THINKING OF THE MEDIEVAL

The mid-twentieth century gave rise to a rich array of new approaches to the study of the Middle Ages by both professional medievalists and those more well-known from other pursuits, many of whom continue to exert their influence over politics, art, and history today. Attending to the work of a diverse and transnational group of intellectuals – Hannah Arendt, Erich Auerbach, W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Erwin Panofsky, Simone Weil, among others – the essays in this volume shed light on these thinkers in relation to one another and on the persistence of their legacies in our own time. This interdisciplinary collection gives us a fuller and clearer sense of how these figures made some of their most enduring contributions with medieval culture in mind. Thinking of the Medieval is a timely reminder of just how vital the Middle Ages have been in shaping modern thought.

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THINKING OF THE MEDIEVAL

Midcentury Intellectuals and the Middle Ages

EDITED BY

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For Kenneth “Satch” Head, who first got me thinking about philosophy – R. D. P.

For Oliver William Saltzman, in memoriam
       William Saltzman – B. A. S.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Contributors</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Cover</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Directions of Thought – The Middle Ages at the Midcentury</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. D. Perry and Benjamin A. Saltzman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART I: POLITICS</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Outside History: Fanon’s Negative Manicheism</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Vance Smith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cord J. Whitaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ernst Kantorowicz, Carl Schmitt, and the University of California Regents</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy van Deusen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hannah Arendt’s Middle Ages for the Left</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. D. Perry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART II: ARTS</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Curtius and Jung: Commonplaces, Archetypes, and Literature’s Collective Unconscious</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily V. Thornbury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Old English at the Midcentury: Poetry, Scholarship, and Fiction in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare A. Lees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

7 Erwin Panofsky’s Neo-Kantian Humanism and the Purported Relation between Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism 167
   C. Oliver O’Donnell

8 “Are Women Human?”: Authority, Gender, and Dante in Dorothy L. Sayers’s Scholarship 190
   Helen Brookman

PART III: EPOCHS 213

9 Periodization Trouble: Auerbach, Huizinga, and the Question of Medieval Realism 215
   Jane O. Newman

10 Medieval Mysticism and the Making of Simone Weil 239
   Anna Kelner

11 Hermeneutics and the Medieval Horizon: Zumthor, Jauss, Barthes, and Gadamer 255
   Benjamin A. Saltzman

   Afterword 273
   Martin Jay

Bibliography 301
Index 337
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List of Contributors

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“Cathedral” (1966, 2 of 12) is a woodblock print by my grandfather, the American artist William Saltzman. His work ranges in scale and medium, from dramatically abstract watercolors to precisely angular stained glass, from intimate pen-drawn studies of the human body to massive copper installations in banks and churches and synagogues across the Midwest. The idea for “Cathedral” was perhaps first sparked in Europe during World War II, where he served in the US Army 604th Engineer Camouflage Battalion. His photographs from that period alternate between the workshop where they painted faux signage and built other objects of deception, to the friends and landscapes that caught his eye, to some of the great Gothic cathedrals and more modest medieval churches of France. He visited Brussels on March 17th (I can’t read the full year) and wrote a postcard back to his wife, Muriel Saltzman: “Dearest – All these buildings and monuments are untouched by war – just drab in appearance – very interesting examples of early Gothic – classical – and Romanesque – plus Baroque.” On the back of another postcard from the Cathedral of St Gudule, he wrote, “This Cathedral is not half as inspiring as Notre Dame in Paris, Rheims – in Rheims or Chartres in Chartres.” Then again, “Cathedral” could have just as well been inspired by the glorious year he relocated his family from Minnesota to Italy (1960–1961). Yet there’s something about the energy of the print – the way the lines of coppered light burst forth from the black structure and gray-blue underbrush – that seems to move between his two encounters with the cathedrals of Europe, between the dark and gloomy, yet massively uplifting structures, enveloped in the dust of war, and the brightly rekindled encounter with a Europe fifteen years later.

BENJAMIN A. SALTMAN, Chicago, IL
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