

Dreams, Visions, and Utopias

CERÆ

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Acknowledgements

Dream narratives were arguably the most ubiquitous and diverse literary genres of the medieval and early modern centuries. Some dreams were prophetic visions of both desired and feared future states of being such as the *Apocalypse of John (Revelation)*, the gnostic *Visio St. Pauli*, and Dante's *Inferno*. Other dreams entangled locations both imaginary and real as with the Land of Cockaigne, Merlin's *Prophecy of Britain*, or the numerous versions of Alexander the Great's exploits. Some dreams featured well-known individuals, and others, such as *Pearl*, focus on a person known only to the dreamer. Dreams could also become tangible through the mediums of tapestry, frescos, or sculpture, but archaeology also hints at a darker aspect through deviant burial practices aimed to prevent the movement of the dead into the world and the dreams of the living.

From the early medieval to the early modern, this conference features presenters from over thirty different institutions in fourteen different countries, from junior postgraduates to distinguished senior scholars.

Conference Committee

Erika Dell'Aquila, Julián Giglio, Michele Seah, and Erica Steiner,

with the assistance of

Ashley Castelino, Lindsay Church, Gavin Foster, Essi Nuutinen, Natasha Parnian, Ela Sefcikova, and Maria Gloria Tumminelli.

Volume 12 Ceræ Committee

Natasha Bailey, Quinn Bouabsa Marriott, Amanda Burrows-Petersen, Ashley Castelino, Lindsay Church, Erika Dell'Aquila, Colin Fisher, Gavin Foster, Julián Giglio, Ayaka Nguyen, Essi Nuutinen, Natasha Parnian, Brigitta Schvéd, Michele Seah, Ela Sefcikova, Erica Steiner, Dain Swenson, Barbara Taylor, Maria Gloria Tumminelli.

Acknowledgements

We would also like to thank Boydell & Brewer Publishers who have generously provided all conference delegates with access to an exclusive 50% off discount code for their Medieval and Early Modern Studies titles from 22 April – 31 May 2025

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Conference Schedule

All **ORANGE** times occur on **Saturday 26/4/24**, all **BLUE** times occur on **Sunday 27/4**, and all **GREEN** times occur on **Monday 28/4** for that respective timezone.

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NZST	AEST	JST	AWST	EEST	CEST	BST	UTC	ADT	EDT	CDT	MDT	MST	SESSION	PAPER TITLE	TITLE	PRESENTER NAME		PRESENTER AFFILIATION
1900	1700	1600	1500	1000	0900	0800	0700	0400	0300	0200	0100	0000						
1930	1730	1630	1530	1030	0930	0830	0730	0430	0330	0230	0130	0030	OPEN			Erica	Steiner	University of Sydney
2000	1800	1700	1600	1100	1000	0900	0800	0500	0400	0300	0200	0100	KEYNOTE 1	Early Medieval Dreams and Visions	Docent	Jesse	Keskiaho	University of Helsinki
2030	1830	1730	1630	1130	1030	0930	0830	0530	0430	0330	0230	0130						
2100	1900	1800	1700	1200	1100	1000	0900	0600	0500	0400	0300	0200						
2130	1930	1830	1730	1230	1130	1030	0930	0630	0530	0430	0330	0230	SESSION 1	Appeals and Contestations of Prophecy to Negotiate Alliances in the Anglo-Welsh Glyndŵr Rebellion		Lucy	Moloney	Deakin University
2200	2000	1900	1800	1300	1200	1100	1000	0700	0600	0500	0400	0300		"...for the oppression of that odious tyrant...": Utopian and Dystopian Kingship in the Royal Image of King Henry VII		Reilly	O'Hagan	University of Sydney
2230	2030	1930	1830	1330	1230	1130	1030	0730	0630	0530	0430	0330		Joseph II's vision of the reform of the Habsburg Monarchy's administration in the light of his political memoirs		Dániel	Molnár	University of Debrecen
2300	2100	2000	1900	1400	1300	1200	1100	0800	0700	0600	0500	0400						
2330	2130	2030	1930	1430	1330	1230	1130	0830	0730	0630	0530	0430						
0000	2200	2100	2000	1500	1400	1300	1200	0900	0800	0700	0600	0500						
0030	2230	2130	2030	1530	1430	1330	1230	0930	0830	0730	0630	0530						
0100	2300	2200	2100	1600	1500	1400	1300	1000	0900	0800	0700	0600	SESSION 2	The Great City: The Romanization of Constantinople as a Hero's Temptation in <i>Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar</i>		Evelyn	McCune	Texas Tech University
0130	2330	2230	2130	1630	1530	1430	1330	1030	0930	0830	0730	0630		Determining Fate: a Functionalist Approach to Dreams and their Interpretation in <i>Gísli Saga</i>		Rowan	Carlacci	University of Pennsylvania
0200	0000	2300	2200	1700	1600	1500	1400	1100	1000	0900	0800	0700		Wild animals as dream creatures in Old Norse sagas	Dr	Irina	Manea	Signum University
0230	0030	2330	2230	1730	1630	1530	1430	1130	1030	0930	0830	0730						
0300	0100	0000	2300	1800	1700	1600	1500	1200	1100	1000	0900	0800	SESSION 3	A History of Monstrous Medieval Visions		Leonardo	Colicigno	University of Florence
0330	0130	0030	2330	1830	1730	1630	1530	1230	1130	1030	0930	0830		Learning towards an Ambiguous Future in <i>Piers Plowman</i> (B-Text)		Daisy (Xinyu)	Liu	University of Birmingham
0400	0200	0100	0000	1900	1800	1700	1600	1300	1200	1100	1000	0900		Medieval sexualities and dreams: between male domination and queer emancipation		Inès	Limam	Aix Marseille Université
0430	0230	0130	0030	1930	1830	1730	1630	1330	1230	1130	1030	0930						
0500	0300	0200	0100	2000	1900	1800	1700	1400	1300	1200	1100	1000	SESSION 4	Narrative Levels in Late Medieval Stained Glass Depictions of the Apocalypse of John		Jessica	Knowles	University of Vienna
0530	0330	0230	0130	2030	1930	1830	1730	1430	1330	1230	1130	1030		Echolocation, Sound and Silence: Medieval Italian and Chinese Dreaming of Architecture		Shan	Wu	Harvard University
0600	0400	0300	0200	2100	2000	1900	1800	1500	1400	1300	1200	1100		"For the ingenuities of youth are always unstable": Sixteenth Century Marginalia in a 1497 Incunabula of Lorenzo Valla's Translation of the <i>Iliad</i>	Dr	James	Russell	Rio Salado College
0630	0430	0330	0230	2130	2030	1930	1830	1530	1430	1330	1230	1130						
0700	0500	0400	0300	2200	2100	2000	1900	1600	1500	1400	1300	1200						
0730	0530	0430	0330	2230	2130	2030	1930	1630	1530	1430	1330	1230						
0800	0600	0500	0400	2300	2200	2100	2000	1700	1600	1500	1400	1300						
0830	0630	0530	0430	2330	2230	2130	2030	1730	1630	1530	1430	1330						
0900	0700	0600	0500	0000	2300	2200	2100	1800	1700	1600	1500	1400	SESSION 5	Unfalsifiable Visions: The Inefficacy of Rome in <i>Cymbeline</i>	Asst Prof	Philip	Goldfarb Styrts	St Ambrose University
0930	0730	0630	0530	0030	2330	2230	2130	1830	1730	1630	1530	1430		'Remember well, that all is but Illusion': Internal Visions and Metatheatrical Layers in John Dryden's <i>King Arthur</i>		Amanda	Trainham	Binghamton University
1000	0800	0700	0600	0100	0000	2300	2200	1900	1800	1700	1600	1500						
1030	0830	0730	0630	0130	0030	2330	2230	1930	1830	1730	1630	1530	SESSION 6	Medieval Mysticism as Pre-Modern Utopias	Dist. Prof	Albrecht	Classen	University of Arizona
1100	0900	0800	0700	0200	0100	0000	2300	2000	1900	1800	1700	1600		Another Vision of Creation: The Feminine Divine in the <i>Cosmographia</i> of Bernardus Silvestris	Prof	June-Ann	Greeley	Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT
1130	0930	0830	0730	0230	0130	0030	2330	2030	1930	1830	1730	1630						



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1200	1000	0900	0800	0300	0200	0100	0000	2100	2000	1900	1800	1700	SESSION 7	Reviving Hope: Resurrection in Chaucer's <i>Book of the Duchess</i>		David	Palko	Duke University
1230	1030	0930	0830	0330	0230	0130	0030	2130	2030	1930	1830	1730		The (less than) Fortunate Isle: Utopian Spaces and Death in Medieval Arthurian Literature		Nicole	Kimball	University of Newcastle
1300	1100	1000	0900	0400	0300	0200	0100	2200	2100	2000	1900	1800		Juliet's Utopia of Death		Kenzo	Pecchia	McGill University
1330	1130	1030	0930	0430	0330	0230	0130	2230	2130	2030	1930	1830						
1400	1200	1100	1000	0500	0400	0300	0200	2300	2200	2100	2000	1900						
1430	1230	1130	1030	0530	0430	0330	0230	2330	2230	2130	2030	1930						
1500	1300	1200	1100	0600	0500	0400	0300	0000	2300	2200	2100	2000						
1530	1330	1230	1130	0630	0530	0430	0330	0030	2330	2230	2130	2030						
1600	1400	1300	1200	0700	0600	0500	0400	0100	0000	2300	2200	2100						
1630	1430	1330	1230	0730	0630	0530	0430	0130	0030	2330	2230	2130						
1700	1500	1400	1300	0800	0700	0600	0500	0200	0100	0000	2300	2200						
1730	1530	1430	1330	0830	0730	0630	0530	0230	0130	0030	2330	2230						
1800	1600	1500	1400	0900	0800	0700	0600	0300	0200	0100	0000	2300						
1830	1630	1530	1430	0930	0830	0730	0630	0330	0230	0130	0030	2330						
1900	1700	1600	1500	1000	0900	0800	0700	0400	0300	0200	0100	0000						
1930	1730	1630	1530	1030	0930	0830	0730	0430	0330	0230	0130	0030						
2000	1800	1700	1600	1100	1000	0900	0800	0500	0400	0300	0200	0100		Night Visions in Merovingian Hagiography	Assoc Prof	Lisa	Bailey	University of Auckland
2030	1830	1730	1630	1130	1030	0930	0830	0530	0430	0330	0230	0130	SESSION 8	Wakefulness, Vision, Truth, and Reason: A Study of the Preface of Petrarch's <i>Secretum</i>		Kosuke	Iijima	University of Osaka
2100	1900	1800	1700	1200	1100	1000	0900	0600	0500	0400	0300	0200		Sense Perception and Saintly Visitations in Raymond of Aguilers's Narrative of the First Crusade	Dr	Beth	Spacey	University of Queensland
2130	1930	1830	1730	1230	1130	1030	0930	0630	0530	0430	0330	0230						
2200	2000	1900	1800	1300	1200	1100	1000	0700	0600	0500	0400	0300	SESSION 9	Conceptualizing the Afterlife: Anglo-Saxon Eaves-Drip Burials in the Cemetery Landscape		Annie	Ross	Macquarie University
2230	2030	1930	1830	1330	1230	1130	1030	0730	0630	0530	0430	0330		"I shall not see a world that will be dear to me": Prophesying Doom in Old Norse and Old Irish		Samuel	Lewis	University of Sydney
2300	2100	2000	1900	1400	1300	1200	1100	0800	0700	0600	0500	0400		A Heathen Paradise: An Analysis of <i>Glæsisvellir</i> in the Old Norse Legendary Sagas		Brooklyn	Arnot	Háskóli Ísland (University of Iceland)
2330	2130	2030	1930	1430	1330	1230	1130	0830	0730	0630	0530	0430	SESSION 10					
0000	2200	2100	2000	1500	1400	1300	1200	0900	0800	0700	0600	0500		Rethinking Thomas Müntzer: Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt	Dr	Andrea	Di Carlo	University College Cork
0030	2230	2130	2030	1530	1430	1330	1230	0930	0830	0730	0630	0530		To create a New Jerusalem – the messianistic visions of the Spanish monarchs on America during the 16th and 17th centuries	Dr	Zoltán Attila	Liktor	Pázmány Péter Catholic University
0100	2300	2200	2100	1600	1500	1400	1300	1000	0900	0800	0700	0600		Pilgrimage to Dystopia: Parallel Reading of <i>Inferno</i> and <i>Heart of Darkness</i>		Lucas	Legović	University of Zagreb
0130	2330	2230	2130	1630	1530	1430	1330	1030	0930	0830	0730	0630						
0200	0000	2300	2200	1700	1600	1500	1400	1100	1000	0900	0800	0700						
0230	0030	2330	2230	1730	1630	1530	1430	1130	1030	0930	0830	0730	KEYNOTE 2	In defense of utopia, or: the early modern utopia as radical dreaming (and why we need it now)	Assoc Prof	Chloë	Houston	University of Reading
0300	0100	0000	2300	1800	1700	1600	1500	1200	1100	1000	0900	0800						
0330	0130	0030	2330	1830	1730	1630	1530	1230	1130	1030	0930	0830	CLOSE			Ashley	Castelino	Oxford University
0330	0130	0030	2330	1830	1730	1630	1530	1230	1130	1030	0930	0830						

Keynote Speaker Abstracts

Associate Professor Chloë Houston (University of Reading, United Kingdom)

In defense of utopia, or: the early modern utopia as radical dreaming (and why we need it now)

From their earliest occurrence in the 1500s, early modern utopias have recognized and played with the fact of their own unreality and the allegation of their inutility. In the seventeenth century, writers of utopias were often defensive about their use of a form which was viewed as ‘fraught with nothing but Heterodoxal novelties, and imaginary whimsies, which are not to be imitated, but are meerly impracticable’ (John Webster, *Academiarum Examen, or the Examination of Academies* (1653), Bv). This paper will look at the problems of the utopian form and its use as a space for radical dreaming in the early modern period, arguing that utopias often used these radical dreams to model small and achievable social reforms. It will end by suggesting that the imaginary whimsies of the medieval and early modern periods have much to offer our own age in the kinds of reading and thinking they model and encourage.

Biography

Chloë Houston is an Associate Professor and joint Head of the Department of English Literature at the University of Reading. Her research is on the representation of cross-cultural encounter in the early modern period and her monograph on Renaissance utopias was published by Ashgate in 2013. Her latest book is a co-authored novel, *The Book Game*, to be published under the pseudonym Frances Wise with 4th Estate in June 2025.

Docent (Associate Professor) Jesse Keskiäho (University of Helsinki, Finland)

Early Medieval Dreams and Visions

Dreams and visions occur frequently in early medieval hagiographies and histories, and narratives were also dedicated to single visions of the afterlife. Scholars and leaders discussed their nature and meaning. How were these phenomena understood? Were visions understood to be different from dreams, and if so, how? This paper discusses what we know of early medieval dreams and the way they were understood in early medieval learned traditions. It will also examine the extent to which visions were distinguished from dreams and the reasons for such distinctions.

Biography

Dr Keskiäho is currently docent at the University of Helsinki, and he specialises in early medieval intellectual history, manuscript studies, and the reception of patristic texts. He is currently working on a monograph on early medieval ideas about the soul, funded by the Research Council of Finland and the Finnish Cultural Foundation. His first monograph, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (Cambridge, 2015), explores early medieval thought on dreams, and he has also studied how early readers annotated some of Augustine of Hippo’s major works.

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Brooklyn Arnot (Háskóli Íslands (University of Iceland), Iceland)

A Heathen Paradise: An Analysis of *Glæsisvellir* in the Old Norse Legendary Sagas

Glæsisvellir is a utopic geographical region which reappears throughout the Old Norse legendary sagas. Its halls are filled with treasure while its inhabitants are healed of sickness, becoming immortal. It is represented as a heathen utopia, but in *Eiríks saga víðförla*, it is subsumed into a Christian, Edenic paradise. While the Christian writers of the legendary sagas often present pre-Christian magic negatively, *Glæsisvellir* is cast in a surprisingly positive light. *Glæsisvellir* has stimulated minimal scholarship, however, some scholars have suggested that its positive depiction of a heathen paradise created discomfort for its contemporary Christians (e.g., Rosemary Power, 1985). This paper will interrogate this assertion, considering what the existence of *Glæsisvellir* means for medieval Icelandic understanding of pre-Christian religion. It will ask: is *Glæsisvellir* merely an uncomfortable remnant of pre-Christian oral tradition, is it a place of demonic temptation, or does it reflect a medieval understanding of God's common grace manifest within pre-Christian religion? In order to answer these questions, my paper will examine the unique features of this land, comparing them with Old Norse translations of Christian visions of paradise and hell, such as *Duggals Leizla*.

Biography

Brooklyn Arnot is a PhD Student in Icelandic Literature at Háskóli Íslands. Her dissertation, "Undercover Christians: How Religious Worldviews Shape the *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*" provides new frameworks for understanding the reception of the pre-Christian past in post-Conversion Iceland. Outside of her scholastic work, Brooklyn is a visual artist, creating watercolour and linocut pieces inspired by her interest in the Middle Ages.

Assoc. Prof Lisa Bailey (University of Auckland, New Zealand)

Night Visions in Merovingian Hagiography

This paper explores the role of night time settings in creating a sensory atmosphere for the visions in the hagiographies of two seventh-century saints from Merovingian Francia: Aldegund and Eligius. It builds on previous work, which establishes the distinctive character of night-time dramas, and the particular power of night-time religious activities. It argues that night was an especially appropriate setting for miraculous 'visions', which could take on a dream-like quality, in addition to their dramatic luminosity in the darkness. These visions could be experienced by men, women, and children, by people across the social spectrum, and by laity, clergy, and

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monks. This gives them a markedly democratic character, but the elite texts which describe them also convey the fear that they could be diabolical in origin. Night visions therefore require expert sanction before they can be considered miraculous, and their potential to do harm hovers constantly at the edge of their textual descriptions.

Biography

Lisa Bailey is a historian of late antique and early medieval religious cultures, especially in Merovingian Gaul. Her publications include *Christianity's Quiet Success: The Eusebius Gallicanus Sermon Collection and the Power of the Church in Late Antique Gaul* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); *The Religious Worlds of the Laity in Late Antique Gaul* (Bloomsbury, 2016) and *Servants of God, Slaves of the Church: The Rhetoric and Reality of Service in the Early Medieval West* (Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

Rowan Carlacci (University of Pennsylvania, USA)

Determining Fate: a Functionalist Approach to Dreams and their Interpretation in *Gísla Saga*

This paper will provide a new approach to supplement previous scholarship that predominantly interprets Old Norse dream verses as literary devices or indications of religious belief by interrogating how the dream verses and their interactions with the concept of fate within *Gísla saga* might be interpreted instead for their psychological, and sociological, implications. Through insights made in modern psychology to the use of the dream space to perform 'threat-simulation', these dreams can be understood as representations of common psychological experiences where anxieties about future threats are displaced into a supernatural setting to simulate their outcomes. While the dreams themselves are a window into interiority and anxiety over the future, the interpretation and recitation of these dreams is shown to be a powerful tool for manipulating social opinion, casting accusations and protecting the lives and reputations of others. Ultimately, analysis will interrogate the *Gísla saga* dream verses, and their interpretation as being fated, from a psychological and sociological perspective, applying modern frameworks to consider these poetic episodes as literary representations of genuine psychological phenomena reckoned with by members of a society with a complex, highly developed concept of 'fate' informed not only by spirituality but by social codes and practices.

Biography

Rowan Carlacci is a doctoral student in the Penn English programme specialising in the Early Medieval Period in Northern Europe and England whose research explores Anglo-Latin, Old Norse and Old English concepts of cosmology, temporality and the negotiation of the self in time. Carlacci holds a

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particular interest in the transmission and influence of Late Classical didactic models and cosmologies in Early Medieval Western Europe.

Dist. Prof. Albrecht Classen (University of Arizona, USA)

Medieval Mysticism as Pre-Modern Utopias

Older research had traditionally assumed that the genre of utopias emerged only with Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Medievalists have revolted against this myopic perspective, pointing out, for instance, the genre of the Grail romance (Chretien or Wolfram), the Tristan romance (Gottfried) the Alexander romances, or love narratives (Marie de France) as forerunners of utopias. Carefully considered, medieval mystics can be identified as strong performers of utopia or narrative media for utopian experiences, but in a different way than we might assume today. Widening the term of 'utopia,' we can recognize many of the revelations or visions as fleeting forms of utopias. Some of the most vivid mystical images can be found in the writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg and Angela da Foligno. After all, those female writers were entitled to witness temporarily utopian visions. If we accept this premise, which I will flesh out in this talk, we will have a much stronger explanation for the study of mystical literature since it sheds light on extrasensory experiences both then and today.

Biography

Albrecht Classen received his PhD from the University of Virginia in 1986. He has a broad range of research interests covering the history of German and European literature from c. 800 to 1600 CE. He has currently published 132 books and well over 800 articles dealing with comparative issues, gender topics, environmental concerns, and cultural historical themes. His most recent books include: *Prostitution in Medieval and Early Modern Literature* (2021), *Charlemagne in Medieval German and Dutch Literature* (2021), *Tracing the Trails in the Medieval World* (2021), *Wisdom from the European Middle Ages* (2022), *The Secret in Medieval Literature* (2022), *Globalism in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age* (ed., 2023), and *Der Niederrheinische Orientbericht, c. 1350* (trans., 2024). A new book on court criticism and of evil kings in medieval literature appeared in 2024. In 2017, he received the rank of Grand Knight Commander of the Most Noble Order of the Three Lions.

Leonardo Colicigno (Università di Firenze, Italy)

A History of Monstrous Medieval Visions

This paper will provide a concise overview of monstrous visions in the Middle Ages. During this period, the dream was subject to a complex relationship characterised by a mixture of veneration and condemnation. On the one hand, the population was intrigued by the potential for uncovering hidden truths and approached dream

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content with a sense of curiosity; on the other hand, ecclesiastical authorities disapproved of the practice, associating it with pagan rites. The *Decretum Gratianii*, a compendium of legal decisions and opinions, explicitly forbade the preservation of pagan traditions and condemned the interpretation of dreams through books, such as the *Somniale Danielis*. Dream visions were interpreted as either divine messages or satanic temptations, stimulating reflections by physicians and scholars. Haly Abbas and Gariopontus argued that nightmares could manifest themselves in human form, while Gilbert Anglicus and Bernard de Gordon spoke of demons and terrifying figures. *Metamorphoses*, already celebrated in antiquity, took on demonic characters in the medieval context, highlighting the ability of devils to change form. These disturbing representations were also reflected in art, where monstrous creatures adorned cathedrals, symbolising sins and spiritual downfalls, to warn the faithful of the insidious dangers of evil.

Biography

Leonardo Colicigno, a PhD Student in Art History at the University of Florence, was awarded his previous degree with honours in 2020, having presented a thesis on the figure of Hercules in the Middle Ages. The thesis, which focused on a 14th-century lintel, was subsequently published as an article in the *IX Ciclo di Studi Medievali*, edited by NUME – Gruppo di Studio sul Medioevo Latino Association, in 2023. Since 2022, Colicigno has been employed as a museum operator at the Natural History Museum of the University of Florence.

Dr Andrea Di Carlo (University College Cork, Ireland)

Rethinking Thomas Müntzer: Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt

The aim of this presentation is to reconsider Thomas Müntzer's utopian blueprint through the theoretical lenses of Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt. Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525) is the key figure of the German Peasants' War (1524–1525), where he stood up against Martin Luther and his closeness to aristocrats. Müntzer's theology is a rejection of the status quo, defining a utopia where all Christians can share their belongings while adhering to the message of the Gospel. I claim that Michel Foucault would have held out Müntzer as a compelling example of counter-conduct. Müntzer's utopian blueprint, with its rejection of the status quo, pits Müntzer against the German princes and Martin Luther. Utopia is therefore the counter-conduct to undermine biopolitical governance. By focusing on Hannah Arendt, I will show how on the one hand, the Reformation did not instigate the individualisation and atomisation of humankind. On the other, I will show Müntzer's radical utopia embodies the Arendtian notion of action. On Arendt's view, action opens up a space of contestation and continuous engagement. Müntzer created a novel and engaged community. Via Foucault and Arendt, I re-examine Müntzer's utopia from a novel theoretical lenses.

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Biography

Andrea Di Carlo received a PhD in political philosophy from University College Cork. Di Carlo's main areas of expertise are Continental philosophy (Michel Foucault, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Hannah Arendt) and early modern philosophy (Machiavelli and Montaigne) and has published in *Foucault Studies*, *History of European Ideas*, and *Reformation*. Di Carlo has co-authored two articles with Dr Miranda Corcoran, associate professor in American studies at University College Cork. The former came out in 2020 for Palgrave (*Fictional World and the Moral Imagination*, ed. Gary Hagberg). The latter came out in 2022 for the peer-reviewed French journal *Arrêt sur Scène/ Scene Focus*. Di Carlo has also served as a reviewer for the journal *Synthese*.

Asst. Prof. Philip Goldfarb Styrt (St. Ambrose University, Iowa, USA)

Unfalsifiable Visions: The Inefficacy of Rome in Cymbeline

The Soothsayer in William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* has a vision of an eagle disappearing into a sunbeam in the west, a vision that he twice interprets onstage: first as a precursor to a Roman victory, and then, after the fact, as presaging Cymbeline's willingness, after defeating the Romans, to nevertheless ally with them. In this presentation I suggest that Lucius's reliance on this re-interpretable (and thus unfalsifiable) vision also serves as an indication within the play of the ineffectiveness of Rome as an empire, which thinks it ought to sweep all before it but is ultimately reliant on the cooperation of the local authorities. I connect this to a broader theme in Shakespeare's work critiquing the operation of Roman imperial power, suggesting that in all of Shakespeare's plays about Rome we see a common thread: that Shakespeare's Romans always misunderstand how they ought to rule. I argue that this misunderstanding serves as a critique of empire more broadly, applicable to England's own nascent imperial ambitions and the likelihood that an imperial England will likewise find itself misunderstanding how to rule its empire.

Biography

Philip Goldfarb Styrt is an assistant professor of English at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, USA. His research primarily focuses on early modern drama and its various cultural contexts, both early modern and contemporary. He is currently working on a project about skepticism concerning empire in early modern drama, focusing on Shakespeare, Jonson, and Marlowe.

Prof. June-Ann Greeley (Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT, USA)

Another Vision of Creation: The Feminine Divine in the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris

In the 12th century, the enigmatic Bernardus Silvestris composed *Cosmographia* ("Cosmography"), a treatise that explores in allegory the creation of the universe, the

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‘Megacosmus’, and the creation of humanity, the ‘microcosmos’. In the interest of time, the paper will explore only the first part of the work, the “Megacosmus”, as a study in the primordial transformation of creation, the processes by which creation came into being, and how that process was initiated and organized by the Celestial Female, the Feminine Divine. The paper will also address the rather mysterious inspiration for such a unique work: was it in fact a vision? Simply an exercise in Platonic imagery? A rethinking of conventional theology?

The first section begins with a complaint by Nature to her mother “Noys” (the Divine Mind) that the universe (primordial matter), “Hyle”, is in chaos and requires structure and order. Noys, the “daughter” of God, agrees that it is time to set order into the universe of materiality, especially since, as Nature argues, that primordial matter was not even ‘of God’ or divine origin, but was instead a “giddy contrivance of blind fortune, bereft of the protection of any higher power” (68). As such, Hyle tends toward evil and so it is only when Noys, implementing both reason and imagination, sets it in order that excess and turmoil can be managed. Noys, “pregnant with the Divine Will” (of God) is then able to shape a structured creation, beginning with the four primary elements and generating the World Soul, the source of all goodness in the universe.

This paper will consist of a close reading of the first section of the “Megacosmus” and an analysis grounded in feminist literary theory (which, oddly, is not a significant aspect of much scholarship about the work – perhaps not so odd?) as Silvestris designed a creation narrative in which the (male) God of Christianity is noticeably absent and the most dynamic forces in the universe are female, and will argue that *Cosmographia* is in fact a visionary text that asks the reader to reconsider conventional wisdom about the generative source and dynamic of creation.

Biography

June-Ann Greeley is a Professor in the Department of Languages and Literatures and Department of Catholic Studies at Sacred Heart University (Fairfield, Connecticut). Areas of research/publications are medieval spirituality (Western Europe, 8th–13th c.), more specifically prayer studies and gender studies; medieval angelology (Christian and Muslim); medieval literature with a focus on 11th–13th c. Welsh literature (poetry and Arthurian tradition); monsters and the marvellous in medieval (Christian and Muslim) travel literature; visionary/ apocalyptic medieval (Latin) literature and realms of the fantastic in medieval (Latin) literature; and (my latest project) animal imagery in medieval spirituality/ spiritual texts.

Kosuke Iijima (University of Osaka, Japan)

Wakefulness, Vision, Truth, and Reason: A Study of the Preface of Petrarch’s *Secretum*

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This study examines the preface of Petrarch's *Secretum* as a pivotal moment in his intellectual evolution, where the concepts of wakefulness, vision, truth, and reason converge. By deliberately situating his protagonist Francesco in a state of wakefulness (*pervigilium*) rather than following the medieval convention of divine revelation through dream visions (*somnium*), Petrarch establishes a distinctive framework for introspection. The analysis demonstrates that this conscious state represents both a challenge to traditional allegorical modes of visionary literature and the construction of a rational space that facilitates self-examination independent of mystical intervention. Through careful examination of the preface's architectural structure and symbolic dialogue, the paper illuminates how Petrarch redefines the relationship between reason and vision in the pursuit of truth. This reconfiguration marks a significant transition toward a more reflective, humanistic approach to spiritual contemplation – one that privileges active intellectual engagement over passive reception of dream-induced revelation.

Biography

Kosuke Iijima earned his master's degree in Italian Studies at the University of Tokyo (March 2023) after completing his undergraduate studies at Ritsumeikan University. His research focuses on the concept of *io petrarcheschi*, analyzing the multilayered and complex self-representation in Petrarch's works through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary theory, philology, and historical context. He has presented at academic conferences in Japan and Italy, including Laureatus in Urbe (2023), and published an article in *Ritsumeikan Bungaku* (No. 679, 2022). Starting in April 2025, he will begin his doctoral studies in Italian and Latin Literature at the University of Osaka.

Nicole Kimball (University of Newcastle, Australia)

The (less than) Fortunate Isle: Utopian Spaces and Death in Medieval Arthurian Literature

The island of Avalon, or Fortunate Isle, is a mystical island utopia that is a feature of Arthurian literature. First appearing in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136) and then his *Vita Merlini* (1150), the island is a feminine-coded paradise where food is plentiful without the need for agriculture and men might live for a hundred years or more. Ruled by a benevolent version of Morgen le Fay, Avalon is also a place of education and miraculous healing. However, from the beginning Avalon is also associated with the death of King Arthur. In nearly every version of the legend, the dying king is brought to the island, either to be healed, as in Geoffrey, or as his final resting place. The idea of a feminine coded utopia is one that repeats in Arthurian literature, either through depictions of Avalon or similar spaces. With this in mind, this paper seeks to explore this consistent correlation between utopia and death in Arthurian literature.

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Biography

Nicole Kimball is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Focused primarily on cultural and literary history, Nicole's doctoral research explores the representation of witches and witchcraft throughout major works of literature, from the *Odyssey* of ancient Greece to the modern-day Harry Potter series. Her work examines the common features of the witch in these representations and addresses the reasons behind why these images might differ from the norm. Her research interests include magic and witchcraft, folklore studies, mythology, and the reception of these into the current day. Her thesis, titled 'The Wayward Witch of the West: Tracing the Classical Witch in Western Literature from Homer to *Charmed*' was submitted in January.

Jessica Knowles (University of Vienna, Austria)

Narrative Levels in Late Medieval Stained Glass Depictions of the *Apocalypse* of John

The northern English city of York contains two surviving depictions in stained glass of the *Apocalypse* of John. The first is the largest surviving expanse of medieval glass: the Great East Window of York Minster, the lowest two-thirds of which contain a scheme of 81 panels showing episodes from John's *Apocalypse*. The second depiction, almost entirely ignored by scholarship, is in the parish church of All Saints, North Street. The main lights of this glass show St. Michael killing the many-headed Beast and St. John recording the event in the *Book of Revelation*, with donors praying at the base of the window. These two windows survive within the same city, were likely made within fifteen years of each other, and show the same topic. Yet, they have not previously been investigated together. The proposed paper will explore the ways in which the dream or vision of St. John is presented within this glass. It will compare how the materiality of these windows shaped the presentation of the narrative, and how the pictorial form moved between the level of St. John in Patmos (dreaming, seeing the apocalypse, and writing his biblical text), and his prophecy of the apocalypse.

Biography

Having previously studied at the University of York, England, Jessica Knowles is finishing a PhD at the University of Vienna, Austria. Knowles' doctoral dissertation explores the apocalyptic windows of the church of All Saints, North Street, employing iconography, narratology, and light and sound studies to highlight connections between these windows and manifestations of local popular saints (Richard Rolle and Richard Scrope).

Lucas Legović (University of Zagreb, Croatia)

Pilgrimage to Dystopia: Parallel Reading of *Inferno* and *Heart of Darkness*

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Dante's *Inferno* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* construct journeys through dystopian landscapes where morality, civilization, and power unravel. Traditionally read as visions of damnation and colonial horror, these spaces can also be understood through Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia – real-and-imagined sites that reflect, invert, and subvert societal norms. In *Inferno*, Hell functions as a heterotopia of deviation, where rigid hierarchies of sin and punishment create an uncanny mirror of medieval social and religious anxieties. Dante's journey, framed as a pilgrimage, destabilizes conventional understandings of justice, revealing a world where order and chaos coexist. Similarly, in *Heart of Darkness*, the Congo emerges as a heterotopia of crisis, exposing the moral decay of imperialism. Marlow's journey into the heart of colonial violence dissolves the distinctions between civilization and savagery, revealing empire as an illusion masking brutality. By reading these texts through the lens of heterotopia, this paper challenges the binary of utopia and dystopia, arguing that these landscapes do not merely depict suffering and corruption but serve as liminal spaces that expose the fragile foundations of human civilization.

Biography

Lucas Legović is a graduate student of Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. As part of his student demonstratorship at the Department of Comparative Literature, he conducted research on queer-coded characters in Walt Disney animated films. He is one of the editors of the upcoming issue of *k.*, a student journal for literary and cultural theory. As a young literary critic, he participated in the project *Her Story is Also Your Story: Universal Values of Women's European Literature*, supported by Creative Europe, where he attended the regional literary criticism workshop *Young Europe Reads*. He occasionally writes reviews and literary critiques for the portals *Kulturpunkt*, *Booksa*, and *Mreža antifašistkinja Zagreb*. His interests include queer theory, feminism, cultural studies, as well as the history and theory of literature.

Samuel Lewis (University of Sydney, Australia)

"I shall not see a world that will be dear to me": Propheying Doom in Old Norse and Old Irish

My paper aims to examine the visions of the figures of the seeress in the Old Norse *Völuspá* and the prophecy of the Morrigan after the Second Battle of Moytura. My paper aims to consider the significance of eschatological prophecy in Old Norse and Old Irish mythology. This paper will have a bipartite structure. I first aim to examine *Völuspá* and discuss the portrayal of the figure of the seeress and her prophecy of the eschaton to the god Óðinn. The second part of the paper will examine the Morrigan's prophecy. In this section, I will complement my analysis of the Morrigan's eschatological prophecy through reference to the Classical Greek works of Strabo and Arrian, both of whom mention a Celtic eschatological story. This section will also refer to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophecy of Merlin*. This paper highlights commonalities

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between Old Norse and Old Irish mythological tradition, and in turn suggests that there is a common Indo-European notion of the prophetic figure at work in both traditions.

Biography

Samuel Lewis is a graduate of the University of Sydney whose research interests lie chiefly in the field of Germanic philology and mythology, with a particular interest in Old Norse mythological and heroic poetry. Lewis is also interested in Medieval Latin epic and the intersection of Latin and Germanic vernacular culture.

Dr Zoltán Attila Liktó (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary)

To create a New Jerusalem: the Messianistic visions of the Spanish monarchs on America during the 16th and 17th centuries

The medieval history of the Iberian Peninsula was marked by the *reconquista* – an 800 years-long fight against Islam. In this process, the Catholic faith proved to be the most important link during the struggle against the Moors, and the Spanish monarchs noticed that political and religious unity as well as social unity were essential for their survival and finally their success. After Columbus had returned from America, the so-called Indies, the kings of Castile and Aragon asked Pope Alexander VI to grant them the New World to create a ‘New Jerusalem’ there. The vision of Isabel and Ferdinand was not to eliminate the native people there, but to mix the Spaniards and the Indians under the Catholic faith, just as they and their predecessors had urged it before among the Spaniards, Jews, and Moors in the Iberian Peninsula. This vision was respected and followed by their successors as well. This paper argues that during the 16th and 17th centuries we can see how these messianic visions became reality in the Americas through the propagation of Christianity and the massive racial mixture (*mestizaje*) between the Spaniards and the Indians. The Habsburgs tried to protect America from all ‘heretic’ influence and maintain the Catholicism intact there.

Biography

Zoltán Attila Liktó graduated as jurist from Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary, in Law and Political Sciences, and has been a lecturer at the History of Law department since 2017. Liktó obtained his PhD and graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2021. The theme of his thesis was “The guarantees of the Hungarian Historical Constitution and the relation between the Kingdom of Hungary and the House of Habsburg (16th–18th centuries) the relation between Hungary and the Spanish Habsburgs”. Liktó has served as Chief Advisor at the Curia of Hungary since 2021 and has been focusing recently on research into the cultural and legal heritage of the Spanish Habsburgs in America during the 16th–17th centuries.

Inès Limam (Aix Marseille Université, France)

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Medieval sexualities and dreams: between male domination and queer emancipation

In several 13th-century *fabliaux*, women's entry into sexuality is forced. Men, older and more knowledgeable about sexual relations, use metaphorical discourse set in an unreal space to discursively represent the human sexual act and thus force them into an act they believe to be quite different. Unreal spaces of desire are associated with female sexuality, while male sexuality is embodied and material. We can distinguish metaphors, which are tools of male domination, from dream spaces which are more associated with female desires. In *Li souhaiz desvez*, a French *fabliau*, a woman in the privileged space of the dream goes to a penis market, allowing the expression of desire beyond heterosexual norms. In medieval figuration, unreal and virtual bodies represent those on the margins. In *Lancelot en prose*, Galehaut has a love dream in which the bestial, feminine Beast (Galaad) plays with sexual and gender norms. The dream is a foreshadowing of questions about bodies, the virtual world, gender and incarnation of the soul. We can therefore ask ourselves how medieval visions of dreams (i.e. Alain de Lille) and the expressions of sexual desire in dreams help us to understand medieval desiring subjectivities between the dominant and the dominated.

Biography

Inès Limam is a second-year history master's student at Aix Marseille Université whose M1 thesis was on the fluidity of gender and kinship in the hagiography of Saint Euphrosyne. This year, Limam is working on female sexuality in *fabliaux* and in 2023, she took part in a colloquium organized in London by the Gender and Medieval Studies (GMS) group on hagiographic narratives. In May 2025, Limam will be taking part in the International Congress of Medieval Studies (ICMS) in Kalamazoo in the session on the performance of chastity with a paper on female sexuality in the Middle Ages as affecting gender norms.

Daisy (Xinyu) Liu (University of Birmingham, United Kingdom)

Learning towards an Ambiguous Future in *Piers Plowman* (B-Text)

This paper focuses on the relation between ambiguity and educational aim in the B-text of *Piers Plowman* and seeks to demonstrate how ambiguity facilitates the dreamer's learning on both a local and structural level. The poetics of Langland's work is examined alongside the medieval notion of ambiguity, which is highly suggestive in its implication of transcendence. Since the deferral of a clear meaning is not only an end in itself but also a pointer towards an infinity yet to be grasped, ambiguity in late medieval English literature is self-sustaining in its very essence. In its discursive and meandering self-sustainment, ambiguity produces a movement through time and embodies another form of knowledge. By closely examining the psychological

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ambiguity in a sequence of representative passages in B-text (inner dream in B.XVI, narrative in B.XIII, and the transitional passus B.VII), the paper argues that learning is not only achieved by arriving at a clarity of reason – it can be an ongoing process where the learner is constantly inspired by irrational affection and is propelled to continue the search for knowledge into a far future.

Biography

Daisy (Xinyu) Liu is an MA Comparative Literature and Critical Theories student at the University of Birmingham. They received their BA in English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford. Their main research interest is late medieval English literature, specifically *Piers Plowman*, hermeneutics, and the conception of study in the Middle Ages. In the upcoming year, they will be focusing on how early 20th century Chinese translations of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* helped to construct vernacular Chinese as the national language of modern China.

Dr Irina Manea (Signum University, New Hampshire, USA)

Wild animals as dream creatures in Old Norse sagas

'And last night I dreamt that a wolf ran from the same house and tore Vestein to death' (*Gísla saga Súrssonar*). Among the various dream motifs, wild animals frequently appear as *fylgjur* (fetches), acting as omens, metaphors, and extensions of human characters. This paper aims to explore the symbolic function of wild dream-animals in the sagas with a comparative focus on wild versus domestic animals and their respective connotations in medieval dream culture. Drawing on Lévi-Strauss' idea of animals as conceptual tools and Descola's animism framework, I analyse how medieval Icelanders imagine wild animals in their dreams particularly in their associations with fate, personal identity, and supernatural guidance. Additionally, the study incorporates medieval Scandinavian dream theory, considering the influence of dream-interpretation practices found in sources such as *Ragnarssona þáttr* and *Njáls saga*, i.e. how these representations align with broader medieval European beliefs about divine visions, prophetic dreams, and symbolic bestiaries. While previous scholarship has examined more generally the role of animals in Norse mythology, this paper introduces a nuanced perspective on wild dream animals as markers of status, morality, and the permeability of human-animal boundaries.

Biography

Irina Manea holds a PhD in Viking Studies (Bucharest 2017) and is an instructor at Signum University with classes on Old Norse magic, pre-Christian religions in Northern Europe, and the Viking age. Manea is also a public historian with the Save Ancient Studies Alliance NGO and YouTube history project Shield of Skuld, with main academic interests in Viking age (and pre-Viking) religions in Scandinavia, the supernatural, the undead, and pagan memory in saga literature.

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Evelyn McCune (Texas Tech University, USA)

The Great City: The Romanization of Constantinople as a Hero's Temptation in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*

The memory of Constantinople is like a star that won't go out. Constantinople and its art, decadence, and royalty faces romanticization and Utopianization even within scholarship. This presentation will analyze the medieval Icelandic saga *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* and its treatment of Constantinople. Constantinople is mentioned for a large portion of this saga and plays an important role in the hero's journey of the character. A large portion of the first 15 chapters make Constantinople a significant part of the plot. The saga begins with king Haraldr escaping his responsibilities, fleeing a battle and escaping to Constantinople. He then finds himself serving the Empress Zoe Porphyrogenita of Byzantium and has a successful military career abroad. During his service he receives unwanted attention from the empress and comically must avoid her offer of staying in Constantinople to live a carefree life. He then returns home to find his nephew has taken his throne and Haraldr must take back his responsibilities. The role of Constantinople is one of distraction and opulence which hinders the main character from his true destiny. This mirrors the trend of many Scandinavian mercenaries who similarly had to reject the splendor of the world beyond and return to their homelands. This presentation will argue the usage of the grandeur of Constantinople as a deterrent in the hero's journey in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*.

Biography

Evelyn McCune is a recent graduate from the University of Iceland with a Masters degree in Viking and Old Norse Studies. Here McCune learned the Old Norse Language (Medieval Icelandic) and studied Icelandic Manuscripts intensely with a specialization in the Old Norse religion. McCune also has a Bachelors in Classical Literature from the University of Texas Tech with two minors in Latin and Religious Philosophy. McCune's specialization is in religious and mythical literature and she is currently applying to several PhD programs.

Dániel Molnár (University of Debrecen, Hungary)

Joseph II's vision of the reform of the Habsburg Monarchy's administration in the light of his political memoirs

'*Josepho secundo Augustus, qui salutis Publicae Vixit, non diu, sed totus*'. This is the inscription on the equestrian statue of the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II, King of Hungary and Bohemia in Vienna, but what does it mean? 'Joseph II, who lived for the common good, not long, but completely'. So the monument is a reminder of a ruler whose political aspirations were strongly focused on the common good. Strangely,

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however, Joseph is remembered in the literature as an ‘enlightened tyrant’ rather than a ‘people’s emperor’, even though his policies were specifically aimed at benefiting the lower classes of society. It is important to point out that, although the history of Joseph II’s reign has been widely and repeatedly discussed over the past two hundred years, the authors have paid little attention to the future aims and ambitions of Joseph II. This paper examines the future plans and ideas of the Emperor through his political memoirs on the reform of the administration. In this regard, this paper will also try to explain what Joseph saw as the purpose of the state and how he interpreted his sovereign power.

Biography

Dániel is a fourth-year law student researching the constitutional history, art, and music history of the Habsburg Monarchy in the 18th century. His research includes the baroque castles, palaces and residences in Vienna and the vicinity of the *Kaiserstadt*, in addition to the representation of Habsburg power in art during the reigns of Leopold I, Charles VI, and Maria Theresa.

Lucy Moloney (Deakin University, Australia)

Appeals and Contestations of Prophecy to Negotiate Alliances in the Anglo-Welsh Glyndŵr Rebellion

This paper examines how medieval British elites used and contested prophecies to gain and circumvent alliances. This tactic of political negotiation responded to an overlap of conflicting sovereignty concerns in the later medieval period. Internally Wales, Scotland, and England each had rulership crises, while English kings were concurrently attempting to impose superiority over the whole island of Britain. For the Welsh and the Scots, securing alliances to give them the military and financial power to fight the English was a vital objective. Calling upon prophecies in their diplomatic correspondence sought to bring about their desired vision of the future. Meanwhile, the English show a concern of the existence of these prophecies and sought to discredit them. Examining the diplomatic correspondence of Owain Glyndŵr, the last native Welsh-born to claim the title ‘Prince of Wales’, and letters and decrees of the English government, this paper highlights the contestation of prophecy as a political tool in sovereignty disputes. As previous scholarship has largely considered the appeals to prophecy with each polity in isolation, this paper explores how a cross-polity approach highlights the significance of shared culture in creating and refuting ties across polity boundaries.

Biography

Lucy completed her Masters at Monash University in 2024. Her thesis examined appeals to the past in sovereignty disputes in Wales, Scotland, and England during Edward I’s reign (1272–1307). She is

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interested in prophecy, historical writing, alliance making, and political and legal debates over sovereignty.

Reilly O'Hagan (University of Sydney, Australia)

“...for the oppression of that odious tyrant...”: Utopian and Dystopian Kingship in the Royal Image of King Henry VII

When Henry VII (r. 1485–1509) seized the throne of England from Richard III in August of 1485, he portrayed himself not as a usurper, but as a saviour. According to Henry, he deposed Richard to liberate England from tyranny, and to unite the kingdom under the rule of a new, just king – himself. Throughout Henry’s nearly two-year campaign for the throne, in his letters, and later as king, Henry regularly highlighted the stark differences between himself and Richard, portraying himself as the antithesis to Richard’s supposed villainy. Henry maintained that his purpose in seeking the throne was neither for greed nor personal glory; rather, he asserted his claim in the name of justice, right, and, importantly, liberation. In doing so, Henry created an image of his kingship as utopian, just, peaceful, and sanctioned by God, while simultaneously portraying Richard and his rule as a dystopian nightmare, characterised by oppression, injustice, and corruption. In this paper, I will use Henry’s letters and his only contemporary biography to show how a portrayal of his reign as a utopian alternative to Richard’s was a central tenet of Henry’s image as king.

Biography

Reilly O'Hagan is an early career historian who will complete her Master of Arts (Research) degree in mid-2025. Reilly’s MA thesis examines the royal image of King Henry VII of England (r.1485–1509) with particular focus on Henry’s depiction of himself as a saviour and restorer of unity in the wake of the Wars of the Roses. Her research interests include kingship, power, and the political and legal systems of late medieval England.

David Palko (Duke University, USA)

Reviving Hope: Resurrection in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*

Scholars largely agree that Chaucer wrote *The Book of the Duchess* – an early dream vision – to console the recently widowed John of Gaunt. Critics remain starkly divided, however, about whether Chaucer achieves that goal. Some argue that the Man in Black, often read as symbolizing John of Gaunt, acknowledges his grief at the dream’s finale, thus producing consolatory catharsis for both himself and the reader. Other critics claim that this conclusion is not an act of acknowledgment but one of stasis – an inability to look past grief that produces despondence. This paper argues

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that these two views are not as incompatible as they may seem. By tracing key distinctions between *The Book of the Duchess* and Chaucer's source materials, this paper shows how Chaucer consistently directs the audience's attention toward resurrection and Christian salvation. The Man in Black misses these cues, however: he remains solely focused on worldly sorrow. In so doing, the Man in Black shows the audience how not to grieve. The dream narrative itself seems hopeless, but the paradoxical effect is that the dream's despair produces hope for the audience. Thus, we must reconsider how Chaucer sought the poem to console John of Gaunt's mourning.

Biography

David Palko is a PhD student in the English Department at Duke University. His previous degrees include a BA in English and Music from Davidson College, an MA in English from North Carolina State University, and a JD from Harvard Law School. David's research interests focus on using legal history to explore medieval and early modern texts. He is especially interested in how literature from these periods reflect and shape the reputations of judicial figures.

Kenzo Pecchia (McGill University, Canada)

Juliet's Utopia of Death

While she awaits the arrival of her beloved Romeo, Juliet delivers a soliloquy in which she urges the sun to set so that the couple may perform 'their amorous rites' (3.2.8) in the secrecy of darkness. Juliet ultimately concludes that the night is inadequate for accommodating their love, due to the fact that the night is 'sober-suited' (3.2.11) in contrast to the passionate lovers. She thus envisions the construction of a new night: a perfect intermingling of light's day with night's secrecy, populated by 'little stars' (3.2.22) that will outshine the 'garish sun' (3.2.24). The creation of Juliet's utopian night, however, requires an immense amount of bloodshed. She must kill the 'garish sun' through the death of its charioteer Phaëton, freeze the 'sober-suited' raven of night, and even murder her beloved for she commands that, 'when I shall die' (3.2.21), Romeo is to be cut up into the 'little stars' that will adorn the heavens and give her night its beauty. The vision of her night is one predicated on death – of both the lovers and the natural order itself – revealing the necessary violence one must enact to construct a utopia.

Biography

Kenzo Pecchia is an English student at McGill University in the first year of his MA program. His focus lies in the reception of classical works by Renaissance poets, particularly Shakespeare, and their legacies. He is currently working as a research assistant to Professor Maggie Kilgour and his essay, "The Erosion of Memory in Hamlet", has been accepted for publication at McGill's graduate English journal, *Caret*. He is currently working on his thesis, which seeks to trace the reception of the Roman Poet Ovid throughout the English Renaissance, with especial focus on Marlowe, Shakespeare and Milton.

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Annie Ross (Macquarie University, Australia)

Conceptualizing the Afterlife: Anglo-Saxon Eaves-Drip Burials in the Cemetery Landscape

In the 1970s, a unique discovery of 23 neonate and infant burials were uncovered against the walls of a late-Saxon field church in Raunds, Northamptonshire. This unique burial phenomenon – referred to as ‘eaves-drip burials’ has been observed throughout England and Continental Europe. For decades, the rationale behind the eaves-drip burial has been theorised, and ultimately reduced to a simple, romanticised notion: these burials are the result of unbaptised, deceased infants being buried below the eaves of the church, with the hope that as rainwater fell on the roof, it would be imbued with sanctity, providing a blessing which would (hopefully) ensure entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. However, these baptismal notions have remained largely unchallenged in the decades since these children were discovered at Raunds and have a dubious historical origin. Using a Deleuzian Assemblage Theory approach, I assess the various practices which may have been made manifest within the late-Saxon burial landscape. The paper provides insights into how late Saxons may have envisaged damnation, salvation, in addition to still-prevalent ‘pagan’ supernatural threats, and the use of consecrated cemetery space as a form of mitigation of threats to these children’s bodies and souls.

Biography

Annie Ross holds a Bachelor of Anthropology from the University of Winnipeg, Canada and a Master of Research from Macquarie University, Australia. Her research interests lie in the study of the Early Medieval church and its treatment of women and children through New Materialist perspectives. She is currently working on her PhD proposal on Christina of Markyate.

Dr James Russell (Rio Salado College, Arizona, USA)

“For the ingenuities of youth are always unstable”: Sixteenth Century Marginalia in a 1497 Incunable of Lorenzo Valla’s Translation of the *Iliad*

The Renaissance humanist Lorenzo Valla (c. 1406–1457) is best known today for proving the *Donation of Constantine* to be inauthentic. Yet among Valla’s other works was a Latin prose translation of the first sixteen books of the *Iliad*. A 1497 incunable edition of Valla’s *Iliad* in the Alfred Knight Collection of the Rare Book Room at the Phoenix Public Library has been found to contain profuse marginalia from a sixteenth century reader showing extensive engagement with the first four books of the poem. This paper, the first study of these marginalia, will document how the reader conducted a rhetorical and strategic analysis of Valla’s translation of Homer’s epic. This annotator marked the use of effective rhetorical devices and identified who is

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speaking in long passages of dialogue, while also providing a reference guide to mythological figures. The marginalia also indicate a reader with idiosyncratic interests, such as to which god each sacrifice is given. Of particular interest to this reader is Homer's Catalogue of Ships, with the marginalia identifying the commander and number of each fleet. The notes to this Phoenix copy of Valla represent an early modern reader engaging with an imagined heroic past.

Biography

James Russell is a book historian based in Phoenix, Arizona. He is interested in the history of reading, specifically in how Late Medieval and Early Modern readers actively engaged with early printed books through practices of annotation, as evidenced by the marginalia they left behind. James completed his doctorate at the Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Studies at Durham University. He is an Adjunct Instructor at Rio Salado College.

Dr Beth Spacey (University of Queensland, Australia)

Sense Perception and Sainly Visitations in Raymond of Aguilers's Narrative of the First Crusade

According to the *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem* (completed c.1101), a Latin narrative history of the First Crusade attributed to the southern French cleric Raymond of Aguilers and his erstwhile co-author Pons of Balazun, visionary experiences were often physical affairs. For example, during the crusader siege of Arqa in the spring of 1099, a priest named Stephen experienced a vision of the papal legate Adhémar of Le Puy, who had died the previous August. The deceased bishop struck Stephen with a rod and commanded him to take instructions to the Provençal count. Also in attendance were the Virgin Mary, Saint Agatha, and an unidentified virgin who held two candles. When Stephen asked Adhémar if he could take one of the candles to the count as proof of his vision he was denied, but instructed to take Adhémar's ring instead. By examining the various visionary experiences described in the *Historia*, this paper will argue that, for Raymond, perceiving the usually unperceivable could include an important corporeal dimension, both in terms of the mechanisms of seeing and hearing, and the significance of touch as an indicator of authenticity.

Biography

Beth Spacey is a Lecturer in Medieval History at the University of Queensland. Beth is a historian of medieval religious cultures specialising in the crusades and with broader interests in the European and Mediterranean world of the Middle Ages. She has published on the medieval Latin Christian historiography of the crusades, especially on ideas of the miraculous, masculinities, and landscapes, and is currently conducting research into environmental imaginaries in crusade texts.

Presenter Abstracts

Amanda Trainham (Binghamton University, USA)

‘Remember well, that all is but Illusion’: Internal Visions and Metatheatrical Layers in John Dryden’s *King Arthur*

In Restoration England, audiences sought verisimilitude between theatrical content and its execution, prompting playwrights to be sensitive to how they drew audiences into the often unrealistic actions of their plays. However, the playwright/player relationship required reciprocity – the playwright needed to create narratives believable enough to draw the audience in, and the audience needed to be willing to engage with and accept the dramatic reality of the plays. Although unspoken, this relationship allowed plays to contain strange or unnatural illusory events without the audience questioning their plausibility. In Dryden’s *dramatick* opera *King Arthur* (1691), the sorcerer Osmond conjures illusory scenes to manipulate the characters. However, Emmeline and Arthur resist Osmond’s fantastical visions, refusing to surrender to his influence. The audience, by contrast, is not afforded the same luxury. While the characters can escape Osmond’s illusions, the audience is caught between the theatre’s manufactured reality and the illusory scenes Osmond creates. These visions simultaneously captivate the audience while trapping them in the fictional world of the play. The dual reality forces audiences to accept its dramatic plausibility, and this layered reality pulls the audience deeper into the illusion while complicating their ability to distinguish between the real and the illusory, suspending their need for verisimilitude.

Biography

Amanda Trainham is a PhD student in English at Binghamton University in New York. Her research focuses on supernatural manifestations in Restoration drama, with a particular interest in examining the significance of seventeenth-century audience reception. She also works to establish connections between the Renaissance and Restoration stages, emphasizing the historical relevance of dramatic texts as representations of their time.

Shan Wu (Harvard University, USA)

Echolocation, Sound and Silence: Medieval Italian and Chinese Dreaming of Architecture

‘Echolocation’ – perceiving ‘architectural forms’ (distance, motion, texture, size, proportion, shape, measure) comparable to those made commonly by vision – is a curious phenomenon often neglected in the early accounts of dreaming about the heavenly realm through sound/soundlessness in Chinese (*Löshen Fu*) and Latin literature (*Somnium Scipionis* etc.). I will offer a particular kind of ‘architectural’ reading, developed in my dissertation project on the ways of measuring (scaling,

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proportioning, navigating) in the ancient world, of stories of dreamers getting lost (or seemingly so) in an otherworldly setting. Two examples will be offered: the medieval retelling of the early *Shu yiji* dreams, e.g., how Wang Zhi navigates through Mount Shishi ('Stone/Cave Enclosure') by the sound(lessness) of chess playing and the curious account of Psyche's nonverbal sensory movement through the architectural complex of Cupid, reinvested in the visionary writing of an 'enigmatic canvas' created in Mantua by Giulio Romano. Getting lost is, as I argue, a pretext to the 'art of memory' (e.g., of lost forms of architectural form as well as ways of moving through space) that were prominent in both traditions, a key concern of Renaissance scholars who searched for lost forms of ancient *technē* of art and architecture.

Biography

Shan Wu is a scholar of ancient languages (Latin/Greek/Sanskrit/Tibetan etc.) and theme-oriented studies at the intersection of philosophy of technology, history of technics, and classical humanities with a PhD in the history of religion (2025 May). During their dissertation project on ancient measurement, they published works on the survival of *technopoïèse* in technopraxis (*Philosophy and Technology* 2023a, b, c), aerial movements and energy (*ENERGY: A [Philosophy of] Practice*, 2024), the idea of "aesthetics of technics" through the entangled situation at the intersection of sound and rhythm, music, and artisanal/intellectual labor in early China (*Postmedieval*, 2025), as well as mimetic theory ("Mimetic Studies", *ACLA* 2025). Beside their passion for the ancient world, their main interest is to understand more profoundly, through the prism of history of art and architecture, the artisanal and technical practice in early China and Renaissance in relation to spontaneity, movements, *technè*, and mimesis.