
Editors' Introduction

What might a journal be?

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After more than a decade of publication, *postmedieval* has a new editorial team. As the fledgling Editors-in-Chief, we couldn't be more excited to continue the legacy of conceptual adventure, stylistic experiment, and political and ethical urgency that was so powerfully established by the previous editors (Eileen A. Joy, Myra Seaman, Lara Farina, and Holly A. Crocker) as well as by the many guest-editors, whose visions over the years transformed what a 'journal of medieval cultural studies' could be. During the last year, the three of us, together with our Managing Editor, Dr. Francesca Petrizzo, have assembled a new editorial board, built a digital platform (<http://tinyurl.com/postmedievaljournal>), called for submissions, negotiated the ethics of peer review, corresponded with authors, read brilliant articles-in-process, and tested new possibilities for scholarly encounter and expression.

In the midst of these tasks, we've also found ourselves reflecting on academic publishing. What is a scholarly journal for, and what can it bring about? How might inclusion and equity be best practiced by editors? How do the material conditions of *postmedieval* affect its identity—for instance, that it is owned by a



for-profit publishing conglomerate, with mostly paywalled content? How does the journal's basis in Anglo-American academia determine its remit? If the landmark publications of our disciplines have often served to replicate scholarly norms, to showcase skills stamped by the weight of authority and tradition, how can *postmedieval* remain an incubator for innovation and experimentation? Might *postmedieval* create a horizon against which flicker alternatives to what 'the medieval' means at present? We've posed these questions as we've met weekly on Zoom, as we've sent emails, as we've learned new publishing software, read submissions, thanked reviewers, line-edited, brainstormed, debated, sent more emails, and sought to imagine futures for the journal and for medieval studies. This introduction is an opportunity for us to be frank and transparent about our first months of work, while also gesturing toward the ideals that have fueled that work and emerged from it. It may strike some readers as 'in the weeds' of editorial business, but it is here in the weeds where we have been able to track the entwining of theory and practice.

We envision *postmedieval* fostering a space for collaborative and effervescent conversation, where, whatever the medieval is, it is not yet normed, not crystallized, singular, or stable. We are committed to dialogic and fractal perspectives on the Middle Ages, the premodern, and the nonmodern. That is, we see the journal as a forum to celebrate the always partial knowledge of the past made available in each new 'turn' and each refraction through the bodies of scholars who bear divergent experiences, skills, and identities. We encourage intellectual risk-taking and seek to make visible those evanescent moments on the precipice of new understanding, when we think intimately but out loud, when we allow the medieval to matter both politically and personally. We recognize that the academy has often failed to value such personal meditations and speculations about what our terms and sources mean. Scholarship has proved a hostile place for those who do not replicate its expectations, who do not mime its traditions or reproduce its status quo in body, word, ethics, or thought. By asking authors to work along the fraying seams of medieval studies, we seek to be accountable to a wider community than just medievalists—a collective of readers, researchers, students, theorists, artists, and activists assembled in and around the journal's pages. Here are some of the concrete steps we're taking to realize these commitments, as well as some of the factors of labor, cost, time, and access that have shaped our actions thus far.

One of our proudest achievements to this point has been convening a new editorial board for *postmedieval*. We are grateful to the members of the previous editorial board, who served steadily in that role for eleven years. Now the time has come for new leadership, and in inviting members, we've tried to shift the journal's center of gravity at least partly away from the English Middle Ages and from literary studies, to foreground other disciplines, language traditions, topics, and geographic locales, and the work of scholars from identity groups that have not heretofore been featured consistently in *postmedieval* or in other mainstream outlets for medieval



studies scholarship. We now have nineteen new board members, with another joining in January. These members are located in various countries and bring expertise in fields and languages including musicology, Byzantine studies, art history, the Hispanophone early modern, medievalism, religious history, Jewish studies, the environmental humanities, film studies, Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Japanese, French, medieval Ethiopia, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, premodern critical race studies, manuscript studies, and the digital humanities (see <https://sites.google.com/view/postmedieval/about/editorial-board>). We are especially grateful that two previous editors, Myra Seaman and Lara Farina, have agreed to bring their expertise and experience to the board as well. The members' willingness to join and their active leadership thus far have bolstered our optimistic sense that *postmedieval* remains significant to a broad community of readers, a community that can grow wider and more welcoming still.

The *postmedieval* board will have an active role in guiding the journal, even as we recognize the heavy service load that most board-members bear already. To that end, we have planned biannual virtual meetings to help set the future course of the journal. Board members are called on to review articles and proposals, suggest readers and contributors in their fields of expertise, and generally spread the word about *postmedieval* initiatives. We've already benefitted from members' insights as we've appraised proposals for special-issues and essay clusters. The standard duration of a term on the board will be three years, with the possibility of a one-term renewal—although we anticipate staggering the terms of current members (so that everyone doesn't rotate off at once). In the future, we will solicit nominations for new board members from the wider *postmedieval* community. Our aim is to create an institution of collective leadership that is dynamic and inclusive, to help guide the journal beyond the editors' quotidian work. The board should reflect not only the current readership of the journal but also the collaborators who will maintain it as a home for theoretically ambitious scholarship questioning the constitution of 'the medieval', and for inclusive and experimental publishing practices. To that end, we are also cultivating relationships with scholarly societies outside of the US, Canada, and the UK, in the hopes of attracting submissions from new authors and fostering new intellectual partnerships.

Forms and genres

Another initiative we have pursued since stepping into the role of Editors-in-Chief is developing an expanded range of scholarly genres. Our hope is that this will continue the work of reshaping received scholarly paradigms and will also help meet the needs of scholars working under varied labor conditions. Some of the genres we're soliciting are as follows:



Book-review Essays This genre has long been a feature of *postmedieval*. It's an opportunity to stage a state-of-the-field conversation and open that conversation to wider audiences. Book-review essays are usually around 6000 words and address three to five texts, all related to a specific theme or question. These texts can be, but don't have to be, monographs. Past reviewers have also considered essay collections, editions, translations, journal issues, novels, and other media documents. We expect these essays to summarize briefly the texts under review, to map out their intellectual contexts within ongoing conversations, and to evaluate the texts' individual contributions as well as the overall direction of current work. (We will help in obtaining review copies for all accepted proposals.)

Terms of art In this genre, an author introduces a specific term, some word or expression, from their field of study. The term could be drawn from a premodern archive, from the scholarly methods used to study the past, or from the modern reimagination of the Middle Ages; it could be jargon or slang; it could be an 'untranslatable.' Authors will define their term, situate it, riff on its significance, and suggest some of the interesting conceptual or methodological questions that the term could raise. We're envisioning mini-essays of around 2000 words, but we are open to longer pieces too.

Noted Documents Introduce and provide a brief edition, translation, or other presentation of a primary source within your field. The aim of this genre will be to make new sources, and their theoretical stakes, accessible to a wider readership. Accordingly, author-editors are invited to stage the source's conceptual and methodological relevance to a range of scholars working on different aspects of the medieval or premodern world.

Dialogues Two scholars share a conversation in print. These scholars might be bound together by relations of similarity (working on a similar topic or conceptual problem, traveling similar paths to becoming medievalists, etc.) or by differences (different fields, disciplines, academic generations, or institutions). One might be interviewing the other, or they might be mutually posing questions and responding. We hope the genre will be a chance for the back-and-forth of conversation to find its way into the pages of the journal.

Reports from the field This genre will be in some ways similar to a book-review essay, but it will focus on a recent conference, symposium, exhibition, or other event (virtual or in-person) that is of interest to the study of the Middle Ages, premodern world, or medievalism. Such a 'report' would describe the event for readers (including brief summaries of relevant talks or public dialogue); would contextualize the event within broader conversations (positioning it within the current 'state of the field' as well as broader trends in the humanistic or historical disciplines); and would evaluate the nature of the event's



contributions, less by judging the quality of particular papers than by articulating their most compelling aspects, their cumulative impact, any oversights or exclusions of the event, and new directions for future work. We anticipate ‘Reports from the Field’ being 3000 to 5000 words in length, though this is flexible. We plan to commission these pieces—so if you’d like to cover an upcoming event, or if you know of an event that *should* be covered, please reach out to us. Proposals for co-authored reports are welcome. Authors should not be directly involved with the organization or execution of the event.

If you have interest in writing a piece in any of these genres, please reach out to us at postmedievalED@gmail.com. We welcome proposals, which can be as simple as one or two paragraphs explaining the basic idea for the piece as well as its conceptual or cross-disciplinary interest for readers. The audience we aim for is quite heterogeneous, composed of scholars working on varied archives of premodernity, early-modernity, and medievalism. Accordingly, we encourage authors to explain specialized terminology and to articulate conceptual stakes with a diverse audience in mind.

Labor and values

In order to promote greater access to the intellectual work of the journal, we plan to showcase on social media and our blog (<https://sites.google.com/view/postmedieval/blog>) scholarship from the pages of *postmedieval* as well as more informal pieces. We are particularly inspired by the model of Dr. Erik Wade, who in February of 2021 created a massive Twitter thread rendering public, in summary form, the entire contents of *postmedieval* 11.4, ‘Race, Revulsion, and Revolution,’ edited by Mary Rambaran-Olm, M. Breann Leake, and Micah James Goodrich (see https://twitter.com/erik_kaars/status/1356930995501596673?s=20). Wade’s thread is a model of scholarly generosity, and it made the brilliant research, writing, and editing contained in the special issue available to a much wider readership, in spite of access restrictions on the publication itself.

Yet as we aspire to generate additional content for more accessible venues, we also confront limitations on our time and energy—not to mention the similar limitations faced by our authors and collaborators. Bringing a first issue to print and planning for the upcoming ones have occupied significant time, which the three of us have set aside from the schedules of full-time, securely employed academics. Such secure employment has become a privileged exception within humanistic and historical fields of study—an ugly fact of academic precarity that is everywhere palpable in medieval studies. Still, these privileged positions remain labor-intensive, and we have found it hard to know where more hours to develop freely accessible content will come from. Even the infrastructure for such content is difficult to secure. The *postmedieval* blog was built on a free-to-

use platform, in the hopes of being able to hand it off to future editors. But its interface and circulation are limited. When we published an interview with a Chinese scholar of Shakespeare, Yang Xiubo (see <https://sites.google.com/view/postmedieval/blog/yang>), we discovered that she could not even view the site in China. Looking up ‘postmedieval’ in any search-engine yields a handful of now-outdated pages accumulated over the last decade, reflecting editors’ efforts to share content beyond the paywall.

Even as we’ve been interested in fostering new genres in scholarly publishing and more public-facing and accessible venues, we have also reflected on the value of the peer-reviewed article. As we see it, the ideal article shapes knowledge into new argumentative positions, builds complex claims, and provides confident, fresh interpretations that are ballasted by engagement with existing scholarship. An article often bridges the gap between the acquisition of knowledge as a student and the deployment of that knowledge as an emerging scholar. How to bridge the gap may seem obvious to many *postmedieval* readers, but for others it is not. For scholars who come from backgrounds marginalized by Anglo-American academia, for those working at the edges of scholarly criticism, those navigating institutional structures without looked-for support, or those battling others’ unconscious and conscious biases—crossing this bridge is not only difficult; it can seem closed off. We are committed to helping newer scholars, or scholars whose backgrounds are ‘nontraditional’ (from the standpoint of normative academic prestige), to cross to peer-reviewed scholarship with support and encouragement. We take pride in the fact that across the last decade *postmedieval* has been invested in developing and showcasing the voices of early-career scholars. These early-career scholars have been guest-editors as well, with their visions shaping the path of the journal. This legacy is one we want to sustain. We encourage scholars at all stages of their careers, and in a variety of roles (including those working outside the academy) to submit their work.

Although the humanities are changing rapidly, a published peer-reviewed journal article remains a general marker of academic success. Articles matter especially for junior scholars transitioning out of a PhD into the ever-shrinking and absurdly competitive job market. They also matter in the metricized academic economies of promotion, evaluation, and the securing of grants and fellowships. Our awareness of this ‘mattering’ is one of the reasons we’ve shifted *postmedieval* to publishing one or more open-topic issues per year—because authors of open-topic articles are not required to tailor their work to specific themes, and pieces submitted for immediate peer-review often find their way to print more quickly. At the same time, the field-changing role that *postmedieval* special issues have played remains important to the journal’s mission. We will continue publishing guest-edited issues on focused themes each year. These special-issues will be complemented by smaller guest-edited ‘clusters,’ which will appear within open-topic issues—like the one on ‘Sensory Presence and Senses of



Absence in the European Middle Ages,' edited by Fiona Griffiths and Kathryn Starkey, in the present issue. Proposals for clusters are accepted on a rolling basis; special-issue proposals will be solicited annually each spring. For more information, see <https://sites.google.com/view/postmedieval/submissions>.

Peer-review

As editors, we are committed to providing authors with feedback that is constructive and humane, that seeks to develop the strengths and potential of each submission, and that values conceptual adventure, stylistic experiment, political urgency, and generous and just citation practice. We seek to ensure that all authors are treated with respect and care throughout the process, whether or not their articles wind up accepted. Such commitments clearly redound on how we handle the process of peer-review.

postmedieval has an established practice of anonymous peer-review, with at least two reviews per article. As a default, neither author nor reviewer knows the other's identity. It probably won't shock anyone to learn that anonymous review can sometimes embolden readers to hand out dismissive judgments or use belittling modes of address. At *postmedieval*, we do not share abusive reviews with authors. If necessary, we will provide editorial feedback that synthesizes and reframes reviews couched in harmful terms. To head off such reviews, we share our ethical expectations with reviewers in advance. In our roles as editors, we have discussed the merits and demerits of peer review and possible ways of improving the process, including getting rid of the anonymity of peer-review. However, at this point we continue to see value in the communication that anonymity makes possible. In many cases, reviewers may be junior scholars who are nonetheless at the forefront of their subfields—and could therefore be reviewing senior scholars' work from vulnerable positions. Nonetheless, one policy we hope to implement going forward is an open invitation for reviewers, if and only if they wish, to express their willingness to communicate further with authors—although it would ultimately be up to the author whether to initiate further contact.

Peer reviewing is difficult and unremunerated work, and we are grateful to the numerous readers whose judgments have helped make the present issue possible. Reading the deft, expert commentary of our reviewers—crafted with care even though intended for very few eyes—has been one of the keenest pleasures of being an editor thus far. We are implementing a new policy of sending digital copies of published articles to their respective reviewers, as minor tokens of our gratitude.

Thinking ahead with theory

In closing it is perhaps worth saying something about *postmedieval* as a ‘theory’ journal. At our board meeting last April, one of the board members, Prof. Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, pointed out a hierarchy that tends to structure the relationship between ‘theory,’ as a heady and transformative conceptual synthesis, and philological approaches to textual and historical detail, which often take place prior to interpretations of large-scale value or meaning. ‘Theory’ (as normatively understood and institutionally recognized) was elaborated largely by scholars in the West, usually in relation to European archives. A comment similar to Yousefzadeh’s was recently made by Prof. Justin Stearns, a scholar of Islamic intellectual history. In a published conversation, he remarks that, on occasion, when ‘I look at our Europeanist colleagues, I am struck with something you could call “theory envy,” as I see there a much deeper explicit engagement with a wide variety of contemporary theoretical approaches’ (Şahin et al., 2021, p. 204). Stearns continues:

This is in part a reflection of our fields not yet having fully digested the ocean of unedited manuscript sources with which we are faced, but we are also struggling to find the right master narratives with which to contextualize these materials and to articulate them to others outside our fields. (Şahin et al., 2021, p. 204)

At *postmedieval*, we remain passionate about theory but also intent on pluralizing the intellectual sites where theory is to be found. If theory articulates the principles that underlie phenomena and action, we are eager to work with scholars to make explicit the theoretical implications of a wide array of historical and textual scholarship on the premodern world. That commitment extends beyond scholarship as well, to include the theory tacit in artistic engagements with the medieval past and implicit in its activist contestations.

When *postmedieval* was founded, it was pitched in part as a theoretical upstart, a newcomer pushing back against the historicist gatekeeping and the conceptual circumspection that had curtailed existing conversations in medieval studies. But theory only looks like an underdog from certain angles or from particular points of view. It needs to remain self-critical if it is to be vital, vibrant, and capable of twisting and bending to address its exclusions. For this reason, we look forward to welcoming theoretically driven scholarship that emerges from many different methodologies and archives. We are excited to see work that makes us question what and where theory is. Revising our governing narratives and concepts continues to be urgent, exhilarating work. The same is true for the *poiesis* of posing novel questions to the past. ‘Theory’ perhaps names the forum where thinkers from many different fields and disciplines gather, a space established by the conviction that what we’ve understood separately and variously can transform all of our thinking if we bring it into common



articulation. *Postmedieval* seeks to be an arena for such theoretical articulation. We look forward to welcoming your voices here.

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