

## Editor's Note

***M.J. Toswell***

Taking stock of the field of medieval studies in one nationally-defined area has its significant uses. On the one hand, it may be possible to identify specific national characteristics in the research, and perhaps in the future to build upon those strengths and further to emphasise them. Thus, manuscripts and editions (to judge by the SSHRC awards) are an overriding presence for Canadian medievalists. There is acknowledgment of and obeisance to theoretical approaches but the latter tend to be packaged up with one or both of the former, whereas just looking at a set of manuscripts or just embarking on a new edition of a significant text is clearly quite acceptable (with, of course, awareness that all decisions are freighted with the baggage of the researcher's past and present). Similarly, as a national group we tend to speak with passion about our teaching of matters medieval to undergraduates. More evident, perhaps, in the reports from smaller universities whose remit is a liberal arts curriculum, the desire to communicate well our excitement in our field is endemic, perhaps to all medievalists, and certainly to Canadian medievalists. We fuss, trade numbers of students, recommend texts for reprinting, talk about teaching techniques, and even drag our students (even undergraduates) along to national and international conferences.

At the same time, a nationally-focused study also demonstrates how our specific allegiances cut across national boundaries and narrow approaches. The number of medieval art historians in Canada dwindles steadily, yet we export, and train, new scholars in the field who head out and obtain jobs elsewhere. This is not a new thing; Earle Birney as a graduate student was settled at Berkeley until his thesis proposal was rejected by the winning faction of a faculty struggle, and after a stint in Utah, he came to Toronto to complete the doctorate. Had he finished at Berkeley and gone on to a post in the States, he too would have been a part of our brain drain. Others leave later

for more lucrative jobs, another situation which seems likely to repeat with frequency in the near future. Canadians find themselves torn between attending national conferences such as the Learned, international and interdisciplinary events, or discipline-specific, or even geographically-specific, conferences. Our allegiances, like those of all faculty colleagues, are a mix of individual and general allegiances, lateral linkages that are in most cases more important to our research interests than the hierarchical structures of our home institutions or any national considerations. At the same time, until a decade ago the Institut des Études Médiévales in Montréal and its sister the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (and the junior sibling of the latter, the Centre for Medieval Studies) were twin pillars of medieval studies widely recognised and admired in the world today. Only one pillar is left, but the principle of interdisciplinarity holds firm in Canadian medieval studies. Today it is enshrined in *Le moyen français*, in *Mediaeval Studies*, and in *Florilegium*. The first two are rightly venerated as major periodicals in the field of medieval studies; the third, with less history upon which to stand, is working on it.

Some will notice a more obvious editorial presence in this issue. I decided that intruding in small ways through the issue was preferable, given that the alternative was a monstrous editorial introduction. Most of the pieces here are quite short, and the volume lends itself to grazing; a top-heavy mass of prose would, I felt, interfere with the array of *tapas* here provided. For those who prefer to skip past the editor's ruminations and head into the main course of the volume, my advice is to avoid the beginning, the end, and the headnotes for each section, which appear just after the lovely pattern-drawings of Selma Purac, a doctoral student in English at Western.

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