

Michael Rewa ed.

The Year's Work in Medievalism 1991.

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Reviewed by Richard H. Osberg

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Based on the Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Medievalism, October, 1991, at the University of Delaware, the twenty-five short essays that comprise this volume (ably edited by Michael Rewa) represent a lively sampler of the work possible under the aegis of medievalism. The volume also provides the abstracts for the sixty-four papers on the program of the conference, as well as one interview and one review (of M. D. Allen's *The Medievalism of Lawrence of Arabia*) not originally presented at the conference. As Leslie Workman notes in the "Foreword," *The Year's Work* was initially "intended to represent work in progress and so to stimulate further advance along the lines suggested." In the years intervening since 1991, medievalism has come into its own as a field with the publication of such general studies as John Simons, ed., *From Medieval to Medievalism* (St. Martin's, 1992), John Van Engen, ed., *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies* (Notre Dame, 1994), Howard R. Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols' *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper* (Johns Hopkins, 1996), and most recently Marie-Francoise Alamichel, ed., *The Middle Ages after the Middle Ages in the English-Speaking World* (Brewer, 1997). It is testimony to the vigor of medievalist scholarship, the varied and complex strands that comprise it, that a significant number of these essays remain interesting and insightful commentaries on medievalism from Colonial America to post-unification Germany. Although some essays are indeed preliminary in the sense intended (for instance, Eva Richter's "The Collapse of the Old and Hope of the New Order in Hein's *Knights of the Round Table*, which anticipates in some ways Joerg O. Fichte's "The End of Utopia: The Treatment of Arthur and His Court in Contemporary German Drama," [in *Mediaevalitas: Reading the Middle Ages*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Brewer, 1996) 153-69]), and others have clear lines of antecedence, (Bernard Rosenthal's essay on medievalism in the Salem Witch Trial confessions, for instance, owing something of its inception to Rosenthal and Szarmach, eds., *Medievalism in American Culture*, papers from the Eighteenth Annual Conference at Binghamton in 1989), many of the essays are sui generis.

Although the essays here collected retain for the most part the sketchiness attendant on their origin as conference papers, they have a concomitant immediacy and sense of exploration--they are reports from the field. The unavoidable delays attendant on publication aside, *The Year's Work* provides an overview of medievalism's reach and breadth--it is nearly impossible to provide a neat classification of subjects and methodologies, although a few significant disciplines are especially well represented. Of the twenty-five essays, for instance, five deal with music (developed from the session on "Medievalism and Music"

organized by Louis Auld and Lyrica, the Society for Word-Music Relations). These range from Frank Tirro's assertion that "the principle of successive composition based on a generative row [twentieth-century atonal composition] or color [thirteenth-century polyphony] is almost identical" (164) to William E. Grim's analysis of allusions to medieval music in Louis Zukofsky's modernist poem "A." Luise E. Peake's "The Minnesinger Songs in Romantic Musical Settings" provides a useful catalogue of principal nineteenth-century sources of German medieval song, and Louis Auld shows how the songs of George Brassens are indebted in various ways to medieval conceptions and conventions of the troubadour.

Also of considerable note in this volume is the presence of several papers from Japanese scholars, Toshiyuki Takamiya's very interesting essay on the novelist Soseki, whose *Kairo-ko* (1905) is the earliest and only serious prose work in Japanese on an Arthurian theme, and Chiaki Yokoyama's essay on Soetsu Yanagi, who fused the ideas of the early masters of the Way of Tea with those of John Ruskin and William Morris to found "Mingei" or Folkcrafts Movement, which elevated the status of handcrafted utensils to objects of aesthetic appreciation.

Medievalism in literature is well represented, with essays on Shakespeare's *Pericles*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Dante and Matthew Arnold, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers' quasi-mystery novel, *Gaudy Night*, and the novels of Colin Mackay. Of special interest at the moment because of the run of Brother Cadfael whodunits on Public Broadcasting System's Mystery program is Edwin Ernest Christian and Blake Lindsay's lengthy interview with Ellis Peters, whose conjuration of the Middle Ages attempts "to make the characters feel like the people next door" (242).

Art history too has a share in the collection. Nancy Chute, in "The Madonna and Child Image: Providing a Thematic Link between Medieval and Modern Sculpture in the 1950's," clarified for me a little fragment of my own past; everyday as an undergraduate I walked past in the student union a massive Jacques Lipchitz bronze of a mother and child--a piece I liked (as apparently did many others, for one knee of the otherwise verdigris finish was polished bright bronze with constant touching). Chute makes clear that the statue and our apparent appreciation of its maternal character was very much an expression of "the Marian Decade," in which Henry Moore, Jacques Lipchitz, and Hanns Swarzenski (curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) played pivotal roles. Equally compelling is Kymberly N. Pinder's "The Re-Presentation of the Gothic Interior and American Perceptions of the Medieval Past," which ranges authoritatively from the Gothic room at the Art Institute of Chicago (c. 1912) to the sets for *Citizen Kane*.

What is equally striking in this collection of essays, for all its eclecticism and disciplinary breadth, is the absence of what in some sense is the invaginating principle of medievalism--the Victorian Gothic Revival. The influence in Japan of Morris aside, one could read *The Year's Work* without discovering a single reference to the Gothic Revival, without understanding, in John D. Rosenberg's formulation, that "Morris is the most extreme instance, as Ruskin is the most influential, of the bond linking Romanticism to the Gothic Revival, and both to social reform" (*The Darkening Glass*, 1961). This is, of course, neither an oversight nor

a deliberate slight, but a reflection of the diverse and wandering paths that medievalism has taken in the last forty years. "Medievalism and medieval studies," Leslie Workman writes elsewhere, "might well be defined as the Middle Ages in the contemplation of contemporary society" ("Editorial I," *Studies in Medievalism*, 1995). The generousness of that view of the field is surely well represented in this fine collection of essays.

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REVIEWED BY: Richard H. Osberg

AFFILIATION: Santa Clara University

ADDRESS: Dept. of English, 500 El Camino Real, Santa Clara, CA 95053

E-MAIL: Rosberg@mailers.scu.edu

FAX: 408-554-4837

PHONE: 408-554-4934

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