their consistency and attracted even wider audiences.

If Leslie J. Workman was considered to be the founder of medieval studies, the movement that appeared at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the field is also associated with the consistent or sporadic endeavours carried out by other historians from different cultural areas. One such starting point, as Workman himself claimed, was the book entitled *A Dream of Order*, authored in 1970 by Alice Chandler.<sup>27</sup> It is in fact a collection of studies carried out by the North American linguistics researcher. Chandler, because of this book, was considered by Workman to be the “true founder of modern medievalism.” However, Workman evaluated his own contribution as a process of institutionalisation, as a conference organiser and due to his role as editor of publications that, in his own words, “gave the word an institutional meaning and presence.”<sup>28</sup> In the years following World War II, literary history is supplemented with a series of contributions that, from the perspective of establishing the precedents of medievalism, focus on the history of ideas and ideologies,<sup>29</sup> as well as the history of art and architecture.

The studies in the field of medievalism did not remain merely within the binds of the Anglo-Saxon North American cultural space. They permeated other cultural spaces as well. For instance, in the linguistic space of the German historiography, namely in Austria, Ulrich Müller organised, in 1979, in Salzburg, a conference on the means of interpreting the Middle Ages. The “final victory” of medieval studies in Germany, in the academic field, in the face of “the impermeable bastion of philology,” was marked by the publication of collections of studies. One was edited by the specialist in medieval German literature, Peter Wapnewski, in 1986, titled *Mittelalter – Rezeption*, and the other was Otto Gerhard Oexle’s book, focused on the history of mentalities.<sup>30</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, this research area also received the term *Mediaevalismus*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1971); Davis Matthews places Chandler’s book alongside the works of Janine Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), and those of Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: The Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone Press, 1964), as significant precedents for the establishment of medieval studies; see D. Matthews, *Medievalism*, 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> Workman, *Medievalism Today*, 29; Utz, *Speaking of Medievalism: An Interview with Leslie J. Workman*, 448.

<sup>29</sup> Lionel Gossman, *Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment: The World and Work of La Curne de Sainte-Palaye* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968); Jürgen Voss, *Das Mittelalter im Historischen Denken Frankreichs* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972).

<sup>30</sup> Utz, *Contesting the Critical Site*, 241.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-243.



Toshiyuki Takamiya, a Japanese professor from a university in Tokyo, had similar intellectual preoccupations. The same research perspective on the popular culture of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the viewpoint of the use of medieval themes, was also present in the Italian space. *Nota bene*: Umberto Eco's intervention in the '80s predominantly focused on the American cultural space, but did not overlook the western European culture or that of his native country. However, the approach to medievalism in quasi-institutional terms in Italy was supported by a permanent section in the journal of medieval studies *Quaderni medievali*. From the very beginning, in the 1960s, until the cessation of its publication, in 2005, the journal contained a section entitled "The other Middle Ages" (*L'Altro Medioevo*). It was addressed to non-specialists and it approached what was reproduced through different media channels about the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> Within the Italian Institute for Medieval Studies, in 2020, a centre for the study of medievalism was established.<sup>33</sup> Since 2018, when the international congress dedicated to the reception of the Middle Ages across the world left the English cultural space, it found refuge in Rome, within the Rome-based French School.<sup>34</sup>

In France, at the end of the 1980s, a research direction focusing on the paradigm of "modernity," "actuality," or "contemporaneity," related to a Middle Ages of the "now" (*maintenant*), "today" (*aujourd'hui*), or the miraculous (*merveilleux*), emerged.<sup>35</sup> The starting point of this research direction was given by certain aspects of literary history. In 1979, the launch was triggered by P. Zumthor, during the conference in Beaubourg. In 1982, the *La Licorne* journal published a special issue dedicated to this subject, namely that of the representation of the Middle Ages in the French literature, from the Renaissance to the present day.<sup>36</sup> One year later, in 1983, the journal *Europe* reintroduced the relevance of the Middle Ages into contemporary debate. Subsequently, between 1995 and 1996, a series of symposiums were held in Cerisy. The seminars and academic gatherings on this topic took place increasingly more often in the 2000s,

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<sup>32</sup> "Quando il Medioevo e la contemporaneità si incontrano: il medievalismo spiegato dal Prof. Tommaso di Carpagna Falconieri," *Medievaleggiando*: <https://medievaleggiando.it/quando-il-medioevo-e-la-contemporaneita-si-incontrano-il-medievalismo-spiegato-dal-prof-tommaso-di-carpagna-falconieri/> (Accessed in November 2022); Tommaso di Carpagna Falconieri, "Medievalismi: il posto dell'Italia," in *Medievalismi italiani (secoli XIX-XXI)*, Tommaso di Carpagna Falconieri, Riccardo Facchini (eds.) (Rome: Gangemi, 2018), 9-28.

<sup>33</sup> Tommaso di Carpagna Falconieri, Pierre Savy, Lila Yawn (eds.), *Middle Ages without borders*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Vincent Ferre, "Introduction. Medievalisme et théorie : pourquoi maintenant?" *Itinéraires* 3 (2010): 7-25.

<sup>36</sup> "L'image du Moyen Âge dans la littérature française de la Renaissance au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle," *La Licorne* 6 (1982).

when, in 2004, the organisation *Modernites medievales* was founded. This organisation intended to hold an annual conference on the topic of the presence of the Middle Ages in literature and art.<sup>37</sup> The research conducted on the relevance of the Middle Ages in the French contemporary culture crossed the borders of the literary studies and of art history by approaching both the ideological aspects and the aspects pertaining to the daily use, namely to a certain “taste” for the Middle Ages.<sup>38</sup> It simultaneously became a research field for historians, established through the journal *Cahiers de recherches médiévales*, which, after 2007, launched a column entitled “Modernité du Moyen âge.” Over the years, Vincent Ferre, the French historian who stood out in this field, carried out a series of retrospectives on the evolution of the medievalism studies in France. With respect to the key moments (the debut and the assertion of the process of defining the field), he noted that the continental initiatives were simultaneous with the preoccupations of the North American or Anglophone historians in general.<sup>39</sup> The debates regarding the definition of the research field are reflected in the discussions of the colloquium held in November 2009, in Metz-Malbrouck, and during the gathering of the following year, that brought together the European and North American researchers, in Groningen, entitled “Medievalism: Transatlantic Dialogues.”<sup>40</sup>

However, P. Zumthor and U. Eco’s aforementioned observations consolidated, on an academic level, the prestige gained by the new

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<sup>37</sup> Under the auspices of this association, colloquiums and conferences were organized and their proceedings were published: Isabelle Durand-Le Guern (dir.), *Lectures du Moyen Âge* (2006); Anne Besson, Myriam White, *Fantasy: le merveilleux médiéval aujourd’hui* (2007); Élodie Burle et Valérie Naudet, *Fantasmagories du Moyen Âge: entre médiéval et moyenâgeux* (2010); Séverine Abiker, Anne Besson, Florence Plet-Nicolas, *Le Moyen Âge en jeu* (cop. 2009); Anne Besson, Vincent Ferré, Anne Larue, *La Fantasy en France aujourd’hui. Écrire, éditer, traduire, illustrer*; Nathalie Koble, Mireille Séguy, *Le Moyen Âge contemporain: perspectives critiques* (2007); Nathalie Koble, Mireille Séguy, *Passé présent. Le Moyen Âge dans les icions contemporaines* (2009); Michaël Devaux, Vincent Ferré, Charles Ridoux, *Tolkien aujourd’hui*, actes du colloque de Rambures [juin 008], Valenciennes, Presses de l’université de Valenciennes, 2010; Alicia Montoya, Vincent Ferré, *Médiévalisme: dialogues transatlantiques / Medievalism: Transatlantic Dialogues*, sous-titré « Parler du Moyen âge, Groningen, 2010. The aforementioned organisation also has a website, as of 2005: <http://www.modernitesmedievales.org>.

<sup>38</sup> Christian Amalivi, *Le gout du Moyen Age* (Plon, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Vincent Ferre, “Le médiévalisme a quarante ans, ou « L’ouverture qu’il faudra bien pratiquer un jour...,” *Médiévales* 78 (2020): 193-210, 193: “En 2019, le médiévalisme moderne – conçu comme l’étude de la réception du « Moyen Âge » dans son versant savant, érudit, et son versant créatif, artistique – a fêté ses quarante ans. C’est en effet en 1979 que Paul Zumthor a prononcé à Beaubourg des conférences publiées l’année suivante<sup>2</sup> et que Leslie Workman a lancé du côté américain la publication d’une revue, *Studies in Medievalism*. Effet de l’esprit du temps ? La simultanéité est remarquable également en ce qu’elle illustre certaines des divisions fondamentales de ce domaine de recherche: linguistique, culturelle, disciplinaire” See also page 208.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

research endeavour, despite its “audience” having grown rather slowly, a situation which changed only at the beginning of the ‘90s.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, an essential role was played by the monograph authored by Norman Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, published in 1991<sup>42</sup> and considered to be the “catalyst” of the polarisation of the public on the subject of medievalism. Another sign indicating the growing prestige of the studies on medievalism at the beginning of the ‘90s was the fact that the journal *Studies in Medievalism* was taken over by the prestigious Boydell & Brewer publishing house. Leslie Workman deems this moment to be worthy of assessment. He noted a progressive forsaking of the view on medievalism as a mere “modest ancillary” to medieval studies. However, Workman acknowledged the reciprocal influence exerted by medieval studies and medievalism and, using Yeats’ words, he asked “How can we know the dancer from the dance?”<sup>43</sup>

The relation between medievalism and medieval studies is rather controversial. Despite the fact that, initially, L. Workman saw an indissoluble connection, medievalism distanced itself and he actually became known as a “founding father,” as an independent cultural research field. Similarly, from the perspective of the academic world within which medieval studies evolved, the relation with medievalism was problematic in nature. At first, a complete detachment from medievalism can be observed, followed by a slow integration into the “academic citadel.” This trajectory is visible particularly in the relation with the strong, well-rounded academic environments, namely the ones deemed traditional, as was the case of the German academic sphere, for instance. On more than one occasion, Richard Utz emphasised this situation in his articles. Thus, as R. Utz noted, philology retained its great importance for the German research in the humanities.<sup>44</sup> The convergence between the fields of medieval studies/academics and medievalism occurred through a compromise: “the compromise turned out to be the reception theory.”<sup>45</sup> (Rezeptionsgeschichte, Mittelalter-Rezeption),

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<sup>41</sup> Workman, *Medievalism Today*, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Norman Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: William Morrow, 1991).

<sup>43</sup> Workman, *Medievalism Today*, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Utz, *Contesting the Critical Site*, 240. See also Idem, “Resistance to the (The New) Medievalism? Comparative Deliberations on (National) Philology, Mediävalismus, and Mittelalter-Rezeption in Germany and North America,” in *The Future of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Problems, Trends, and Opportunities in Research*, Roger Dahood (ed.) (Brepols: Turnhout, 1998), 151-70; Jürgen Kühnel, Hans-Dieter Mück, and Ulrich Müller (eds.) *Mittelalter-Rezeption: Gesammelte Vorträge des Salzburger Symposions “Die Rezeption Mittelalterlicher Dichter und ihrer Werke in Literatur, Bildender Kunst und Musik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts.”*, Kümmerle Verlag, Göttingen, 1979.

<sup>45</sup> Utz, *Contesting the Critical Site*, 241.

rooted in the works of H. G. Gadamer and H. R. Jauss. According to historians Francis G. Gentry and Ulrich Mueller, four reception models could be outlined for the topic of the Middle Ages: a creative reception, termed productive; a reconstruction perceived as “authentic,” understood as “reproductive reception”; the investigation and interpretation of the Middle Ages using the methodology of critical historical research, titled as academic reception; and the reshaping of the Middle Ages for political purposes in the construction of a legitimising discourse, defined as a political-ideological reception.<sup>46</sup>

In the North American cultural space, medievalism emerged in the proximity of medieval studies, with significant influences from the literary studies. Later, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, medievalism overflowed in the area of cultural studies in regards to the popular culture and mass culture. However, this case also required a firm dissociation between medievalism and medieval studies. Paul Szarmach, despite having noted several tangent points (the Arthurian studies or the art and architecture studies), also noted the separation of medievalism and medieval studies into different research fields. For Paul Szarmach, medieval studies represented “an ancient, venerable discipline rooted in philological research, involving the verification and ascertainment of reality limited in time and space”; however, medievalism “it was a footnote in the intellectual history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that probably continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in what is called popular culture.”<sup>47</sup> Those who sought to affirm the connection between the two fields undertook “a series of risks,” according to Szarmach.

Richard Utz’s recent plea<sup>48</sup> for a closer connection between the academic body/medieval studies and the body of enthusiasts and dilettantes/medievalism, in the sense of giving medieval studies a social meaning, of a dialogue between these researchers and the contemporary public, was the expression of the preservation of the dissociation from the previous period.

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<sup>46</sup> Francis G. Gentry, Ulrich Mueller, “The Reception of the Middle Ages in Germany: An Overview,” *Studies in Medievalism* III (1991): 401.

<sup>47</sup> Szarmach, “Medieval Studies and Medievalism...” 228.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Utz, *Medievalism: A Manifesto* (Kalamazoo: ARC Humanities Press, 2017). That very same year, 2017, he readdressed the issue, noting that “Therefore, they replaced it with the umbrella term, “medievalstudies,” which warned anyone with aspirations about learning about medieval culture that hard and serious academic effort was a pre-condition for comprehending it. “Medieval history,” “medieval philology,” “medieval archaeology,” etc., further specialized and refined the process of pastist “othering.” Professional medievalists had drawn up the drawbridge between the general public and their ivory tower castle. Anything to be known about the medieval past would have to be mediated by and through them.” See R. Utz, “Medievalism is a Global Phenomenon: Including Russia,” *The Years Working in Medievalism* 32 (2017): [https://www.academia.edu/36545977/Medievalism\\_is\\_a\\_Global\\_Phenomenon\\_Including\\_Russia\\_The\\_Years\\_Work\\_in\\_Medievalism\\_32\\_2017\\_](https://www.academia.edu/36545977/Medievalism_is_a_Global_Phenomenon_Including_Russia_The_Years_Work_in_Medievalism_32_2017_) (Accessed in November 2022).

These studies in the research area encompassed by medievalism have experienced a new surge in the first two decades of the third millennium. The number of monographs on medievalism increased and a growing number of medieval historians showed an affinity for this research subject. The epicentre of these studies remained in the proximity of Leslie Workman's collaborators. However, a new generation of historians emerged and they used new means of communication to popularise their message. One of these new means of communication was the website *Medievally Speaking*, a website that appeared in January 2009 and that was overseen by Richard Utz and Tom Shippey.<sup>49</sup> Both historians were involved in an editorial endeavour in 1998, the purpose of which was to pay homage to the "founding father" of medievalism, L. Workman. The contents of this website were also uploaded to the social media platforms, using Facebook as an interface. The increasingly larger audience for medievalism can also be explained as a result of its being approached in the collections published by the great publishing houses specialised in the production of academic books, such as Cambridge, Oxford, Palgrave-Macmillan, or as part of the launch of certain editorial collections held by increasingly more prestigious publishing houses. One such case would be that of Arc Humanities, where a book on medievalism launched the *Past Imperfect* collection. In 2016, under the coordination of Louise D'Arcens, a professor at the University din Wollongong, Cambridge University Press published a guidebook for the sphere of studies on medievalism, entitled *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*.<sup>50</sup> More recently, in 2021, the same historian published a monograph on medievalism at the Oxford University Press, entitled *World Medievalism*.<sup>51</sup> For the establishment of medievalism as an autonomous research field, the publication of the anthology by Cambridge University Press represented a key moment. On that occasion, Louis D'Arcens, the editor of the volume, stated that it was "a sign that this field of research has come of age in reflecting on its own progress, in order to provide a summary of key themes and the development of its own, critical approach."<sup>52</sup>

In 2017, Richard Utz, professor at the Georgia Institute and president of the International Society for the Study of Medievalism, published a book that bore a militant and challenging title and message: *Medievalism:*

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<sup>49</sup> <http://medievallyspeaking.blogspot.com/> (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>50</sup> See note 15.

<sup>51</sup> Louise D'Arcens, *World Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern Textual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

<sup>52</sup> Idem, *Introduction*, 1. That very same years, the following work was also published: B. Bildhauer, C. Jones (eds.), *The Middle Ages in the Modern World. Twenty-First Century Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

*A Manifesto*.<sup>53</sup> The book aimed to reconcile medievalism and the academic field, the latter understood as a self-sufficient sphere that is exclusivist as both membership and audience,<sup>54</sup> as opposed to the enthusiasts and dilantants, who compile the non-academic field. Medieval studies, as an academic field, defined its own “identity as a major”, based on the endeavour of gathering historiographic knowledge and excluding the historian’s affectivity and subjectivity, proclaiming itself as a means of obtaining objective, empirical knowledge, employing a series of “formal academic practices such as editing, translation, or criticism.”<sup>55</sup> Affectivity was left to the non-academic sphere, contributing to the “invention” of the Middle Ages within popular culture. Richard Utz, however, following in Cantor’s footsteps, considered that “any form of knowledge is (...) an autobiographical form and that the multitude of researchers’ efforts to recover the Middle Ages were the result of numerous (subjective) reinterpretations of this time period.” He also noted that the term “amateur” came from Latin, from the verb “to love”, while the term “dilettante” was borrowed from Italian and meant “to sing”. Therefore, the book aims to encourage the acceptance of “the subjective and affective origins of interest in the medieval past.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, the editorial contribution was understood as a manifesto, given its suggestion that our interest, as historians of the Middle Ages, must not be limited to merely “interpreting texts and artefacts for other specialists, but must be seen as a nobler task, that of making those texts and artefacts relevant to contemporary non-academic audiences.”<sup>57</sup> The historical reconstruction of the past was circumscribed to the historian’s biographic experience, on the one hand, and to the reason of the present, on the other hand. By proclaiming this stance, Richard Utz applies it throughout the book in the form of the studies that approach, from the viewpoint of medievalism, his hometown, Amberg (Germany), which holds festivals that continue the medievalist tradition created by the Weimar Republic and the Nazi regime.<sup>58</sup> Another study brings up his city of residence, Atlanta, as a place that celebrates chivalry and slavery, as Confederate values, supported by

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<sup>53</sup> See note 31.

<sup>54</sup> Nadia Altschul, “Utz, Medievalism: A Manifesto,” *The Medieval Review*, 2020: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/31330/35466> (Accessed in November 2022)

<sup>55</sup> Richard Utz, *Medievalism*, IX. For the impact of this book, see <https://www.medievalitas.com/post/medievalism-a-manifesto-responses> (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. Richard Utz interview: [https://www.academia.edu/30840907/Medievalism\\_A\\_Manifesto](https://www.academia.edu/30840907/Medievalism_A_Manifesto), (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

the medievalist architecture and art.<sup>59</sup> Last but not least, it contains a third study that mentions the need for “support” for the research endeavours that focused on the study of the Christian traditions and rituals “as bridges between the medieval past and the present.”

The manifesto quality that R. Utz assigned his book resided precisely in the author’s desire to contribute to the recovery of medieval studies / medievalism, as constituent parts of the same phenomenon, at the forefront of the contemporary culture. Considering himself both medieval historian and medievalist, Utz militated for communicating the Middle Ages to the broader audience and pulling them out of the “ivory tower” of the academic sphere.<sup>60</sup> From this viewpoint, as Nadia Altschul also noted in her review, Utz brought up a series of recommendations for discussion: medieval studies as a form of medievalism stood out by eliminating the passion for the study of the medieval past; in the future, high-class research practices would accept the “sentimental” relationship between the researcher and the object of their investigation; we must not write merely for ourselves, but for the larger audience; the academic sphere would focus on matters of public agenda; medievalism represents more than an entry point towards medieval studies, but also a means for an in-depth theoretical approach, for critical reflection and for increasing the social impact; the plea was for a reconceptualization of the academic profession through an “active engagement” and a “confrontation” with the “non-academic audience.”<sup>61</sup>

The last several years of research conducted in the field of medievalism have brought forth a series of new observations, thus enriching and re-systematising the typology of the means by which the Middle Ages became relevant to the contemporary popular culture. For instance, Matthew M. Reeve,<sup>62</sup> from his perspective as an art historian, identified a series of means of intercepting the Middle Ages in the society of the present: he identified the so-called modern-medieval, a way of recreating the Middle Ages in modern art, a “removal from time” (Alexander Nigel); another means resided in intercepting the “The Subjective Middle Ages,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., chap. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., XI: “The book is called a manifesto because it has an obvious political objective. I hereby wish to help reform the way we academically think about and practice the study of medieval culture, and I will use my own observations as a medievalist and medievalist for over twenty-five years to suggest ways in which we can reconnect with the general public after that we allowed ourselves to become, starting from the end of the 19th century, almost an exclusive clan of specialists who communicate mostly with each other.”

<sup>61</sup> Altschul, “Utz, Medievalism: A Manifesto...”.

<sup>62</sup> Matthew M. Reeve, “Living in the New, New Middle Ages,” *The Rambling* 2 (2018): <https://the-rambling.com/2018/10/18/living-in-the-new-middle-ages/> (Accessed in November 2022).

or, My Own Private Middle Ages,” the period thus being assumed as a “subjective investment;”<sup>63</sup> a new direction was illustrated by the so-called “the Racial Middle Ages, or the New Crusade,” in which case, the period under scrutiny identifies “as a place to project current constructions of nationalism and race;”<sup>64</sup> there was also “the Queer Middle Ages;”<sup>65</sup> the new revolution of communication also influenced the view on the Middle Ages in the contemporary society, designating a “Digital Middle Ages;”<sup>66</sup> last but not least, the cultural transformations that occurred at the turn of the millennium brought forth a new generation with its own cultural characteristics, which led to the assertion of the “Millennial Middle Ages;”<sup>67</sup> resulted from the “medievalist fantasy” assimilated by this generation from the SF novels and movies. Through exhibitions and monographs, the last decade had outlined the analysis of medievalism’s manifestations of this nature. Other contributions tried to systematise and reflect on these directions by editing collective volumes, as is the case of the work entitled *Whose Middle Ages?* (2019), a volume coordinated by a series of historians affiliated with Fordham University in New York.<sup>68</sup>

The neo/medievalism phenomenon can also be felt in the Romanian cultural sphere from the last several decades, despite the fact that the approaches in this respect do not use the concept in itself, nor do they pretend to ingrate into such a historiographic movement. In the case of the Romanian culture, the antecedents of such an approach can be found in the studies conducted by literary historians. They traced the origins and dissemination of certain literary themes (Lucreția Cartoian<sup>69</sup>) or the

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<sup>63</sup> Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (eds.), *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Michelle Warren, *Creole Medievalism: Colonial France and Joseph Bédier’s Middle Ages* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Zrinka Stahuljak, *Pornographic Archaeology: Medicine, Medievalism, and the Invention of the French Nation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Patrick J. Geary and Gábor Klaniczay (eds.), *Manufacturing the Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013).

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Tison Pugh, *Queer Chivalry: Medievalism and the Myth of White Masculinity in Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Lynn T. Ramey and Tison Pugh (eds.), *Race, Class, and Gender in “Medieval” Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); L. D’Arcens, A. Lynch, *International medievalism and popular culture* (New York: Cambria Press, 2014).

<sup>67</sup> Daniel T. Kline, *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages* (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Albin, Mary C. Erler, Thomas O’Donnell, Nicholas L. Paul, Nina Rowe (eds.), *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

<sup>69</sup> See Lucreția Cartoian, “Legenda ‘Mama lui Ștefan cel Mare’,” *Cercetări literare V* (1943): 65-95.



representations of the lords from the Middle Ages in the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Tudor Vianu<sup>70</sup>).

These contributions are rather studies on the historical culture within the Romanian space (Andi Mihalache<sup>71</sup>), studies that circumscribe the Romanian national version of using and abusing history, from the historiographic discourse (Lucian Boia<sup>72</sup>) to the ideological-political propaganda (Mihaela Grancea<sup>73</sup>, Ionuț Costea, Virgiliu Țărău<sup>74</sup>) and imagology (Alexandru Duțu<sup>75</sup>, Cristina Bogdan<sup>76</sup>, Ana Maria Ștefan<sup>77</sup>, Mihaela Grancea<sup>78</sup>), or works in historical biography (Ionuț Costea<sup>79</sup>).

### 3. Medievalism: Field of Study or Anti-Field of Study?

The past decade has shown a new scope for medievalism. The number of attempts to define the research field, the directions and characteristic research methods have increased. In the absence of a unique scrutiny, with respect to the field of aforementioned issues, these debates became more visible, placed within prestigious academic and cultural spheres. Thus, Louise D'Arcens, in her introduction to the anthology published in 2016, noted the tendency to outline two movements within medievalism, namely "a medievalism based on the found Middle Ages and a medievalism based on the made Middle Ages."<sup>80</sup> The former refers to the "contact and interpretation" of the material medieval traces that were preserved in a post-medieval period; the latter includes "texts, objects,

<sup>70</sup> Tudor Vianu, "Ștefan cel Mare în literatură," in *Studii de literatură română* (Bucharest: Ed. didactică și Pedagogică, 1965), 610-625.

<sup>71</sup> Andi Mihalache, Mănuși albe, mănuși negre. Cultul eroilor în vremea Dinastiei Hohenzollern (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2007), see the approach to the Middle Ages in the studies entitled Ștefan cel Mare în cultura istorică a începutului de secol XX, 71-123 and Mihai Viteazul și ceremoniile corpului absent, 200-232.

<sup>72</sup> Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1997).

<sup>73</sup> Mihaela Grancea, "Filmul istoric românesc în proiectul construcției "națiunii socialiste": 1965-1989," *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* 6, 3 (2006): 683-709.

<sup>74</sup> Ionuț Costea, Virgiliu Țărău, "Matthias Corvinus Statue - Political propaganda. Past and Present," *ISHA Journal*, 4, Mainz, 1996.

<sup>75</sup> Alexandru Duțu, *Călătorii, imagini, constante* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1985).

<sup>76</sup> Cristina Bogdan, "O temă medievală recuperată de epoca romantică: dansurile macabre," in Andi Mihalache, Alexandru Istrate (eds.), *Romantism și modernitate. Atitudini, reevaluări, polemici* (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2009), 239-256.

<sup>77</sup> Ana Maria Ștefan, "O ipostază a alterității în drama istorică românească: претенții la coroană," in *ibid.*, 257-268.

<sup>78</sup> Mihaela Grancea, "Haiducul și tâlharul - o dilemă culturală? Schiță de imagologie istorică și literatură comparată," in *ibid.*, 507-543.

<sup>79</sup> Ionuț Costea, *Biografie și istorie: Pinteza Viteazul, reprezentări culturale, în vol. Societate. Cultură. Biserică. Studii de istorie medievală și modernă* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2014), 329-350.

<sup>80</sup> D'Arcens, "Introduction," 2.

performances and practices that are not only post-medieval in provenance, but are also imaginary representations of ideas about the medieval, as concepts rather than as historical categories.”<sup>81</sup> In connection with this second category of the imagined Middle Ages, the concept of neo-medievalism (New Medievalism) arose. Louise D’Arcens, in turn, considers that such a distinction is complicated and ambiguous and, as such, evaluating the approaches to medievalism in the sense outlined by the two movements would be almost impossible.

A resuscitation of the term neo-medievalism also emerged in the area of the international relations studies. The interpretation is connected to the cultural ambiance of the Cold War and its consequences at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The theory of modernisation, in this sense, is an ideological construct meant to prove the supremacy of the neo-liberal western civilisation over the development of the countries from the soviet bloc. Thus, the Middle Ages were considered, from an economic, industrial and intellectual perspective, a “fountain of modernisation” and that “the very theory of modernization is part of the medieval European heritage.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, Bruce Holsinger concluded that “modernization theory is the medievalization of theory.”<sup>83</sup>

In this situation, if the nation state, on an ideological level, represented a creation of medievalism, its dissolution at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be associated with a new ideology, namely that of neo-medievalism: “sovereignty became more fluid. More and more states share power and authority with subnational units (like the old vassalage), with supranational political entities (like the Holy German Empire), and powerful non-governmental forces (analogous to the Roman Catholic Church).”<sup>84</sup> The new political project debated by the politological literature at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century linked itself with the Middle Ages from the viewpoint of the similarities and analogies. Therefore, the prefix “neo” was justified “by the historical analogy”, the future being foreseen as “the new Middle Ages.” From the viewpoint of political theory, neomedievalism refers to the non-statal and transnational political actors who define “the emerging environment of globalization.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce Holsinger, “Neomedievalism and International Relations,” in Louise D’Arcens (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 171. For the relation between politology, political practice and neomedievalism, see Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *Medioevo Militante: La politica di oggi alla prese con barbari e crociati* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011).

<sup>83</sup> Holsinger, “Neomedievalism...,” 171.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 165, 171-173.

Neomedievalism, as opposed to medievalism, is a creation of the 1990s and it emerged through the terminology promoted by the journals *Romantic Review* (1988) and *Speculum* (1991).<sup>86</sup> William D. Paden, one of the supporters of this terminology, connected neomedievalism, “an unstable subatomic particle,” with the outlet of postmodernism (“neomedievalism is the postmodern medievalism”). The theoretical basis is given by the postmodern thought defined by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, in association with the features of this movement, namely eclecticism, anachronism, pastiche, subjectivism, indeterminism, emphasised by Jean-Francois Lyotard’s “postmodern condition.”<sup>87</sup>

In fact, in the proximity of the French literary studies department, and the studies dedicated to Romance languages and literatures at Yale University, the so-called neomedievalism movement emerged. Both W. D. Paden and R. Howard Bloch taught old French and Italian literature at the aforementioned institution. They also proved to be the supporters of neomedievalism as a movement. The attempt to establish neomedievalism in association with “New Historicism,” “New Philology,” but especially with the postmodern representations in contemporary culture, has sparked a series of controversies. These controversies were illustrated by the polemic interventions that came in the form of the reviews for the book on neomedievalism, published in 1996 and edited by R. Howard Bloch and Stephan G. Nichols.<sup>88</sup> The polemic reviews belonged to historians Leslie Workman and Richard Utz, published in the journals *Arthuriana*<sup>89</sup> (1997) and *The Medieval Review*<sup>90</sup> (1998). As the reviewers noted, the book under scrutiny was not devoid of merits, it “it contained, Utz noted, a good number of fine essays and offered original insight.”<sup>91</sup> Concurrently, it was at fault for “the exclusion of much existing research, a somewhat nonchalant approach to terminology, and various formal lacunae show dark clouds on the bright horizon of expectations the editors’ introduction attempts to paint.”<sup>92</sup> The omission of a period of almost three decades of studies on medievalism, the side-lining of the contribution to the consecration of the field by a few historians, its institutionalization, and the attempt to present a

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<sup>86</sup> Williams D. Paden, “‘New Medievalism’ and ‘Medievalism’...,” 231.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-233.

<sup>88</sup> R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (eds.), *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University, 1996).

<sup>89</sup> Leslie Workman, in *Arthuriana* 7, 1 (1997): 161-163; Utz, 159-160.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Utz, “Bloch, Medievalism and the Modernist Temper,” *The Medieval Review* (1998): <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/14577/20695>, (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

novel approach in the form of neomedievalism has stirred a wave of “outrage” among historians orbiting around the *Studies in Medievalism* journal. According to them, the use of the term *neomedievalism* was not only inappropriate, but also confused and wrong. As a result of the mimetic tendency from philology, divided into the old and new philology, it actually demonstrated a misunderstanding of the concept of “new philology.” As Utz notes, while “the old philology” focused on the studying the literature of the classical antiquity, the “new philology” approached the horizon of the modern, vernacular languages and literatures. The use of the concept of “new philology” in the journal *Speculum* referred to “the current issues in literary studies.” Truthfully, for all philologists, as Utz pointed out, “The New Philology marks the new territories conquered, compared to the earlier ones, by the old philology with a preoccupation with classical languages and literature, from the second half of the 19th century.”<sup>93</sup>

In his turn, Leslie Workman attacked the terminological ambiguity and noted the similarity between medievalism and the new research field proposed by Bloch and Nichols, neomedievalism. He emphasised that the explanations offered by the two scholars regarding medievalism had nothing to do with the meanings outlined by the dictionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was more a matter of the term having been borrowed from a mistranslation of the French word *medievalisme* into the English *medievalism*. He wrote that “the English term medievalism never referred to medieval studies.”<sup>94</sup> From Workman’s viewpoint, the name of the research field was not the only issue, given that so was its contents, as defined by Bloch and Nichols. In the two scholars’ opinion, neomedievalism placed “historical context the cultural proximity of the studies about the Middle Ages as they were practiced starting from the middle of the 18th century ... From these positions we imagine a history of medievalism that aims at the different ways of exploration by which medieval studies were determined due to specific ideologies or local, national, religious, political or personal interests.”<sup>95</sup> To Workman, this way of defining the preoccupations of neomedievalism seemed superfluous, given that medievalism had already assumed this programme. With irony, the American historian stated: “sorry to rob Bloch and Nichols of their innocent pleasure in reinventing the wheel.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Leslie Workman, in *Arthuriana*, 161. The terminological clarification is connected to Bloch and Nichols’ statement that “the term new medievalism denotes a revisionist trend in romantic medieval studies ... a disposition to interrogate and reformulate assumptions about the broader conception of medieval studies.”

<sup>95</sup> Bloch, Nichols, 162.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Leslie Workman criticised the book's structure, which had been meant to assume the definition of an original field of study ("The Founders of the discipline", "Continuators" etc.). In Workman's opinion, this structure was in contradiction not only with the existence of an institutionalised field of study, but also with the authors' own statements that noted the existence of "emergence of medieval studies and modernism in France in the 1860s."<sup>97</sup> The American historian deemed this judgement as outright "absurd." He emphasised: "One thing must be made clear at the outset: the English term *medievalism* never meant *medieval studies*."<sup>98</sup>

The issue, in essence, was one of terminological incoherence and ambiguity, as well as defining the boundaries of medievalism as a field of study. Medievalism already had its own status as a research field. Richard A. Marsden noted the integration of medievalism studies into the spectrum of contemporary culture, its inclusion in university programs engaged in a dynamic that compares it to literary studies. Thus, medievalism initially embraced an elite culture, after which it encompassed expressions from the spectrum of popular culture, and, to an increasingly greater extent, it became associated with cultural studies.<sup>99</sup>

Over the last decade, more and more historians have pointed out this direction in which the studies on medievalism have developed, namely that of becoming a form of transdisciplinary research. David Matthews, in his turn, noted "a clear affinity between medieval studies and cultural studies."<sup>100</sup> For Matthews, the affinity for cultural studies had two causes. The first would be the cultural ambiance of the 1960s and 1970s – the moment the studies on medievalism emerged, as well as the manifestation period for the counter-cultures that showed somewhat of an attachment to "the romantic Middle Ages" and the representation of the

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<sup>97</sup> Leslie Workman, in *Arthuriana*, 161.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Richard Marsden, "Medievalism: New discipline or scholarly no-man's land?" *History Compass*. 16. e12439. 10.1111/hic3.12439 (Accessed in November 2022): This broadening of research topics by medievalism was understood as a "sign of its vitality ... although it originally encompassed the artistic and literary manifestations of scholarly culture, scholars of medievalism are claiming a wider territory for themselves, from film, TV and electronic games, from fan fiction, role-playing games and historical reenactment, to social theory, theology and the use of medieval motifs in politics and polemics. Thus, medievalism studies transcends the existing frontiers of the discipline. It is an arena where research in art, history, literature, music, religion, political science and sociology are brought together, bringing with them methods and approaches associated with each discipline..."

<sup>100</sup> Matthews, *Medievalism*, 177. The approach to cultural studies of medievalism was formulated in 2007 by Eişeen Joy, Myra Seaman, Kimberly K. Bell, and Mary K. Ramsey, the editors of the volume *Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007; it was also approached by Ute Berns and Andrew James Johnston in the study entitled "Medievalism: A Very Short Introduction," *European Journal of English Studies* 15 (2011): 97–100.

“communitarian, pastoral and anti-industrial” Middle Ages. The approach to this historical period, namely that of the Middle Ages, generated a “form of nostalgia,” specific not only to Great Britain, but also to Central Europe. Secondly, regarding the meeting point between the Middle Ages and the counter-culture of the ‘60s and ‘70s, Matthews noted the outlines of a new critical examination with respect to medieval studies: the interference with gender studies, the rehabilitation of lower social classes, as specific issues within cultural studies.<sup>101</sup>

In actuality, the terminological controversy *medievalism vs. neomedievalism* and the relation with medieval studies showed the ambiguity and fluidity of the delineations with respect to the statute of studies on medievalism per se. D. Matthews thus brought forth the definition of medievalism formulated by L. Workman, “the founding father”, and the means by which he had explained the relation with medieval studies. If we were to understand medievalism as “a continuous process” of reinterpreting the Middle Ages across the post-medieval periods, then medieval studies, the historiographic research on the Middle Ages, should also be encompassed in the area of medievalism. Moreover, chronologically, medievalism implies a manifestation that took place prior to medieval studies, given that the performance at the level of amateurs and dilettantes preceded the engagement of professionals, of academic historians.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, medievalism’s detachment from medieval studies, from the perspective proposed by Workman, no longer appears as clear and firm. Naturally, Workman’s position on the relation between medieval studies and medievalism changed over time, as Matthews also admits. Leslie Workman, once he had renounced the firm distinction between the two research fields, advanced the idea of placing medieval studies within the broader spectrum of medievalism, as a form of studying the Middle Ages that was institutionalised in the academic environment, developed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In D. Matthews’ opinion, other criteria would make a difference, if a separation were to be made between the two research directions. To him, medievalism is nothing more than “a modern judgement, based on a retrospective understanding of their relative positions.”<sup>103</sup> The separation criteria are connected with the nature of the process of depicting the Middle Ages: while some researchers opted to “discover the Middle Ages,” others “invented their Middle Ages.”<sup>104</sup> These options separate

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<sup>101</sup> Matthews, *Medievalism*, 177-178.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-172.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

“the good medieval studies from the bad,” medievalism being “the bad,” from what he regarded as the *dissecta membra* of medieval studies (he also uses the concept of “residual medievalism”<sup>105</sup>). However, even this separation seems “illusory,” since the criteria based on which such a distinction can be made are unstable: “only the occult ideological criterion separates the sheep of medieval studies from the geese of medievalism.”<sup>106</sup> More recently, D. Matthews, using the ideological criterion, highlighted the emergence, within 19<sup>th</sup>-century British medievalism, in contrast to elite and middle-class medievalism, of the so-called “subaltern medievalisms,”<sup>107</sup> forms of medievalism embraced by the working class, socialists, the radical movement, and the feminist movement.

D. Matthews also showed that, from the viewpoint assumed by the researchers who had chosen to study the Middle Ages, matters were equally confusing. The proposed demonstration is based on the discussion around two examples, namely two books that detail biographies of medievalists. The first is the book authored by Normal Cantor,<sup>108</sup> characterised

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<sup>105</sup> “Residual medievalism,” in Matthews’ understanding, was a form taken by medievalism in the contemporary popular culture. This type of medievalism distances itself from the dominant, “central” position held within the culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and transforms into a cultural substrate, into a set of cultural references or into an implicit presence, thus taking a “residual” form. The criterion that separates the two forms of medievalism would be their placement within the broader cultural project of an epoch, as either a “central” theme or a “residual” theme (see D. Matthews, *Medievalism*, 19). However, Andrew Elliott (Andrew B.R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media. Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-first Century*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2017) uses the expression “banal medievalism”, borrowed from the concept of “banal nationalism” used by Michael Billig (Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, London: Sage, 1995). “Banal medievalism” refers to the presence of medieval themes in everyday life, like an “endemic condition” that “most often goes unnoticed” (A. Elliott, *Medievalism*, 17). In other words, “banal medievalism” it does not attach itself “to the past, but to the absence of the past, its power of persuasion deriving not from historicity and representation, but from repeated retransmission by means of the mass media - which is possible only when the medieval reference has been replaced” (Ibid., 19). This form taken by medievalism is distinctive from the ideological-political, intentional, militant form. The “banal medievalism” could overlap the “residual medievalism” in its hypostasis of an implicit presence. However, these typologies are based on different criteria (*central vs. marginal*, for D. Matthews, and *intentional vs. unintentional*, for A. Elliott). A precise delineation between these forms of medievalism is complex and difficult to obtain - even circumstantial and idiosyncratic. From this viewpoint, namely that of the intentionality of approaching medieval themes, Marisa Galvez brought forth the concept of “unthought medievalism”, as a “performative and phenomenological” form of medievalism. See Marisa Galvez, “Unthought Medievalism,” *Neophilologus*, 105 (2021): 365-389. Similarly, from the viewpoint of the contemporary social practices, there is a distinction between a “participatory medievalism” and an “experimental medievalism,” see D. T. Kline, “Participatory Medievalism, Digital Gaming, and Role Playing,” *Companion*, 75-84.

<sup>106</sup> Matthews, *Medievalism*, 173.

<sup>107</sup> D. Matthews, M. Sanders, *Subaltern Medievalisms: Medievalism “from below” in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2021).

<sup>108</sup> Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*.

as “a tabloid approach to academic medievalism” and which pointed out that “when medieval studies are contaminated by ideology, they become medievalism.”<sup>109</sup> The second is the work of Helene Damico,<sup>110</sup> a book that presents a series of “unspeculative, «objective»” biographies that recover, for medieval studies, a series of historians from the horizon of medievalism, where N. Cantor had initially placed them.<sup>111</sup>

D. Matthew’s conclusion emphasises, on the one hand, that “the attempt to differentiate medieval studies from medievalism is compromised from the start”<sup>112</sup> and, on the other hand, “rather than recognizing [medievalism] as a new and separate discipline, it is simply part of medieval studies – an inseparable part of it.”<sup>113</sup> As opposed to Workman’s revised viewpoint and to Utz’s opinion that medievalism and medieval studies belong to the same phenomenon in which medievalism precedes and includes medieval studies, Matthews reversed this relation. To him, medieval studies are predominant, while medievalism, particularly after the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, plays a marginal or residual role in the grander common phenomenon. The different stances taken by the three historians were not without echo. Between R. Utz and D. Matthews a small polemic took place.<sup>114</sup> R. Utz criticised D. Matthews’ attempt to subordinate medievalism studies to medieval studies, emphasising that “medieval studies at the academic level is in no way epistemologically superior to other modes of reinvention”<sup>115</sup> of the Middle Ages. However, R. Utz acknowledged medievalism’s status as an “anti-discipline (undiscipline) which (like cultural studies) blows up existing canons, reintegrates excluded voices, but remains in the stage of productive uncertainty regarding the boundaries of the discipline.”<sup>116</sup>

Medieval studies’ attempt to defend their own territory seemed to turn into a fratricidal war. However, the detachment “bomb” had not yet been primed, in the post-postmodernist environment of neomedievalism. The group of researchers at Yale formed around R. Howard Bloch and

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>110</sup> Helen Damico, Joseph B. Zavadil (eds.), *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies in the Formation of a Discipline* (New York and London: Garland, 1995).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>114</sup> R. Utz, “Medievalism: A Critical History: A Response,” *Práticas da História. Journal on Theory, Historiography and Uses of the Past* 3 (2016): 155-161; David Matthews, “Putting on the Armour: A Response to Richard Utz,” *Práticas da História* 4 (2017): 237-243.

<sup>115</sup> R. Utz, “Medievalism is a Global Phenomennon: Including Russia,” *The Year’s Working in Medievalism*, 32 (2017): [https://www.academia.edu/36545977/Medievalism\\_is\\_a\\_Global\\_Phenomenon\\_Including\\_Russia\\_The\\_Years\\_Work\\_in\\_Medievalism\\_32\\_2017\\_](https://www.academia.edu/36545977/Medievalism_is_a_Global_Phenomenon_Including_Russia_The_Years_Work_in_Medievalism_32_2017_) (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>116</sup> Utz, *Medievalism*, 85.



Stephen Nicholas maintained their viewpoint, despite the aforementioned reviews. In 2014, they edited a new volume and, just as they did in the previous volume, they used the term neomedievalism for the particular means of representing medieval studies in the context of the “communication revolution.” Bloch considered the significance of the new direction in the sense of a *renovatio*, of a renewal in the field of medieval studies.<sup>117</sup> Nichols, in his turn, advocated for placing medieval studies on a return to the original sources, the medieval texts and manuscripts, and exploiting the relationship between medieval studies and new communication technology, a transition “from analog to digital research.”<sup>118</sup> The terminological ambiguity introduced and maintained over time was further complicated by the adoption of the phrase in the early 2000s and its placement in the extension of medievalism proper. In fact, in 2002, an electronic platform led by Carl L. Robinson entitled MEMO (Medieval Electronic Multimedia Organization) was launched.<sup>119</sup> Despite the group having initially asserted themselves in the electronic environment, they returned to the “print culture,” beginning with 2012, by publishing several collections of studies under the title *Neomedievalism in the Media: Essays on Film, Television and Electronic Games*.<sup>120</sup> The collection of studies was preceded by a broad historiographical debate hosted by the journal *Studies in Medievalism*. Carol L. Robinson, together with Pamela Clements, outlined the principles of neomedievalism in the aforementioned publication.<sup>121</sup> They assumed the tradition of the studies on medievalism of the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but emphasised the fact that despite neomedievalism “it is a form of medievalism, it implies a philosophical and technological mutation.”<sup>122</sup> Neomedievalism

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<sup>117</sup> R. Howard Bloch, “The New Philology Comes of Age,” in R. Howard Bloch, Alison Calhoun, Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, Joachim Kuepper, Jeanette Patterson, *Rethinking the New Medievalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 1-2.

<sup>118</sup> Stephen G. Nichols, “New Challenges for the New Medievalism,” in R. Howard Bloch, Alison Calhoun, Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, Joachim Kuepper, Jeanette Patterson, *Rethinking the New Medievalism*, 12.

<sup>119</sup> Carol L. Robinson, <http://medievalelectronicmultimedia.org/definitions.html>, (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>120</sup> Carol L. Robertson, Pamela Clements (eds.), *Neomedievalism in the Media: Essays on Film, Television and Electronic Games* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2012).

<sup>121</sup> Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements, “Living with Neomedievalism,” *Studies in Medievalism* 18 (2009): 55-75: “neomedievalism is a post-postmodern ideology (...) that draws its sap from French theorists and other postmodern thinkers (including Eco) ... For better or worse, neomedievalism starts from the European Middle Ages, but also from its non-European sources (such as the Japanese one). Unlike postmodernism, it does not refer to the Middle Ages in order to use, study, reproduce it; the perception of the Middle Ages is filtered, as a perception of perception (and distorted) without any connection to facts and reality... This lack of attention to historical accuracy is not like that of traditional fantasy literature, the difference lies in the degree of self-awareness and self-reflexivity. It is not the same as that found in medievalism.”

<sup>122</sup> Amy S. Kaufman, “Medieval Unmoored,” *Studies in Medievalism* XIX (2010): 2.

asserts its independence from both medievalism and the “postmodern condition.” How can one characterise this independence?<sup>123</sup> Firstly, by focusing on the epistemological issues, by embracing the investigation of virtual reality that reproduces “traces” or medieval themes, dominated by a vision anchored in relativism, deconstructivism, and fragmentarism, it becomes a form of “representation of representation.” The electronic environment was presented as a “third space” that contains objects, characters, medieval legends or legends merely imagined as medieval, selected and intermixed so as to construct a different fantasy universe – a “new history” and a “new meaning”, as a space that defines different identities. Through these practices, neomedievalism is more detached and independent from the Middle Ages and it lacks nostalgia, which leads to a conscious denunciation of history (a negation of history) by inventing a new, fantasy one. Moreover, neomedievalism established a contemporary moral ethics by promoting a dichotomous, simplistic vision, such as the confrontation between good and evil. Despite emphasising all of these aspects, neomedievalism essentially covers “a substantial number of specific cultural manifestations ... from political ones, to literature and digital media.”<sup>124</sup> Fundamentally, neomedievalism was not far from the objectives of medievalism and, according to U. Eco’s judgement (from whom it claimed its title), it was rather an “eleventh medieval period,” as a means of representing the Middle Ages in the contemporary culture and society, or as “part of the medievalisms,” in A. T. Shippey’s words.

If by 2010 there was a certain reluctance towards using the concept of neomedievalism,<sup>125</sup> the subsequent attitude has been rather conciliatory. R. Utz admitted that, on a terminological level, “current usage is under negotiation”<sup>126</sup>. Moreover, in 2012, R. Utz agreed to write

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<sup>123</sup> See Lesly Coote, “A Short Essay about Neomedievalism,” *Studies in Medievalism* XIX (2010): 25-33 and Cory Lowell Grewell, “Neomedievalism: An Eleventh Little Middle Ages,” *Studies in Medievalism* XIX (2010): 34-43.

<sup>124</sup> Grewell, 35.

<sup>125</sup> Kathleen Verduin, “The Founding and the Founder,” *Studies in Medievalism* 17 (2009): 23-24; Tom Shippey, “Medievalisms and Why They Matter,” *Studies in Medievalism* 17 (2009): 45-54; Nils Holger Peterson, “Medievalism and Medieval Receptin: A Terminological Question,” *Studies in Medievalism* 17 (2009): 36-44.

<sup>126</sup> R. Utz, “Medievalism is a Global Phenomennon: Including Russia,” *The Year’s Working in Medievalism* 32 (2017): [https://www.academia.edu/36545977/Medievalism\\_is\\_a\\_Global\\_Phenomenon\\_Including\\_Russia\\_The\\_Years\\_Work\\_in\\_Medievalism\\_32\\_2017\\_](https://www.academia.edu/36545977/Medievalism_is_a_Global_Phenomenon_Including_Russia_The_Years_Work_in_Medievalism_32_2017_) (Accessed in November 2022): “... among the works on the reception of medieval culture in the post-medieval periods, I believe that a major paradigm shift has occurred, requiring that this reception be named with the term «neomedievalism». Researchers who adhere to this terminology consider that, while early medievalisms attempted a relationship directly with the “real” Middle Ages and made an effort to represent it as an authentic image of the past, as much as possible and necessary, many recent representations, especially those that employ computer technology, are counted as «Neo».”

the preface of the book on neomedievalism, edited by Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements.

Additionally, recent historiographic contributions, such as the collective volume edited by the French School in Rome following the congress held in 2018 in the capital of Italy, used the expression “a vast phenomenon currently” to define medievalism as an “object of historical investigation.” The phenomenon of medievalism brought together “different disciplines and social practices,” which is why the historiographic approach was “comparative, intertextual, and *croisé*.” Multidisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity defined an “broad forum of new scholarship on the perceptions, uses, abuses of the Middle Ages in the last half millennium.”<sup>127</sup>

### **Closing remarks**

As early as the final quarter of the last century, contemporary historiography was already drawing attention to the shaping of representations of the Middle Ages. This shaping was driven, among other things, by the emergence of modern historiography under the banner of nation-states. Later, the emphasis was also put on how some representations were ideologised due to the attachment to liberal ideology, a representation that adopted a view on the Middle Ages elaborated during the Renaissance. The Middle Ages were seen as a dark period, a time when individual freedom was limited to privileged groups. This perspective contrasted with the representation of the modern era as a liberation of the individual, with modernity being associated with human emancipation.

The exploration of the Middle Ages from the viewpoint of national mythologies became a commonplace. An increasing number of volumes, studies, articles, and conferences were dedicated to various national spaces or regions in Europe. These efforts highlighted the approach to the Middle Ages as a legitimization of national identity or as an era from which representative figures of the national pantheon were selected: “medievalism had a consolidating role in asserting national languages and state logic and national constructions in the post-medieval period, from the early modern era to the 20th century.”<sup>128</sup>

These contemporary approaches to the Middle Ages are part of the historiographic revisionism movement, on one hand, and the advocacy for the project of global historical narrative, on the other hand. As a consequence, David Perry, a professor of medieval history at a university in the United States, stated in radical terms that the Middle Ages never existed and continue to not exist today. According to his opinion, this notion has always

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<sup>127</sup> Tommaso di Carpagna Falconieri, Pierre Savy, Lila Yawn (eds.), *Middle Ages without borders*, 3.

<sup>128</sup> Holsinger, “Neomedievalism and international relations,” in *Companion*, 166.

been a fiction.<sup>129</sup> The justification for this radical statement is of a general nature, in the sense that “all epochs are fictions,” and that it corresponds to an intellectual practice of “retrospectively applying” a series of criteria when “visiting the past,” delineating limited periods with their help in order to “make sense of the flow of time.” Therefore, these periods only exist in “our cultural imagination.” David Perry also believes that there is nothing dangerous in this “manufacturing” of historical periods, and the danger only arises when we tend to objectify this fiction.<sup>130</sup>

However, in terms of cultural representation, the Middle Ages “have undoubtedly existed” since the Renaissance, when this concept came into being, until today. Everything became even more complicated as the understanding and approach to the Middle Ages were circumscribed by a reference to both “history and the present.” The approach to the historical essence of being, the fact that humans cannot exist outside of history, the adaptation to the postmodern condition, and perhaps precisely the backlash against the attempt to undermine metanarratives have led to the affirmation of an inertia that prevents the past from losing its “fascination,” and to our being unable to completely detach ourselves from the past.<sup>131</sup> Beginning from the general characteristics, medievalism shaped its research area in the proximity of the major movements of contemporary social thought – namely the feminist movement, the negation of eurocentrism, the fear of foreigners, the cultural construct of the enemy in the wake of religious and racial alterity (Jews, Muslims, African Americans etc.), the decolonisation phenomena, contemporary migration and many more – that updated specific and particular models in the cultural representation of the Middle Ages within the framework of contemporary society.

Medievalism studies were institutionalised in the 1970s through the efforts made by Leslie Workman, but a series of precedents from the previous years were invoked, namely the ones that presumably paved the way ahead of this research area. The precedents were set by the research endeavours in the field of literary history (A. Chandler, Janine, Dakyns), the history of ideas and ideologies (Gossman, Voss), as well as the history of art and architecture. A recent study assessed Leslie Workman’s role as an attempt to unite, into a single field, the different preoccupations that emerged over time regarding “the re-use of the Middle Ages in all historical periods ... as research material for a single discipline.”<sup>132</sup> Initially, researchers defined medievalism as “re-use of medieval motifs, themes, genres and

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<sup>129</sup> David Perry, “Introduction,” in Andrew Albin, Mary C. Erler, Thomas O’Donnell, Nicholas L. Paul, Nina Rowe (eds.), *Whose Middle Ages?*, 1.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-7.

<sup>131</sup> Cetiner-Oktem, 43.

<sup>132</sup> Matthews, *Medievalism*, 8.

topos in post-medieval culture in architecture, art, social and political theory, novels plays, poetry, film."<sup>133</sup> Subsequently, other modern popular culture spaces (tourism) and new forms of communication (the internet – video games) were included.<sup>134</sup> This dynamic of studies in the field of medievalism over half a century, the period from 1970 to the present, describes an upward trajectory, integrating into the “academic citadel.” At first, medievalism research appeared as marginal within the academic environment (conducted by researchers with an academic background, presented at conferences and academic colloquia); in a second stage, during the 1990s, it became institutionalised, creating its own journals and collections at prestigious academic publishers; in a third stage, after 2010, we witnessed the maturation of medievalism and its integration into academic programs as a university discipline or sub-discipline (in the USA, the UK, Australia).<sup>135</sup> From a theoretical, thematic, and methodological perspective, the evolution of medievalism has been presented as a succession of three periods: “modernist medievalism,” understood as the fictional representation of medieval themes within modern culture; “postmodernist medievalism,” characterised by fragmentation and fictional representations striving to reproduce original medieval themes; and “neomedievalism,” in which the medieval is integrated into fiction to construct an “alternative reality.”<sup>136</sup>

Although medievalism may appear to be initially a product of North American cultural space, one should not overlook the contributions of German and French historiography. Furthermore, the fact that their efforts were synchronised must not be overlooked. In the years that followed, British and Australian historiographies also joined this trend. The synchrony between American, German, and French historiographies could be a sign that the field of medieval studies, the “parent discipline,” in these historiographical cultures was going through a period of crisis or decline at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>137</sup> In this sense, the expansion of medievalism can also be seen as a re-signification of medieval studies for the modern world, acting as a “secondary discipline” or a “meta-discipline.”<sup>138</sup>

Are medievalism studies a proper discipline? Richard A. Marsden found it “difficult to characterize medievalism studies as a discipline in

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> D’Arcens, “Introduction,” 1-2; Richard Marsden, “Medievalism: New discipline or scholarly no-man’s land?” *History Compass*. 16. e12439. 10.1111/hic3.12439; Matthews, *Medievalism*, 8.

<sup>136</sup> Carol L. Robinson, “Introduction,” 7, in Carol L. Robinson, Pamela Clements (eds.), *Neomedievalism in the Media: Essays on Film, Television and Electronic Games*. See also Carole M. Cusack, in *Parergon* 30, 1 (2013): 313-314.

<sup>137</sup> Matthews, *Medievalism*, 6-7.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

the traditional sense.” It represents an intellectual space of “confluence of perspectives and methodologies put together for the purpose of studying a particular phenomenon.”<sup>139</sup> These concerns were also pointed out by other researchers. R. Utz and E. Emery in 2014,<sup>140</sup> R. Utz, in his 2017 book, wrote about the lack of theoretical and methodological unity, characterising medievalism as an “anti-discipline ... that blows up the existing canons ... and remains in an uncertain stage about its own frontiers.”<sup>141</sup> David Matthews shared a similar conclusion. He considered medievalism studies as a “particular phenomenon” that lacked its own research methodology and precise affiliation (history, art history, literature?). In a way, Matthews suggested a characterization using Raphael Samuel’s formula as an “expansion of historical culture.” However, he also wondered if medievalism could encompass this general attitude, typical of modernity, toward the past.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Richard A. Marsden, “Medievalism: New discipline or scholarly no-man’s land?” *History Compass* 16. e12439. 10.1111/hic3.12439 (Accessed in November 2022).

<sup>140</sup> E. Emery, R. Utz, “Making medievalism, a critical overview,” in E. Emery, R. Utz (eds.), *Medievalism: Key critical terms* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), 8-10.

<sup>141</sup> R. Utz, *Medievalism: A Manifesto* (Kalamazoo: Arc Humanities Press, 2017), 85.

<sup>142</sup> Matthews, *Medievalism*, 9.