

Karolyn Kinane, "Intuiting the Past: New Age and Neopagan Medievalisms," *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 3, no. 2 (2013): 225–48.



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[www.relegere.org](http://www.relegere.org)

ISSN 1179-7231

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## **Intuiting the Past**

### **New Age and Neopagan Medievalisms**

As distinct movements in contemporary spirituality, the New Age and Neopaganism share a complex relationship to the European Middle Ages. Revered for its closeness to the earth and reviled for its religious intolerance, the medieval past lends authority to Neopagan practice, provides evidence of universal truth to New Agers, and bestows a sense of enchantment to the daily lives of both groups. This essay defines the terms “medievalism,” “New Age,” and “Neopagan,” outlines previous scholarship that connects these areas, and considers the specific and differing contours of medievalism in both contexts.

**I**T MAY seem strange to find eclectic, individualized, pro-feminine, earth-based spiritual movements such as the New Age and Neopaganism engaging in medievalism. After all, the Middle Ages are often perceived as dominated by a ubiquitous, monolithic, anti-feminist Christian Church, a Church that restricted access to learning, preferred the heavenly to the earthly, and

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expressed indifference or outright hostility to the eastern and ancient cultures from which many New Agers and Neopagans draw inspiration. Christianity is sometimes seen as an enemy or villain by these groups, which claim to revere nature and the feminine, locate authority in the self and experience, and favor non-hierarchical organizational structures.<sup>1</sup> The existence of New Age and Neopagan medievalisms is perhaps even more surprising when we consider that, as Sarah Pike states, “Neopagans and New Agers tend to emphasize newness, creativity, imagination, and invention over tradition, creed, established doctrine, and institutionalized religion.”<sup>2</sup> As distinct movements in contemporary spirituality, the New Age and Neopaganism share a complex relationship to the European Middle Ages. Revered for its closeness to the earth and reviled for its religious intolerance, the medieval past lends authority to Neopagan practice, provides evidence of universal truth to New Agers, and bestows a sense of enchantment to the daily lives of both groups.

Of course, the figure of a monolithic, universally oppressive medieval Church is but one “dream” of the Middle Ages; for centuries scholars, artists, and enthusiasts have contributed to proliferating versions of “the medieval.” In general, medievalism, as process and product, helps people make sense of the present by providing a version of the past against which to measure both that present and the future. The medieval is but one among many “significant Others” that the New Age and Neopagan movements construct even as they construct their own ideologies.<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of this volume to explore the multiple receptions of the Middle Ages that we find in New Age and Neopagan contexts, consider why and how they are developed, and propose what these medievalisms tell us about contemporary notions of spirituality, temporality, authority, and the self.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, Columbia Contemporary American Religions Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 124.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>3</sup> “Ideologies define themselves not only in terms of their own doctrines and practices, but also in relation to other ideologies. Whether negative or positive, such pointers to other ideologies can be seen as a reliance on the designation of *significant Others*.... The discursive strategies of the Esoteric Tradition rely to a considerable degree on the (real or imagined) characteristics of ... positive and negative significant Others.” (Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, Studies in The History of Religions 90 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 44, emphasis in original.)

<sup>4</sup> Specific entries on New Age and Neopagan medievalisms will be available in Gail Ashton, ed., *Handbook of Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary Culture*, to be published by Bloomsbury in 2015.

## Some Terms

The very terms of our discussion are under considerable debate by historians, literary scholars, and sociologists, by scholars of medieval studies, religious studies, and media studies. Defining “the New Age Movement” and “Neopaganism,” which tend to be decentralized, individualized, and idiosyncratic, or “medievalism,” which refers loosely to any manifestation of the medieval in non-medieval contexts, has inspired rich discussion across and between disciplines. While there is no consensus on the finer points of “New Age,” “Neopaganism,” or “medievalism,” this collection takes as its starting point some generally accepted assumptions and aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to define and explore these phenomena.

## Medievalism

The Dark Ages, the Age of Chivalry, the Middle Ages—the medieval era has a rich history of being used as an empty signifier against which to define oneself.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, “medieval” often simply means “not modern.” What the medieval is, then, will depend greatly upon how one views the present. Since the medieval can never truly be *known*, mediated as our experience with it is by temporal, linguistic, and other cultural gulfs, it is always, many medievalism scholars posit, *imagined*.<sup>6</sup> Some studies of medievalism attempt to demonstrate how an artifact or the group that creates and uses it “messes up” the Middle Ages by getting its history wrong.<sup>7</sup> Often, studies try to determine which dream of the Middle Ages is being invoked by drawing, sometimes

<sup>5</sup> See Clare A. Simmons, ed., *Medievalism and the Quest for the ‘Real’ Middle Ages* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> “In their attempts to capture aspects of the artificially constructed period known as the ‘Middle Ages,’ both ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures perpetuate images that correspond to the dreams, beliefs or needs of the individual producing them. Ultimately, then, medievalism is a constantly evolving and self-referential process of defining an always fictional Middle Ages.” (Elizabeth Emery, “Medievalism and the Middle Ages,” in *Defining Medievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso, Studies in Medievalism 17 (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 85.)

<sup>7</sup> “Most New Age Wicca adherents believe they are reviving an ancient Celtic spirituality somehow secretly kept alive for 1500 years, despite the fact that the very name of their cult derives not from early Welsh but from Anglo Saxon and that much of their supposedly arcane knowledge has no documented existence prior to the nineteenth century. Yet in the popular imagination, to be rooted in the medieval is to have unquestioned tradition and authority to be legitimized.” (Gwendolyn A. Morgan, “Medievalism, Authority, and the Academy,” in Fugelso, *Defining Medievalism(s)*, 55.) This article explores similarities between popular and academic medievalism.

not explicitly, upon Umberto Eco's (problematic) "Ten Little Middle Ages," which includes the Middle Ages as pretext, as site of ironical revisitation, of barbarism, Romanticism, *philosophia perennis*, national identities, Decadentism, philological reconstruction, occult philosophy, and of millenarianism.<sup>8</sup> While characterizing the "version" of medievalism at work, such studies will, to varying degrees, often analyze both the medieval "sources" (or historical "reality") and the contemporary contexts that employ the medieval.

The reception of the medieval has been marked most strongly by both romanticization and notions of barbarism. From the sixteenth century to today, across a variety of media, "medieval" invokes both a reassuringly "simpler" time and a dangerously "barbaric" past.<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Haydock summarizes: "[o]ur projections of the Middle Ages will always vacillate between contempt and emulation, fear and admiration."<sup>10</sup> By engaging in selective appropriation, New Agers and Neopagans express both of these dreams. The aspects of the medieval which they adopt and adapt tend to be romanticized. Interestingly, such adoption and adaptation is fueled by reaction against the more denigrated aspects of the Middle Ages, such as oppression, misogyny, and dogmatism, purportedly also manifested in contemporary mainstream environments. It's not necessarily that practitioners don't *recognize* aspects of oppression or misogyny in the medieval past; they simply choose to adopt some features of the medieval—those they deem positive, liberating, or that resonate with their experiences—while rejecting others, which they deem "less authentic" (Neopaganism) or "less useful" (New Age).

Eco's theory of the "Ten Little Middle Ages" has been significantly nuanced, developed, and transformed through the many recent studies appearing in the pages of *Exemplaria*, *Arthuriana*, and *Studies in Medievalism* as well as titles from Palgrave, McFarland, and other academic presses. As with other recent studies of medievalism, this present collection acknowledges the many problems with and limitations of Eco's template and yet finds some of his terms useful. As Elizabeth Emery notes, when we study medievalism, we study "how and why various individuals and institutions have chosen to engage with the Middle Ages"; this volume takes up Emery's encouragement

<sup>8</sup> Umberto Eco, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages," in *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 68–72.

<sup>9</sup> Veronica Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail: The Quest for the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 243–46.

<sup>10</sup> Nickolas Haydock, "Medievalism and Excluded Middles," in *Defining Medievalism(s) II*, ed. Karl Fugelso, *Studies in Medievalism* 18 (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 21.

to “not only look at the objects created but also look at the methods of medievalism.”<sup>11</sup> Here, we are less interested in pointing out how contemporary contexts get the Middle Ages “wrong” and more interested in how the past and present affect one another. The medieval past is revived, reinvented, and transformed in New Age and Neopagan contexts as these movements are transformed by their medievalism.<sup>12</sup>

Part of the affective appeal of the medieval to New Agers and Neopagans can be understood if we consider Haydock’s statement regarding *Don Quixote*. “Medievalism,” he writes, “is madness, but realism is sterile, threadbare, and hopeless.”<sup>13</sup> Positive medievalism can provide richness, texture, and hope to New Agers and Neopagans disenchanted with a contemporary society they view as overly dominated by rationality, empiricism, and apathy. Veronica Ortenberg notes that medievalism in general often provides people with an escape “from the harsh realities of the present” so that they may “be allowed to take refuge in a world where reason gives way to emotion, reality to imagination;” New Age emphasis on both emotion and imagination make this iteration of the medieval appealing.<sup>14</sup> But medievalism provides more than escapism.<sup>15</sup> Angela J. Weisl reminds us that narratives linking the present individual to a collective past are built on structures of desire, “desire for a continuity with certain past forms and assumptions, desire to impose fixed structures of meaning on that which is elusive and ambiguous, desire for a transcendent liminality in a quotidian and often alienating world, and desire to reinforce comforting, if problematic, values of the past within the

<sup>11</sup> Emery, “Medievalism and the Middle Ages,” 78.

<sup>12</sup> Such an idea is expressed by Wouter J. Hanegraaff in his study of the reception history of the New Age movement and western esotericism: “As in the case of romanticism, the New Age movement is a revival of something old, but it is a revival *with a difference*. Put differently: there can be no doubt about the historical continuities between ‘Gnosis and Hermeticism’ and the New Age movement; but this continuity consists by virtue of an ongoing process of *reinterpretations*. Ideas are changed (sometimes dramatically, sometimes very subtly) according to the cultural context in which they are perceived; and over time the context itself is transformed by these changed ideas. In order to gain a balanced perspective, one has to follow the development both of the ideas and of their cultural contexts.” (“The New Age Movement and the Esoteric Tradition,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 360, emphasis in original.)

<sup>13</sup> Haydock, “Medievalism and Excluded Middles,” 29n4.

<sup>14</sup> Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail*, xi.

<sup>15</sup> See note 85 below.

seemingly modern forms of the here and now.”<sup>16</sup> Although Weisl’s study focuses on the fan cultures of baseball, *Star Trek*, and *Star Wars*, we can detect these same desires in the medievalism of New Age and Neopagan contexts.

### New Age and Neopagan

In recent scholarship, the New Age and Neopagan movements explored in this volume have gone under a variety of names, such as “new religion,” “revived religion,” and “nature religion,” and have been linked to the Western Esoteric Tradition. We have here adopted the terms used most often in the scholarship we have consulted and use the terms with full acknowledgement that debate continues.<sup>17</sup> This collection accepts the perspective of Sarah Pike and other scholars that, generally, Neopagans and New Agers share “common historical origins in the nineteenth century religious movements” and were shaped by the counterculture of the 1960s. Additionally, “they also have a similar orientation to the world, such as a tendency to privilege internal over external authority and experience over belief, and a focus on self-exploration as the best route to truth and knowledge.” However, as Pike also points out, “it is hard to say that anything is typical of the New Age and Neopagan movements, which have been from the start diverse and individualistic.”<sup>18</sup>

Both groups relate, to greater or lesser degrees, to the Western Esoteric Tradition, which Joanne Pearson describes as “a vast field comprising a body of material gathered together in the West since the end of the fifteenth century, including Kabbalah, hermeticism, Gnosticism and the occult sciences of astrology, alchemy and magic. It pertains to the connections between man and the universe.”<sup>19</sup> However, while Neopagans look to western traditions of paganism, reconstructed via medieval Norse and Celtic literature, New Agers look more to the East and to science. As Olav Hammer notes, “the New Age literature of the late twentieth century has largely severed its roots as a Western esoteric movement, and prefers to place the origins of its doctrines either in the East or among native peoples.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Angela J. Weisl, *The Persistence of Medievalism: Narrative Adventures in Contemporary Culture*, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 15.

<sup>17</sup> See Joanne Pearson, “Introduction,” in *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality, and the New Age*, ed. Joanne Pearson (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 1–14.

<sup>18</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 22, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Joanne Pearson, “The History and Development of Wicca and Paganism,” in Pearson, *Belief Beyond Boundaries*, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 87.

Other distinctions between these groups should be noted. Generally speaking, the New Age and its associated movements emerged on the west coast of the United States in the 1960s and spread to Europe. Contemporary paganism, on the other hand, emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1950s and spread to North America. Highlighting their beliefs about the self and relationship to time, Pike explains that “Neopagan practice highlights the centrality of the relationship between humans and nature and reinvents religions of the past, while New Agers are more interested in transforming individual consciousness and shaping the future.” The essays in this collection explore this difference and illustrate how “the desire of many Neopagans to revive ancient traditions is not shared by most New Agers, who are more concerned with ushering in the future.”<sup>21</sup> While there are solitary Neopagan practitioners, many operate in a group, coven, or community while New Agers practice in what Michael York and others describe as a network.<sup>22</sup> Overall, there is a “more transcendent attitude within New Age whereas Paganism regards the divine as immanent.”<sup>23</sup> It is also important to note that many Neopagans would not want to be associated with the New Age, and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

While scholars of New Religious Movements explore the very important differences between these two groups, some of which will be discussed below, there are compelling reasons to study these groups together.<sup>25</sup> As Wouter Hanegraaf notes, “[I]n terms of basic worldviews, New Age and neopaganism are best seen as two thought complexes that may theoretically be distinct but show a very large overlap in practice.”<sup>26</sup> In their use of the medieval past, both groups seem to share what, according to Hammer, Antione Faivre defines as four characteristics of esotericisms: “the idea of correspondences; the concept of a living nature; an emic epistemology that accords imagination, rituals, symbolic images and similar mediating elements a crucial role in the construction of knowledge; and an experience of personal transmutation.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 18, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Michael York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neopagan Movements* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Pearson, “Wicca and Paganism,” 7.

<sup>24</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> There is some debate as to whether the New Age can be called a “New Religious Movement.” See for example Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), and “New Age Movement,” in *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (New York: Routledge, 2006), 401–5.

<sup>26</sup> Hanegraaff, “New Age Movement,” 369.

<sup>27</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 6.



Analogic reasoning is “a crucial factor in the development of the systems of correspondence that are ubiquitous within the Esoteric Tradition.” Both groups do share an interest in self-exploration; such reflexivity in Esoteric traditions “results in the proliferation of personal projects” rather than “cosmogenic myths or social charters.”<sup>28</sup> These characteristics inform how and why New Agers and Neopagans use the medieval past and justify the clustering of these movements.

### Not-so-strange Bedfellows

New Age and Neopagan movements share a surprising number of features with medievalism as a movement and field; I would like here to explore this compelling overlap. First, current New Age and Neopagan practitioners look back to a medieval past that is refracted through the anti-Enlightenment and Romantic movements, the fertile soil of their own movements. Medievalism itself emerged powerfully from the same contexts as these spiritual movements—namely, the nineteenth century and the 1960s. Looking at the tone of the nineteenth century’s esotericism alongside its medievalism and at the desires and practices of the medieval past in 1960s alternative spiritualities helps us understand how common historical contexts facilitate this marriage and shape the tone of these contemporary medievalisms.

Scholars of religion as well as medievalists both acknowledge nineteenth-century spiritualism and nineteenth-century medievalism as the historical roots of contemporary practices.<sup>29</sup> Movements such as Transcendentalism, Spiritualism, the Theosophical Society, and New Thought are reflected in New Age and Neopagan religions and these movements often engaged in medievalism. For example, the Theosophical Society featured, and still features, the children’s group “The Order of the Round Table.”<sup>30</sup> Jaimee Comstock-Skipp, in her contribution to this volume, explores this era in the Western Esoteric tradition, tracing the intersections of art, literature, Orientalism, medievalism, and spiritualism in the painting *The Adoration of the Magi*. Theosophy continues to influence the New Age and Neopagan movements

<sup>28</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 16, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Pike traces the social, political and economic forces that created “the nineteenth-century spiritual hothouse” in the United States (*New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 42–65). For nineteenth-century medievalism, see Megan Morris, “Victorian Medievalism: An Annotated Bibliography for Teachers,” *The Once and Future Classroom* 7 no. 2 (2009).

<sup>30</sup> “Programs,” The Theosophical Society in America, 2012, <http://www.theosophical.org/programs/national-center/study-groups/2223-order-of-the-round-table>.

through a variety of tropes that seem to have taken on a life of their own, such as the channeling of Ascended Masters.

These religious movements and medievalism both come to us through Romanticism. This era arose, as Roderick Main describes it, as a reaction to the tendencies of determinism (the view that all things are determined by causes, whereas Romantics celebrated human freedom and creativity), reductionism (the view that complex data can be explained in terms of something simpler), and materialism (Romantics instead acknowledge a spiritual reality). In Romanticism, nature is not a machine but “a living companion.” Further, Romantics believed that “not only reason but also irrational faculties of imagination and intuition were essential modes of understanding the world.”<sup>31</sup> This common historical grounding and the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite artists and the poetry of Tennyson in the nineteenth century could help account for the ease with which these contemporary spiritual movements engage in romanticized versions of the medieval.

Scholarship of both medievalism and these contemporary movements additionally looks to the cultural climate of the United States in the 1960s as context for contemporary practices. The counterculture engaged in redefining the experience and significance of time. According to Pike, it “celebrated synchronicities and claimed to reject linear time, ordinary reality, and history.”<sup>32</sup> Engagement with history and the significance of the present could now be intuited by the individual rather than solely researched and confirmed by scholars or other traditional authority figures. In addition, the locus of authority for the counterculture was the self, which allowed for an eclectic approach to spirituality, a spirituality marked by the nostalgia of the 1960s and 70s, which paved the way for medievalism.<sup>33</sup> The medieval becomes a way for people to seek “the mystical, communal and ecstatic in a rationalistic world” and a way to create alternative futures. “Counterculture men and women,” states Pike, “came up with imaginative forms of opposition to social institutions that were drawn from both science fiction and backward-looking medievalism. If the present was bankrupt, then past cultures and frameworks were the best sources of inspiration for new communities.”<sup>34</sup> The medieval,

<sup>31</sup> Roderick Main, “Religion, Science and the New Age,” in Pearson, *Belief Beyond Boundaries*, 177.

<sup>32</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 74.

<sup>33</sup> Pike explores how “nostalgia for times past, for places either remote or undisfigured by technology” dominated the popular culture of the 60s and 70s (ibid., 78).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 76, 78.

located as it is pre-Enlightenment, pre-technology, and pre-rationality, became an access point to truth.<sup>35</sup> Further, Peter Clecak argues that in the 1960s and 70s, “the quest for fulfillment represented the central, energizing thrust of American culture.<sup>36</sup> The use of “quest” is particularly telling here. Both fields (medievalism and these religious movements) feel the influence of works by J. R. R. Tolkien and Carl Jung; later interpreters and popularizers of *The Lord of the Rings* and the idea of archetypes did much to emphasize the personal journey, for which the grail quest became a perfect signifier.<sup>37</sup>

Both fields share concern about the boundaries among scholarly, practitioner, and enthusiast perspectives and both have come out of the proverbial academic closet within recent memory to become respected fields of inquiry.<sup>38</sup> Compellingly, the findings of scholars of the New Age and Neopaganism sound remarkably similar to those of medievalists studying contemporary medievalisms. Speaking specifically of the New Age, Roderick Main classifies this movement as a “*response or set of responses to modernization, secularization and globalization,*” terms often used to account for particular flavors of medievalism in contemporary media.<sup>39</sup> The New Age is part of modernity and its emphasis on progression and evolution but it also “runs counter” to many rationalist currents of modernity.<sup>40</sup> This sounds almost absurdly familiar to a scholar who studies medievalism in contemporary fiction and film.

<sup>35</sup> “The past,’ observed historian of religion Robert Ellwood in his study of spirituality in the 1960s, ‘was to help in the counterculture’s quest for legitimization and authority,’ in part because it was seen as the locus of truth.” (Robert S. Ellwood, *The 60s Spiritual Awakening* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), cited in Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 78.)

<sup>36</sup> Peter Clecak, *America’s Quest for the Ideal Self: Dissent and Fulfillment in the 60s and 70s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 7–8.

<sup>37</sup> On Tolkien, see Jane Chance and Alfred Siewers, eds., *Tolkien’s Modern Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). On Jung, see Susan Aronstein, “The Return of the King: Medievalism and the Politics of Nostalgia in the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement,” in Simmons, *Medievalism*, 144–59.

<sup>38</sup> Hammer notes that the study of esoteric currents in western culture had been “a narrow and barely reputable field of scholarship” (*Claiming Knowledge*, 16). Simmons reminds us that “Medievalism ... had a reputation as an aberration from scholarly Medieval Studies” (“Introduction,” in Simmons, *Medievalism*, 1). See also Nils Holger Peterson, “Medievalism and Medieval Reception: A Terminological Question,” in Fugelso, *Defining Medievalism(s)*, 36–44.

<sup>39</sup> Main, “Religion, Science and the New Age,” 187, his emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> See also Heelas, *New Age Movement*, Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

Lastly, and perhaps frustratingly, “alternative spiritualities” often refers to whatever is not “mainstream” while “medieval” refers to whatever is not “modern”.<sup>41</sup> Thus, our exploration of alternative spirituality’s use of the medieval past inevitably touches upon concepts of the mainstream and the present. Indeed, New Age and Neopagan uses of the medieval say as much about the practitioner’s imagination of the Enlightenment, the Industrial Age, the modern era, even the present moment, as they do their imagination of the medieval past. Romantic medievalism, Haydock claims, creates a triad of historical experience:

An anti-modern, specular triad is ... composed whereby the ‘modern’ itself assumes the central position between the Middle Ages and the present. This present beyond the modern struggling to be born engages in utopian and nostalgic attempts to achieve a ‘renaissance’ of the formerly “Middle” Ages now posed as the real origin of the contemporary world.<sup>42</sup>

And so with some preliminary definitions and contexts in place, we can turn to exploring these phenomena in light of each another.

## Neopagan Medievalisms

As Pearson notes, “contemporary Paganism reinvents the past to give meaning to the present.”<sup>43</sup> This meaning is most often described as *authenticity*. In general, Neopagans tend to use the past as a way to lend authenticity to present practice and tend to be more interested in Survivalist claims than New Agers.<sup>44</sup> For example, the historical evidence for medieval monks grow-

<sup>41</sup> Ortenberg claims that since the late seventeenth century, it has been “the fate of the ‘Medieval’ to be whatever the ‘Modern’ is not” (*In Search of the Holy Grail*, xi).

<sup>42</sup> Haydock, “Medievalism and Excluded Middles,” 22.

<sup>43</sup> Pearson, “Wicca and Paganism,” 16.

<sup>44</sup> Neopagans are “interested in authenticity when it comes to the past. Even though New Agers borrow from indigenous and pre-Christian cultures, they are rarely interested in reviving these religions in the present. Instead, they create paradigms for the future that may be inspired by these ancient cultures.” In Europe, “contemporary Pagan organizations usually claim a lineage that is ancient and unbroken” whereas “American, British, and Australian ‘Neopagan’ communities ... are self-conscious revivals created to be egalitarian, individualistic.” In the US, Neopagans are “creating new religions in the cast of old ones.” (Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 35, 19.) See Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (New York: Penguin / Arcana, 1997) and Ronald Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

ing medicinal herbs is not powerful enough to dispel the sense that herb lore is the heritage of witches. Pike describes Neopagans turning to “European wise women and herbalists of the Middle Ages in their search for an authentic tradition.”<sup>45</sup> Of course, evidence of historical authenticity and reality (as constructed by scholars) is not a deal-breaker for all Neopagans. Even among a relatively small subgroup of Neopagans there can be debate as to the significance of medieval sources and authenticity. As Carole Cusack notes in her contribution to this volume, which studies the reception of Wagner’s operatic *Ring* cycle, “although some Heathens reject the *Ring* outright as divergent from the medieval sources and tainted by nineteenth century Romanticism, others accept it as a powerful representation of the deities and cosmology of the Norse Pagan religion.” Neopagans may be drawn to the psychological power of Goddess, Celtic, and Norse mythology rather than the historical “reality” they may or may not represent.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the numerous scholarly works that attempt to debunk Survivalist claims have done little to dampen Neopagan enthusiasm and engagement with the medieval and pre-Christian past. As Hanegraaff notes, “For some neopagans the academic world is itself a manifestation of the patriarchy, which is why they simply refuse to take it seriously; others feel that, in the end, neopaganism is not dependent on historical roots for being authentic.”<sup>47</sup> Federico Stella, in his contribution to this volume, demonstrates how historical scholarship is “of relative, if not marginal interest” to some Neopagans, such as Dragon Rouge, who sees the historian’s history as “a theoretic-critical support for a super-rational truth.” The essay explores more fully the impact of works by Margaret Murray and Charles Leland upon the development of modern Italian witchcraft.

Scholars from a variety of fields have done excellent studies on Neopagan uses of the medieval, specifically on how some Neopagans look to medieval myth and legend, such as the stories of King Arthur and the Isle of Avalon, to recover authentic Celtic paganism.<sup>48</sup> Authentic or not, the Celtic strain is particularly strong in Neopaganism as people engage with medieval literature

<sup>45</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 94.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>47</sup> Hanegraaff, “New Age Movement,” 369.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Ronald Hutton, *Witches, Druids, and King Arthur* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Marion Bowman, “Contemporary Celtic Spirituality,” in Pearson, *Belief Beyond Boundaries*, 55–102, and Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman, “Arthur Pendragon, Eco-Warrior,” *Arthuriana* 23, no. 1 (2013): 3–19. Other such works can be found by scholars of medieval studies as well as New Religious Movements.

and archaeology for evidence of paganism's survival through the rise of Christianity.<sup>49</sup> For example, the contemporary group The Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (formed in 1964) offers a correspondence course in Druidry for which the medieval Arthurian Legends are required reading.<sup>50</sup> Ortenberg notes how Celticism is now associated with "an assortment of esoteric notions taking in self-proclaimed pre-Christian Celtic religion and philosophy, from druids, witches and warlocks, to New Age mysticism, closeness to mother-earth and goddesses of fertility, soft drugs, organic food, natural products and green issues."<sup>51</sup> The fiction of Marion Zimmer Bradley, particularly *The Mists of Avalon*, has done much to associate the Arthurian Legends with pagan, goddess, and nature religions in the popular imagination.<sup>52</sup> Here we find ample overlap with New Age practices and associations. Melissa Riddle Elmes, in her contribution to this volume, explains how "Arthur has morphed in the New Age spiritual tradition from Christian political figure-head into a neo-pagan tool of self-exploration and fulfillment". Examining Arthurian-themed tarot decks, this article explores the intersections of Celticism, archetypes, and personal transformation in this eminently marketable and collectable medium.

Neopagans are interested in reviving ritual and practice from the past in order to cultivate a more harmonious relationship with nature, a relationship they believe can be accessed and appreciated through Celtic and medieval English myth and legend. According to Pike, in the 1960s, "the ethos of the past was 'thought to be close to the earth and the cycles of nature which Neopagans see as the central metaphor of their cosmology.'"<sup>53</sup> She notes that "Neopaganism is a recent take on a literary tradition characterized by the desire to return to a time when religion was supposedly less dogmatic and

<sup>49</sup> See also Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail*, ch. 5. Discussing the gap between scholars' ideas about the Celtic past and those of contemporary Celtic spirituality practitioners, Marion Bowman explores how historicity is deployed or experienced differently. "It is the experience and efficacy of Celtic spirituality which confirm people in their belief and practice, not linguistic expertise" ("Celtic Spirituality," 91).

<sup>50</sup> Bowman, "Celtic Spirituality," 83.

<sup>51</sup> Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail*, 127.

<sup>52</sup> See Diana Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and the Mists of Avalon," *Arthuriana* 9, no. 1 (1999): 110–126; Carrol L. Fry, "The Goddess Ascending: Feminist Neo-Pagan Witchcraft in Marian Zimmer Bradley's Novels," *Journal of Popular Culture* 27, no. 1 (1993): 67–80.

<sup>53</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), cited in Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 78.

institutionalized and more in tune with the natural world.”<sup>54</sup> Ortenberg’s medievalist exploration of Neopagan medievalism leads her to conclusions similar to those of Pike. “What lies at the root of” the neopagan fascination with ‘nature cults’ in general and Celticism specifically,” she states, is

a mixture of nostalgia for a romanticized version of both a personal and national past, a diffuse sense of the sacred world and the role it can play in what is the equivalent of the ‘salvation of one’s soul’ (not in the next world but in terms of peace in this one), and the salvation of the earth from the polluters and destroyers, in true millenarian style. In addition, the strong emphasis on the feminine, the goddess, associated with life but also with emotion and intuition, as opposed to the perceived tyranny of, namely, reason, aggression and destruction, proves once again, as it did during Romanticism and the post-Enlightenment world, of huge appeal.<sup>55</sup>

Rebecca Krug’s essay in this volume takes up these yearnings for both historical authenticity and connection to the earth evinced by Neopagan medievalisms. Her essay aims “to distinguish between late medieval and New Age responses to astrology in the realm of practical gardening,” interrogating the idea that planting by the moon was a widespread medieval practice. It is this focus on “practical” purpose of gardening that seems to distinguish medieval from New Age and Neopagan perspectives. In the latter contexts, as Krug demonstrates, gardening takes on philosophical and spiritual import it may not have held in the medieval era, import for the development of the self and its relationship to the natural world, demonstrating again the overlap between New Age and Neopagan belief and praxis.

It is important to note here that just as the Neopagan movement is shaped by the forms of medievalism it receives and transmits, the meaning of “medieval” gets colored by such associations; Western Esotericism inflects medievalism. As Ortenberg notes, “the Templars, alchemy, the Kabbalah, Rosicrucians, Freemasons, Satanism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Turin Shroud and Joseph of Arimathea are used to surround the myth of the Holy Grail.”<sup>56</sup> The articles in this volume further demonstrate the constant interplay between past and present that Neopagan and New Age eclecticism both engages in and promotes.

<sup>54</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 75.

<sup>55</sup> Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail*, 135.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

## New Age Medievalisms

In contrast, New Age medievalisms haven't yet received much critical attention.<sup>57</sup> New Age uses of the medieval are similar to Neopagan in their focus on healing the self and planet where, once again, Avalon and the Arthurian Grail are often invoked.<sup>58</sup> But in New Age practice, the emphasis is not so much on reviving or understanding the "real" Avalon or Grail but rather on using archetypes and tropes divorced from their historical contexts and re-situated as tools to develop the individual self.<sup>59</sup> As Ridley Elmes describes later in this volume, New Agers are "predisposed to the concept of the personal quest and willing to pay for items based in medievalism that speak to the notion of 'Celtic Arthuriana' because of the association with the notion of personal growth inherent in the Christian Grail quest." The quest is important not so much for its hearkening back to a time of more authentic communion with the earth, as in Neopagan uses, but for its ability to transform the journeyer. Ortenberg explains how New Age Travelers reject the modern life of industry and alienation in favor of not a revived pagan religion but "a more 'authentic' [life] of self-discovery: the pilgrimage of New Age Travelers is not a pilgrimage to a shrine but a sacred journey into the sublime, wild, mysterious inner landscape."<sup>60</sup> In these two examples we can see how New Agers, like Neopagans, romanticize the medieval, yet how they engage it by decidedly different means to different ends.

Initially, I had been surprised that the New Age, which looks to the future and seeks authorization in science, would engage in medievalism.<sup>61</sup> However, the eclecticism of the movement allows for such diverse practices

<sup>57</sup> Some people consider the mythopoetic men's movement as part of the New Age movement. See Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman, "Who's Your Daddy? New Age Grails," *Arthuriana* 19, no. 3 (2009): 25–33.

<sup>58</sup> See for just two examples among many, Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Crossing into Avalon: A Woman's Midlife Quest for the Sacred Feminine* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2004); Jhenah Telyndru, *Avalon Within: A Sacred Journey of Myth, Mystery, and Inner Wisdom*, (Woodbury: Llewelyn Press, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> See Heelas, "New Age Movement."

<sup>60</sup> Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail*, 137. This does not mean that New Agers utterly disregard more traditional forms of pilgrimage. In fact, medievalism in New Age notions of pilgrimage is another compelling angle to this material.

<sup>61</sup> Main suggests that New Age engagement with non-western, premodern, and esoteric traditions "may appeal partly because in them the problematic relationship between religion and science is assumed not to exist as it does in the modern western mainstream. The traditions operate before (pre-modern), distinct from, (non-western) or in secrecy from (esoteric) the rise of modern science" ("Religion, Science and the New Age," 189).



as meditation, crystal therapy, channeling, shamanism, and dowsing—the efficacy of which are often believed to be confirmed by neuroscience—to coexist as complementary, rather than contradictory, ways to transform self and society. This relatively open disposition to method and practice, combined with the New Age penchant for Perennialism, creates an environment in which the individual’s sense of what “resonates as true” is the sole arbiter of authenticity. And so labyrinths, the music of Hildegard of Bingen, and Kabbalah are among the tools up for grabs to New Age practitioners; many paths, one truth.<sup>62</sup>

For William Irwin Thompson, an early leader in the New Age movement, medievalism is part of the planetization of the esoteric, a necessary but preliminary stage marked by the “old psychic mentality of magic and religion.”<sup>63</sup> Looking critically at how the New Age movement has evolved in recent decades, he writes that the first thing to strike him about the New Age

is how hardly any of it is new. Witchcraft, dowsing, palmistry, astrology, geomancy and Chinese *feng shui*, shamanism, astral projection, pyramids and stone circles, extraterrestrials and elves, Neolithic agricultural communities, Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism, Zen, Cabbalah—what is new in all of this? In terms of the content not very much, but in terms of the structure in which this content is held, everything is new. The first phase of the New Age is really the planetization of the esoteric. It is the release of “secret oral teaching” from medieval societies into mass paperbacks and rock music albums.<sup>64</sup>

Thompson and his co-author David Spangler are part of the New Age movement in the “restricted sense,” as defined by Hanegraaff.<sup>65</sup> They perhaps have a different perspective than the majority of contemporary practitioners, who themselves might not even identify as New Agers.

More typical of the broader New Age experience is the tendency towards a structuralist position, which creates a single way of thinking out of all the

<sup>62</sup> Studies on Hildegard of Bingen as medieval composer and herbalist in the New Age movement are needed. See, for just two among many examples, practitioners channeling Hildegard (<http://hildegardsayshello.wordpress.com/about>) and using her music in healing therapies (<http://www.healingchants.com/itinerary.html>).

<sup>63</sup> David Spangler and William Irwin Thompson, *Reimagination of the World: A Critique of the New Age, Science, and Popular Culture* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1991), 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11.

<sup>65</sup> Hanegraaff, “New Age Movement,” 362.

diversity and difference of those cultures from which they borrow.<sup>66</sup> Such essentialism enables the New Age practitioner to “connect” with the imagined version of the significant Other, be it a different culture or the past, and also enables many groups to criticize New Agers as politically and culturally insensitive. New Agers are often chastised for appropriating other cultures rather than engaging in respectful cultural sharing.<sup>67</sup> They may look to the idealized other for praxis, but New Agers turn to science for confirmation of their beliefs rather than to the idealized Other to deepen or transform them. This practice of disembedding and reembedding foreign cultural elements produces “an entire spectrum of new cultural processes.” As Hammer describes it,

at one end of this spectrum are new cultural products that I propose to call *structurally conservative*. In such products, surface characteristics such as verbal expression, body language and social norms accepted by the actors might be adapted to local conditions, whereas the fundamental structures are retained. At the other end, one finds *structurally radical* cultural products. Here, the surface characteristics of the disembedded cultural product are retained, while the fundamental structures—e.g. religious, ethnic, or gender codes—are disregarded.<sup>68</sup>

Hammer offers the stock exchanges in New York, Stockholm, and Tokyo as an example of structurally conservative models where an internationalized set of processes is expressed with marginal local adaptations. On the other hand, he posits that a tourist dressing like a local with no awareness of the cultural codes permeating the choice of clothes is an example of structural radicalism. The New Age movement seems to engage in structurally radical processes when it practices medievalism; New Agers are less interested in what it was like for a medieval person to, say, encounter a labyrinth, and

<sup>66</sup> We do see this essentializing in Thompson’s work, where he calls consciousness “that magical modality of being that the archaic cultures so beautifully exemplified” (*Reimagination of the World: A Critique of the New Age, Science, and Popular Culture*, 16).

<sup>67</sup> Bowman warns that such “borrowing” makes one seem “a cultural imperialist or a cultural transvestite” (“Celtic Spirituality,” 94). See also Marion Bowman, “The Commodification of the Celt: New Age and Neopagan Consumers,” *Folklore in Use: Applications in the Real World* 2, no. 1 (1994): 143–52 and Myke Johnson, “Wanting to be Indian: When Spiritual Searching Turns into Cultural Theft,” in Pearson, *Belief Beyond Boundaries*, 277–94. Discussed further below.

<sup>68</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 33.

more interested in what the labyrinth can mean for them in their cultural moment, with all of the contemporary values and ideas about self in place, undisturbed by medieval values or ideas of self.<sup>69</sup>

New Age medievalism could be termed ahistorical and, as such, it might be more precisely called neomedievalism.<sup>70</sup> Neomedievalisms, according to Carole L. Robinson and Pamela Clements, are not interested in authenticity but rather simulacra. Robinson and Clements claim that “Neomedieval constructs of the medieval lack the sense of solidarity and finiteness—all is fragmentary, fluid, either susceptible or conducive (depending on one’s values) to constant change. In this way, neomedieval constructs participate in the pre-modern techniques of fragmentation: anachronism, pastiche, bricolage.”<sup>71</sup> We have already discussed above how the New Age movement is marked by an eclecticism that allows for practitioners to, for example, hold a grail ritual using pentagrams and invoking Buddhist compassion.<sup>72</sup> What often matters to New Age practitioners is not that a practice or symbol is an authentic connection to a particular culture or era but rather that engagement with that practice or symbol “works” for them. While neomedievalism is most often applied to video games and other contemporary media by scholars, it seems applicable to a New Age movement engaged in Perennialism, that sees historical and cultural contexts as “trappings” that mask or express a truth as determined by the practitioner. Amy Kaufman states that “neomedievalism is not as interested in creating or recreating the Middle Ages as it is in assimilating and consuming it.... The danger in assimilation,” she warns, “is that the essence and the beauty of difference can be lost.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, such assimilation and consumption (made possible by essentializing) is a critique of the New Age launched by a variety of groups, including Neopagans and First Nations, for whom the dangers are greater than a loss of beauty. Such appropriation is not generally an ethical concern for Neopagans and New Agers who “tend to emphasize the self over external authority.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ben Morgan, *On Becoming God: Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Western Self* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> The relatively recently coined term is, of course, still under definition and debate. See Karl Fugelso, ed., *Defining Neomedievalism(s)*, Studies in Medievalism 19 (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements, “Living with Neomedievalism,” in Fugelso, *Defining Medievalism(s) II*, 64.

<sup>72</sup> Witnessed at a New Age conference by Pike (*New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 11).

<sup>73</sup> Amy S. Kaufman, “Medieval Unmoored,” in Fugelso, *Defining Neomedievalism(s)*, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 26.

New Age use of the past is also colored by particular concepts about time and temporality. Many New Agers “believe in reincarnation (rebirth—the continuity of the soul through many lives) ... and they look to past lives to help them understand the present.”<sup>75</sup> Some New Agers may claim to have memories of past lives, perhaps from the medieval era, memories which trump any textbook’s version of historical reality. Others may engage with the past through channeling, a process by which one may have access to authentic voices from the past in the present in order to transform the self. For example, Heather Kavan, in her contribution to this volume, explores how channeling Joan of Arc permits practitioners to “attune themselves to greatness.” New Age temporalities allow practitioners to intuit, remember, or hear from the past, a capacity which once again foregrounds the individual’s sense of truth. In general, for modern Esotericism, “history is accessible to us not through conventional historiographic methods but through a form of gnosis, through religious experience and insight.”<sup>76</sup> Marla Segol’s essay in this volume demonstrates how such gnosis is practiced on virtual Kabbalistic images, which have been re-embedded and reinterpreted, as an act of visual piety. Exploring this process, Segol outlines “a hermeneutic for kabbalistic images in particular, and for sacred images on New Age websites generally.”

## Connections and Further Directions

The New Age and Neopaganism, which privilege imagination, experience, and intuition as ways of knowing, use the medieval as part of a larger project of re-enchantment, a re-enchantment that connects to, but which is not exhausted by, the fifth and ninth of Eco’s ten categories of medievalism. In the fifth category we find the “Middle Ages of *philosophia perennis* or of neo-Thomism” that serve as “a transparent source of inspiration.” Eco’s ninth category is the

Middle Ages of so-called Tradition, or of occult philosophy ... an eternal and rather eclectic ramshackle structure, swarming with Knights Templar, Rosicrucians, alchemists, Masonic initiates, neo-Kabbalists ... Antiscientific by definition, these Middle Ages keep going under the banner of the mystical weddings

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>76</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 200.

of the micro- with the macrocosm, and as a result they convince their adepts that everything is the same as anything else and that the whole world is born to convey, in any of its aspects and events, the same Message.<sup>77</sup>

New Age and Neopagan adoption of the perennial philosophy or Eco's notion of "tradition" validates anachronistic, or structurally radical, use of the past. Eco's categories, however, do not sufficiently consider the ontological or epistemological contexts of these medievalisms. At this point it is useful to remember Hanegraaff's emphasis, in his work on the history of ideas, "of *reinterpretation* in contrast to mere *continuity*":

Ideas do not move through history unchanged: what 'continues' is never simply 'the original idea' but, rather, the original idea as perceived through the eyes of later generations.... Each generation not only reinterprets ideas of the past, but also makes its own personal selection while adding innovations of its own. With respect to the past, it generally selects what suits its purposes while simply disregarding the rest.<sup>78</sup>

Here, we see the medieval being reinterpreted; in that process we also find notions about self, time, and spirituality being reinterpreted, embedded as they are in any system with an interest in what it means to be "me" "now." I would suggest that New Age and Neopagan romanticized and villainized modes of medievalism reinterpret the past through a desire for present enchantment. This desire is expressed in both movements by what can be called "soft primitivism." Bowman claims that "soft primitivism tends to come about 'when distance in time or space lends *enchantment* to the view, and desirable qualities are not only sought for, but discovered and idealized'. A Noble Savage becomes more noble and less, as it were, savage with distance, be that distance geographic, temporal, or imaginary."<sup>79</sup> Considering a desire for enchantment or sacralization as a powerful and influential context for New Age and Neopagan use of the past can open up new avenues in the study of medievalism, the self, temporality, and desire.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Eco, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages," 70–71.

<sup>78</sup> Hanegraaff, "New Age Movement," 376.

<sup>79</sup> Stuart Piggot, *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), in "Celtic Spirituality," 61, my emphasis.

<sup>80</sup> On enchantment, see Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Lynne Hume

Both Neopagans and New Agers reinterpret the medieval as a significant Other to facilitate identity-formation and to help shape a better future. We have discussed how the interest in feminism and the environment in the 1960s shaped New Age and Neopagan movements and their medievalisms—how these medievalisms seek to find alternatives to the perceived oppression, rationality, and misogyny of modernity. We have also mentioned Clecak's emphasis on the quest for personal fulfillment and the "democratization of personhood" as they emerged in that era and are expressed today.<sup>81</sup> New Age and Neopagan medievalisms are practiced in an environment where individuals seek to fulfill the self through means which are self-authorized and self-authorizing. In such a context, notions of self and identity need to be more thoroughly explored. Drawing from Antony Giddens, Hammer notes that in late modernity

we construct "who we really are" by engaging in self-reflexive speculation and considering a variety of options ... The Esoteric Tradition indeed engages its adherents in such identity work: reflexively, by presenting the reader as an incomplete project in constant spiritual process; as a series of options by seeing a range of exotic cultures as possible Others to use as mirrors in which to judge the success or failure of our own lives.<sup>82</sup>

We see this process at work in the myths and rituals of New Age and Neopagan movements that "create the impression of a tradition rooted deeply in time and history, yet with a contemporary focus on self-knowledge and personal experience."<sup>83</sup> These movements are part of modernism as they struggle against it; their medievalism emerges as a response to (while it articulates) the idea of an alienated self. Practitioners turn for comfort and models to cultures characterized as having healthier or more holistic notions of the self, nature, and society. These uses of the medieval are filtered through "the hope, to

and Kathleen McPhillips, *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006). On sacralization, see Heelas, *New Age Movement*.

<sup>81</sup> Clecak, discussing the 60s and 70s, claims them as part of "a single, uncompleted chapter in American civilization.... I believe that this episode was unified by a central cultural theme: a quest for personal fulfillment, a pursuit of a free, gratified, unalienated self within one or more communities of valued others." The "democratization of personhood" indicates "the substantial extension of many facilitating conditions for fulfillment of the self: enhanced cultural options, rising economic resources and rewards, strengthened legal guarantees, and augmented personal and political rights" (*America's Quest for the Ideal Self*, 6).

<sup>82</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 12.

recall a phrase from the Gospel of John, of a more ‘abundant’ life, characterized by an individual’s opportunity to define and enact possibilities of feeling and mind as freely and as fully as possible.” This hope, according to Clecak, now dominates “what remain[s] an essentially individualistic culture.”<sup>84</sup>

I would suggest that the *structurally conservative* New Age and Neopagan medievalisms betray a desire for *structurally radical* notions of the self. Medievalist Ben Morgan’s discussion of medieval mystics and modern identity is useful here. Morgan demonstrates how modern western thought is bankrupt of notions of non-self that had been articulated through the medieval mystics’ notion of “becoming God.” This bankruptcy could account for New Age and Neopagan’s attraction to other cultures and times for their mythic, connected vocabulary and practices of the self. Such attraction is a revolt not only against mechanistic, rationalist thought but also against more deeply embedded notions of identity (which structure the thought of Post-War critics such as Lyotard, Žižek, Derrida, and Adorno, as explored in Morgan’s work). Further studies of modern and postmodern ideas of the self, read through medievalism and works on medieval notions of the self, would be a fruitful line of research to augment the studies here.<sup>85</sup>

Akin to disrupting notions of self and other, future studies can explore queer notions of time in New Age and Neopagan medievalisms. As described above, these movements feature compelling perceptions of temporality in their engagement with channeling and past lives as well as ritual. For example, Pike describes Neopagan circle-casting as a way to create “the feeling of being outside ordinary space and time.”<sup>86</sup> Medievalist Nil Holger Peterson describes the liturgy as an example

of a medieval appropriation made not with a conscious idea of historical distance, not as a revitalization of a distant medieval

<sup>84</sup> *America’s Quest for the Ideal Self*, 10.

<sup>85</sup> There are also places where we can dismantle two very strong ideas in the current of medievalism: that the medieval is an Other against which to define oneself and that medievalism is a form of escapism. For example, in the context of Live Action Role Playing (LARPing), Kaufman says that the “refracted version of the Middle Ages is not necessarily other, but self. In her created world, the Middle Ages as she imagines them both belong to her and include her” (“Medieval Unmoored,” 5). Similarly, Adam Gopnik compellingly suggests that “Kids go to fantasy not for escape but for organization, and a little elevation; since life is like this already, they imagine that it might be still like this but more magical.” Rather than being escapist, Gopnik claims, fantasy-genre medievalisms can “offer familiar experience in intensified form” (“The Dragon’s Egg: High Fantasy for Young Adults,” *The New Yorker*, December 5, 2011, 86–89). Such dismantling could nuance any study of medievalism and the self.

<sup>86</sup> Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 108.

ceremony, but rather as something seemingly felt as a synchronically relevant present tradition. One might describe the difference as between a ‘modern’ reappropriation of a medieval ceremony ... and the simple feeling of ‘belonging to the medieval’ while living in the eighteenth century, or at least feeling as if, in that particular respect, one ‘belongs to the medieval.’<sup>87</sup>

Compellingly, Peterson asks whether historical difference is the *sine qua non* of medievalism when we consider the medieval being used and worked in a synchronic presence. Indeed, Carole Cusack’s contribution to this collection explores how performances of Wagner’s Ring cycle work to create ritual presence among Heathen communities. Additional readings of New Age and Neopagan pilgrimage, ritual, and meditation through Hammer’s work on New Age timelines, Adam Possamai’s work on the “perennist present,” and Carolyn Dinshaw’s notions of asynchrony—“different time frames or temporal systems colliding in a single moment of *now*” could prove fruitful.<sup>88</sup> How do these concepts relate to Robinson and Clement’s proposal that neomedievalism “moves it [the Middle Ages] off the timeline entirely, a phenomenon of distortion that steps outside of historical consciousness?”<sup>89</sup>

Finally, this study points to a need for deeper exploration of medievalism in New Age and Neopaganism epistemologies and hermeneutics, perhaps alongside contemporary, scholarly conceptions of enchantment and desire for the past. Here, the work of religious studies scholars can be complemented by the works of medievalists who have an interest in the role of affect, enchantment, and ethics. For example, Nicholas Watson suggests we think *with* the ideas of the Middle Ages rather than just *about* them and explores what “shamanic” ways of knowing might mean alongside critical distance.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Richard Utz calls for us to “theorize the role of empathy and affect in scholarship.”<sup>91</sup> Pointing to essays in *Maistresse of My Wit: Medieval Women, Modern Scholars*, edited by Louise D’Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys,<sup>92</sup> Utz

<sup>87</sup> Peterson, “Medievalism and Medieval Reception,” 40. See also note 85 above for a sense of “belonging” to another time.”

<sup>88</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, Adam Possamai, *In Search of New Age Spiritualities* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers and the Queerness of Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>89</sup> Robinson and Clements, “Living with Neomedievalism,” 65.

<sup>90</sup> Nicholas Watson, “Desire for the Past,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 21 (1999): 59–97.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Utz, “Medievalitas Fugit: Medievalism and Temporality,” in Fugelso, *Defining Medievalism(s) II*, 38.

<sup>92</sup> Turnhout: Brepols, 2004.



applauds approaches that feature an “openly experimental and playful character. Empathy, memory, subjectivity, resonance, affection, desire, passion, speculation, fiction, imagination, positionality, etc. are employed in reading that, while unapologetically presentist, are not reductionist or dismissive of pastiest reason, professionalism, distance, and research.”<sup>93</sup> In *How Soon is Now?* Dinshaw states: “I offer this book as a contribution to a broad and heterogeneous knowledge collective that values various ways of knowing that are derived not only from positions of detachment but also—remembering the etymology of *amateur*—from positions of affect and attachment, from desires to build another kind of world.”<sup>94</sup> This is not to say such scholarship is New Age or Neopagan (the religious movements tend not to be as “playful” in their construction of knowledge as some scholarship can be), but rather that rigorous work on epistemology and hermeneutics is underway in diverse fields and further interdisciplinary work on these topics should be encouraged.

In closing, Tom Shippey advocates for “the collective anthology, with single theme but varied perspectives,” which he sees as “of especial importance for the modern world, and even for modern geo-politics.”<sup>95</sup> It is my hope that this collection, with representation from a variety of disciplines, nationalities, and specialties, inspires additional interdisciplinary work in other peer-reviewed, open-access venues so that we may learn more comprehensively about the relationships among the past, present, and future.

<sup>93</sup> Utz, “Medievalitas Fugit,” 40.

<sup>94</sup> Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?* 6, original emphasis.

<sup>95</sup> Tom Shippey, “Medievalisms and Why They Matter,” in Fugelso, *Defining Medievalism(s)*, 48.