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**Staging Medievalisms:
Touching the Middle Ages through Contemporary Performance**

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**Staging Medievalisms:
Touching the Middle Ages through Contemporary Performance**

by

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Dedication

To those who imagine the medieval, and to those who create it.

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**Staging Medievalisms:
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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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Staging Medievalisms analyzes how twentieth- and twenty-first century performance constructs the Middle Ages. This work is in conversation with medievalism, the academic field concerned with the diverse ways post-medieval societies have re-imagined medieval narratives and tropes, often in service of their own values. As a result of centuries worth of re-definition, the term “medieval” is unstable, referring simultaneously to a fairytale prehistory and a dark age of oppression. I argue that performance, both in theatrical productions and in medieval-focused tourist spaces, allows an affective connection between the medieval past and the present, casting the Middle Ages as an inherently flexible backdrop for contemporary political and social concerns. In tourist spaces and plays about the Middle Ages, the performing body becomes the site where the medieval and the modern touch. I conduct close readings of six productions and three public spaces which stage the Middle Ages, examining which particular versions of the medieval they create, how they stage moments of historiographical contact, and how each uses the medieval to imagine their own historical contexts.

Chapter one provides an overview of medievalism and its connection to performance studies, and subsequent chapters take up contemporary productions of

medieval history, legend, and fantasy, respectively. Chapter two examines three recent stagings of Shakespeare's medieval history play *Henry V*, a work which stages two opposing versions of the medieval simultaneously. The Royal Shakespeare Company (1994), National Theatre (2003), and Austin, Texas (2009) productions offer commentary on modern warfare, using Henry's medieval battles as both evidence and setting. Chapter three analyses representations of the Holy Grail in *Mort d'Arthur* (2010), *Spamalot* (2005), and *Proof* (2001). Each re-imagines the Grail as a symbol of achievement and power, drawing different conclusions about contemporary society's need for the mystical. Chapter four takes up performances of the Middle Ages in the public sphere, examining how Disneyland, *Medieval Times*, and the Renaissance Faire offer visitors varying degrees of freedom to experience the medieval through their own bodies. Throughout, I argue that performance encourages affective connections to the medieval past as a reflection of contemporary desires.

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CHAPTER 1: “We Are Seeing What We’ve Seen Before:” Introducing Affective Medievalism and Performance

“We ask ourselves *why* and *how* the Middle Ages are presented in such an indeterminate, ‘inaccurate’ manner. Whom and what does this floating signifier serve, either consciously or unconsciously?”

Anke Bernau and Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Film*

“This story shall the good man teach his son...
From this day to the ending of the world,
[And] we in it shall be remember'd.”
William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

In 2012, the History Channel premiered a new series, *Full Metal Jousting*, in which sixteen contestants don updated versions of medieval armor and practice what the Channel calls “the most dangerous collision sport in history.” Viewers of the highly dramatic series watch as contestants compete for a \$100,000 prize. Both the History Channel’s website and the episodes themselves include information about medieval jousting and tournament practice, usually highlighting the danger inherent in armed men riding at each other on horseback. The website, for instance, details the story of King Henry II of France’s 1159 demise: “he received a fatal wound when a sliver of his opponent’s lance broke off and pierced him in the eye—a fatal event some believe to have been prophesied by none other than Nostradamus” (history.com). The show capitalizes on the spectacle of modern bodies in medieval-style peril, promising viewers excitement derived from fourteenth-century practice.

Medieval enthusiasts do not have to audition for a spot on the History Channel to explore medieval battle practice, however. The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), an international organization founded in Berkeley, California in 1966, invites its members to experience “the current Middle Ages” through “active participation in the learning process. To learn about the clothing of the period, you research it, then sew and wear it

yourself” (sca.org). Boasting over 30,000 members worldwide, the SCA is divided into seventeen kingdoms ruled by kings and queens who have fought their way to the throne by participating in large-scale recreations of medieval battles. In an effort to create “the Middle Ages as they ought to have been” (sca.org), the organization combines medieval practices like tournaments and mead brewing with modern conveniences at SCA events like electricity and running water. The “anachronism” which the SCA embraces also encourages the use of modern technology like sewing machines and the Internet as tools for costume creation and research.

Reenactments with a modern twist like those of the SCA also take place in less formalized spaces, including contemporary Renaissance Fairs. Fairs like the Renaissance Pleasure Faire in Irwindale, California (the first in the United States) combine medieval jousting shows with the iconic giant turkey legs and pewter mugs of mead which have become shorthand for the Middle Ages in the contemporary imagination.¹ Along with these entertainments, however, Renaissance Fairs also combine rule by an early modern monarch, usually Henry VIII or Elizabeth I of England, and a number of stalls selling everything from modern leather goods to homemade perfume. The Renaissance Fair is a medieval fantasy space, encouraging guests to come in costume or to purchase replicas of medieval weapons to attach to their jeans and t-shirts. As of 2013, there were 220 such Fairs in North America alone.²

For those who would rather watch the Middle Ages than make costumes and enact them, there is the popular *Medieval Times* Dinner Theatre and Jousting Tournament. The

¹ Renaissance Fairs are known by a variety of names. Some style themselves “Faires,” while others are called Medieval (or “Med”) Fairs or Faires. Here and throughout, I use the term “Fair” to refer to the phenomenon in general, and “Faire” when referring specifically to the attraction known as the “Renaissance Pleasure Faire” in California.

² According to SCRIBE, an online self-described Renaissance Faire Information network: scribe.faire.net.

company's website entices potential ticket buyers with the promise that "inside the stone walls of our 11th century-style castle, Medieval Spain comes to life as six knights, donning authentic armor, clash in a jousting tournament for the title of King's Champion." Once inside the Medieval Times "castle," guests encounter exhibitions of medieval-style jousting and falconry alongside soft drinks, draft beer, and souvenir stands staffed by costumed workers happy to accept credit cards. Patrons are invited to tour the company's construction of the Middle Ages as they would an actual medieval castle in Europe. The company's advertising rhetoric indeed suggests that a visit to one of the nine *Medieval Times* castles throughout North America allows access to "medieval Spain" for anyone who can afford the price of admission.

By contrast, a number of video games offer the Middle Ages to consumers who would rather experience the past from the comfort of their living rooms. *World of Warcraft*, for example, the 2001 massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) from Blizzard Entertainment, takes place in a medieval fantasy space and relies upon a number of familiar elements from the Middle Ages, including plated armour and an outbreak of the Black Plague. In 2012, the game boasted over 10 million subscribers.³ Players create digital avatars which they maneuver through the quasi-medieval landscape, often teaming up to accomplish quests or battle foes. The 2011 Electronic Arts game *The Sims Medieval* is also avatar-driven. Like other life-simulation ("Sims") games which allow players to control entire communities of characters, *Sims Medieval* facilitates the creation of a complete and insular world. Unlike the other Sims games, however, *Sims Medieval* includes the option to complete quests, thereby forming a narrative link to medieval quests like those of King Arthur and his knights. In an interview with gamespot.com, *Sims Medieval* Executive Producer Rachel Bernstein

³ According to the gaming news website IGN.com

indicated that these quests were designed to make the game feel more “dangerous” than previous Sims games, noting that Sims Medieval characters are vulnerable to a number of terrors including “bandits, bears, boars, duels, dragons, dire chinchillas, famine, drunkards, enraged golems, black knights, angry zealots, doppelgängers, inquisitors, curses, goblins, plague, revolting peasants, [and] witches.” This element of danger on these quests is integral to the game’s medieval setting.

Traditional theatre has also embraced medieval quests, staging epic versions of the Middle Ages which have proved immensely popular with audiences. The Royal Shakespeare Company’s 2010 adaptation of the medieval King Arthur legends, for example, sold out quickly after tickets went on sale. When I visited Stratford to see the show, I was told that it had enjoyed the fewest returned tickets in recent company memory. The show condensed the entirety of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* into just over three hours, staging iconic moments like Arthur’s removal of his sword from the stone and Sir Percival’s achievement of the Holy Grail. Similarly, Eric Idle’s *Spamalot*, the 2005 Broadway re-imagining of the 1975 cult classic film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, was able to reach wider audience demographics than most large-scale musicals, and made an almost unprecedented \$16 million on opening day. The musical draws on audience fascination with the Grail as well as the popularity of the Python film to stage a narrative in which characters question the origin of the term “Middle Ages” as they quest for the holy object.

In addition to smaller-budget films like *Holy Grail*, large-scale epics like *Braveheart* (1995) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), as well as numerous television shows, also stage the medieval. The immensely popular *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003), for instance, as well as the newer *Hobbit* films (the first of which was released in 2012) are set in a fantasy-infused version of the Middle Ages. Their author, medievalist J.R.R.

Tolkien, created his fantasy world from a number of medieval narratives, including *Beowulf*. The 2012 HBO series *Game of Thrones*, based on the fantasy novels of the same name by George R.R. Martin, is similarly set in a medieval-esque landscape, filled with stone castles and broadswords and populated by knights, kings, and dragons.⁴ Indeed, the Middle Ages have enjoyed a strong presence in film since the beginning of the twentieth century, evidenced by George Fleming and Edwin Porter's 1902 short *Jack and the Beanstalk*, set in a medieval fantasy world, and Herbert Brenon's 1913 version of Sir Walter Scott's 1820 novel *Ivanhoe*. The novel itself has enjoyed several film and television adaptations, the most famous of which was the 1952 version directed by Richard Thorpe and starring a young Elizabeth Taylor.

The medieval Robin Hood ballads are particularly popular as film subjects. In addition to the character's presence in *Ivanhoe* adaptations, there have been at least 48 versions of Robin Hood made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The first of these was Percy Stow's 1908 silent film *Robin Hood and his Merry Men*. The famous 1938 version starring Errol Flynn, which Susan King of the *Los Angeles Times* calls the "champion" of the Robin Hood genre, was both the most expensive and the highest grossing film the Warner Brothers studio had produced. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Robin Hood has proven to be adaptable to a variety of contemporary political and social contexts. The 1973 animated Disney version, for instance, engenders a great deal of sympathy for the lower classes who suffer oppression at the hands of tyrannical Sheriff of Nottingham, while New York Times reviewer A.O. Scott called the 2010 Ridley Scott *Robin Hood* "one big medieval tea party."

⁴ *Game of Thrones* and *Lord of the Rings/The Hobbit* of course also demonstrate the presence of the Middle Ages in contemporary fantasy literature as well as in large-budget films and television shows.

These films, games, spaces, and plays demonstrate the continued presence of the Middle Ages—which scholars traditionally locate between the fall of Rome in the 5th century CE and the dawn of the Renaissance circa the sixteenth century—in the contemporary imagination, and particularly in the entertainment industry. These twentieth- and twenty-first-century evocations of the medieval past construct vastly different versions of the Middle Ages, from the war-torn to the idyllic, demonstrating the varied and plural nature of the medieval period in contemporary consciousness. Despite their different formats and treatments of history, however, all of the above-mentioned engagements with history use performance to explore the Middle Ages. Even the video games rely on user-created avatars that function as the virtual representations of gamers’ bodies within a “medieval” landscape. In addition, they juxtapose the medieval with contemporary values, politics, and aesthetics. *Full Metal Jousting*, for instance, combines medieval sport with twenty-first century reality television, while *Spamalot* uses songs about the Holy Grail to criticize the traditional structure of contemporary Broadway musicals.

Given the frequency with which contemporary explorations of the Middle Ages like these create new versions of the medieval through systems of representation and participation, this dissertation argues that performance is both a necessary and appropriate lens for studying how the post-medieval imagination remembers the Middle Ages. This work casts the performing body as both a site for and a subject of medieval research, and explores the texts and production strategies of twentieth- and twenty-first century performances of the Middle Ages. It takes up traditional stage plays that engage with medieval narratives, characters or themes, as well as tourist spaces which encourage both guests and paid staff members to behave as medieval characters in immersive contexts. Performance scholar Freddie Rokem argues that actors in performances of

history bridge the gap between “the historical past and the ‘fictional’ performed *here* and *now* of the theatrical event” (13, emphasis original). Actors in these performances of the Middle Ages are similarly liminal figures who exist in the gap between medieval events and modern understandings of them. An actor playing King Arthur, for instance, draws upon both the play text he is performing as well as upon both historical and contemporary assumptions about the legendary ruler. In turn, the directors and creators of these embodied engagements with the Middle Ages bring the past into conversation with the present, constructing specific versions of medieval history onto which they can map their own concerns and values. The Middle Ages of *Medieval Times*, for instance, looks and feels very different from that of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s *Morte d’Arthur*. By engaging with the relatively new academic field of medievalism—the study of post-medieval uses of the Middle Ages—this dissertation explores how performance works in these contexts to create a recognizably modern Middle Ages reflective of particular social, political, and aesthetic contexts.

INTRODUCING MEDIEVALISM

More than any other historical period, the Middle Ages continue to return to the post-medieval imagination, and they are particularly susceptible to re-interpretation in contexts in which they are invoked. Antiquarian movements of the nineteenth century, for example, idealized the Middle Ages as a pre-industrial escapist haven. The Scouting movements of the early twentieth century idealized Arthurian chivalry and romanticized knightly adventures. Hollywood cinema of the 1950s and 60s couched celebrations of nationalism and traditional morality in retellings of medieval legends. The medieval has also been widely used in novels, advertisements, cinema, and the theatre as a primitive

pre-history, albeit an overwhelmingly white pre-history, against which writers and historians can contrast their own, technologically advanced, worlds.⁵

Historian Kathleen Biddick explains these numerous re-definitions as a result of the Middle Ages' status as "both [the] origin and non-origin" of later periods (84). As Biddick argues,

[Renaissance] Humanists invented a Middle Ages as a place and time of non-origin, and formed an identity essentially informed by a claim of what it was not. Nation-states of the nineteenth century, in contrast, produced a place and time, a Middle Ages, to stage the cultural origins of the Western animal... At the end of the twentieth century, such overdetermined constructs of the Middle Ages haunt medieval studies as a double bind. (83)

Both the Renaissance and the nineteenth-century understandings of the medieval are still present in the twenty-first century. Both produce necessarily limited versions of the Middle Ages, however, due to their investment in locating within the medieval a single point of origin from which modern society either developed or diverged. Michel Foucault cautions against this desire to locate historical origins, arguing that "what is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin... It is disparity" (79). When Foucault's argument is applied to the notion of the Middle Ages as either a point of origin or departure for later periods, this "disparity" refers to the complexity of the medieval itself. Constructions of the Middle Ages as precursors to post-medieval periods are inherently reductive in their desire to reduce a thousand years of history to a single moment which later periods can choose to reject or embrace. The contemporary desire which Biddick identifies to trace the development of modernity from

⁵ This list is necessarily partial. An exhaustive historicization of the diverse uses which post-medieval societies have found for the Middle Ages would take up the majority of this dissertation. Numerous scholars have already completed such works, however. In particular, Veronica Ortenberg's 2006 *In Search of the Holy Grail* does an excellent job tracing numerous historical forms of medievalism.

the Middle Ages or to redefine the medieval to suit the needs of a later period necessarily destroys the richness of the medieval itself.

Medievalism as a field is invested in why and how these reconstructions of the Middle Ages function. Novelist and philologist Umberto Eco, for example, who is also a scholar of the Middle Ages in contemporary usage, has delineated ten distinct versions of the Middle Ages that appear in literature, film, and popular culture. For Eco, contemporary constructions of the medieval range from “the Middle Ages of Romanticism, with their stormy castles and their ghosts” (69), to a “barbaric age, a land of elementary and outlaw feelings... Dark par excellence” (69). Although Eco’s work remains prominent, numerous other scholars have created similar lists, including gender studies scholar Laurie Finke and literary scholar Martin Shichtman, who echo Biddick in their 2006 *King Arthur and the Myth of History*, arguing that there are two important post-medieval versions of the Middle Ages: that of an idealized and romantic pre-history, and that of a barbaric and violent pre-civilization. Regardless of the number of Middle Ages they identify in contemporary usage, however, all of these scholars claim that the nature of the Middle Ages shifts according to the context in which the period is evoked.

Medievalism examines the mechanics and implications of these post-medieval uses of the Middle Ages. Biddick is at the forefront of this field, as is historian Carolyn Dinshaw, whose work explores the ways in which twentieth- and twenty-first-century references to the Middle Ages allow post-medieval societies to “touch” the medieval period itself. She focuses on sexuality, tracing modern notions of homophobia and normative sexual identity back to medieval fears of sodomy. Her queer historical practice thus focuses on moments of intersection between the medieval and the modern. Examining the use of the phrase “get medieval” in Quentin Tarantino’s 1994 film *Pulp Fiction*, for example, she suggests “ways in which what was seen as Hollywood’s latest,

from the hot-hot-hot Quentin Tarantino, turned out to be an old, old story...We can train our long, queer gaze in *Pulp Fiction*'s use of the medieval to understand the film's concomitant construction of the postmodern present" (213). In other words, the ways in which a work creates and uses the Middle Ages as a malleable historical background opens up discourse of how directors and writers understand their own historical moments.

Biddick, Dinshaw, Finke and Shichtman, and Eco's work defines medievalism as a separate field from what has been traditionally known as "medieval studies." In general, medieval studies uses archival work, primary source documents, and medieval artifacts to characterize the Middle Ages as a distinctive historical period. As such, work in the field does not extend to later periods' appropriations of medieval characters, themes, etc. in popular culture or otherwise. Medieval studies as a distinctive branch of the study of history in general can be traced to nineteenth-century Antiquarian movements which were interested in the medieval period as the source of historical relics. Biddick describes the work of these "fathers" of medieval studies as "scientific," arguing that "in order to separate and elevate themselves from the popular studies of medieval culture, [medieval studies scholars] designated their practices, influenced by positivism, as scientific...they isolated medieval artifacts from complex historical sediments and studied them as if they were fossils" (2-3). Nineteenth century scholars such as historian Bishop Stubbs and art historian Viollet-le-Duc worked to designate the Middle Ages as a discrete period in history, drawing strict boundaries around the period and which artifacts and values could be considered "medieval." In constructing the medieval as a distinctive, objective object of research, these scholars othered the Middle Ages from their own time period, as well as from any other.

Medievalists argue that this construction of the Middle Ages as historically "othered" has allowed it to seem both exotic and familiar to contemporary minds. Rather

than analyzing the historical Middle Ages, for instance, Eco argues that each successive invention or evocation of the medieval in popular, literary, and dramatic cultures draws on previous understandings of the period. In Eco's conception, any reference to the Middle Ages in contemporary culture is always and already influenced by previous uses of the medieval period as well as by the creator's own understanding of medieval history. Referring to American popular fiction's fascination with Arthurian legend, for example, Eco writes, "the Middle Ages have never been reconstructed from scratch: we have always mended or patched them up, as something in which we still live" (67-8). He uses the frequency with which popular culture evokes the Middle Ages to argue that the period has never really ended in the contemporary imagination, thus frustrating the aforementioned efforts within medieval studies to draw boundaries around a period called "medieval." As noted above, the Middle Ages' influence is continual and obvious in a range of creative mediums from comic books to film.

Eco's argument that each of his ten versions of the Middle Ages resulted from particular social and artistic contexts positions his work a precursor to Biddick's notion of the Middle Ages as a simultaneous site of "both origin and non-origin." In America, for instance, the Middle Ages stand in as "real past" (Eco 62) for a relatively young country, while contemporary British medievalism is evidence of the lasting influence of the previously mentioned nineteenth-century fascination with historical artifacts. Although some later scholars have criticized Eco's work as overly simplistic, his notion that the Middle Ages enjoy continued life in selective constructions of the period was foundational to many versions of medievalism that followed, and central to this dissertation's argument that performance continues to animate medieval history.

Eco's methodologies and interest in other periods' uses of the Middle Ages are hallmarks of a field that is concerned with, as Biddick argues, the "relation between two

moments” in history (10). Work in medievalism disrupts the linear flow of time to analyze the goals and effects of placing the Middle Ages in conversation with other, clearly defined, periods. Dinshaw in particular argues that the ways in which post-medieval—specifically twentieth- and twenty-first-century—imaginings conceive of the Middle Ages reveal more about the anxieties and values of those later periods than they do about the Middle Ages themselves. Her previously mentioned analysis of *Pulp Fiction* is a clear example of a particular construction of the Middle Ages in service of a specific modern value. In the film, mob boss Marcellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) tells the man who has just anally raped him that he (Wallace) is going to “get medieval on your ass.” A possible explanation of Wallace’s threat is an understanding of the Middle Ages as an inherently violent era that prized war and crusade (what Eco calls “the Middle Ages as a barbaric age” [69]). Dinshaw takes this idea further arguing that, uncomfortable with any suggestion of his own homosexuality, Wallace evokes the Middle Ages as a time which would have punished acts of sodomy with violence or banishment. She argues that Wallace needs the Middle Ages to be a space diametrically opposed to that of the pawn shop in which he is raped. She emphasizes that these juxtapositions of two distinct time periods allow us to better understand both.⁶

Biddick and Dinshaw read the frequency with which the medieval period has appeared in popular culture since the nineteenth century as evidence that it is no longer possible to study the Middle Ages without an eye toward their influence on the present. Biddick in fact argues that these non-medieval uses of the Middle Ages “haunt” the field and practitioners of medieval studies (11). Haunting, as explained by comparative literary

⁶ Ultimately, Dinshaw discredits Wallace’s version of the Middle Ages by examining medieval accusations of sodomy. She concludes that sexuality in the Middle Ages is not as clear-cut as those like Wallace would like for it to have been. Still, she posits that what is important in the *Pulp Fiction* scene is not historical accuracy, but Wallace’s understanding of the medieval.

scholar Cathy Caruth, is a result of the impulse to repeat or recreate an event or period. Caruth argues that an event will recur in an individual's subconscious until s/he has learned how to categorize it (1). As previously discussed, however, the Middle Ages exist in the contemporary imagination as a plural space, rather than a fixed, bounded, or easily categorized period. Indeed, the efforts in Medieval Studies to isolate a definitive "medieval" have become associated with positivism and are often challenged by medievalists. Rather, the continual desire to rewrite and re-experience the Middle Ages make it seem "unfinished" in the contemporary imagination.

The practice of theatre-making facilitates a similar experience of haunting, further suggesting a productive link between medievalism and performance. In *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (2003), theatre scholar and historian Marvin Carlson calls the theatre the "repository of cultural memory" (2), arguing that "one of the universals of performance, both East and West, is its ghostliness, its sense of return, the uncanny but inescapable impression imposed upon its spectators that '*we are seeing what we've seen before*'" (1, emphasis original). Not only do most performances repeat night after night, but they also utilize the same actors (or types of actors), the same sets, and the same spaces to tell stories that are often familiar to audiences. Although the Middle Ages themselves are often used as a referent on stage, performances of the medieval repeat stories and tropes which have changed across the centuries in response to shifting values and aesthetics. Plays like *Spamalot* or the RSC's *Morte d'Arthur* create spaces in which performers recreate previous *constructions* of history that suit their directors' particular preferences and needs.

Carlson terms performance an "attempt to repeat the original" (17) of events or behaviors. With regard to the Middle Ages, however, the original (the medieval period itself) has become a palimpsest upon which centuries of thinkers have re-written their

own versions of the past. In particular, when the Middle Ages reoccur in later periods they often lend a sense of historical weight to modern narratives. The History Channel's contextualization of *Full Metal Jousting* as a continuation of medieval jousting tradition, for instance, lends the show a sense of legitimacy and importance. Audiences can feel as if they are watching history unfold on the bodies of contemporary athletes. Similarly, as will be discussed in chapter four, *Medieval Times*' creators assure audiences that the company's version of the joust and melee combat are the same as what "would have been your experience at a medieval tournament a thousand years ago" (*Medieval Times: Journey Behind the Scenes*). These efforts to historicize contemporary versions of the Middle Ages follow what historian Eric Hobsbawm identifies as a contemporary desire to "invent tradition" (4), or to elevate new artistic or cultural practices by "establish[ing] continuity with a suitable historic past" (1). Thus, particularly in the United States, the indeterminacy of the Middle Ages and the relatively small amount of information we have about them makes the medieval period particularly well-suited to house invented traditions like those of contemporary jousts. *Full Metal Jousting* and *Medieval Times* are less interested in the accuracy of their jousts than in creating spectacle, but the creators of both understand the market value of evoking the Middle Ages as a point of origin. Like all of the case studies in this dissertation, these performances are evidence of later centuries' tendency to remember the medieval in their own images.

DEFINING A FIELD: PERFORMANCE MEETS MEDIEVALISM

As it suggests a new relationship between medievalism and performance studies, this dissertation combines explorations of medievalism as a field with literature and scholarship in two overlapping areas: the emerging conversation between medievalism and film studies, and performance historiography. From the concerns of these three areas, I create a systematized method for studying medievalism in live performance. All of the

authors discussed in this section share an interest in genealogy, replication, repetition, and both the limits and opportunities created by systems of representation. Broadly conceived, their work is interested in the implications of "the past's inability to stay past, its continual re-emergence into the present" (Phelan 120). *Staging Medievalisms* draws from and builds on the work of these scholars to explore how performance facilitates this "re-emergence."

The questions which this dissertation asks about the desires and agendas of those who create the Middle Ages bring it into conversation with recent medieval film theory. Indeed, since 1999 a large amount of work has been published on the mechanics and implications of medieval films.⁷ "Cinematic medievalism" advocates the serious academic study of films about the Middle Ages, arguing that although they often eschew historical accuracy, medieval films have myriad lessons to teach about how contemporary society constructs and understands medieval history. Medieval film scholars argue that the Middle Ages represented in these films are shaped by the preferences of their writers and directors, and that, in turn medieval films actively shape audiences' perceptions of medieval history. An early example of these studies was literary scholar Kevin Harty's 1999 book *The Reel Middle Ages*, which examines the historical accuracy of over 900 films (made between 1897 and 1996) which engage with the Middle Ages. Harty provides contextual details of the (often multiple) medieval elements in the films, and draws clear distinctions between the "real" (i.e. historical) Middle Ages and the cinema's interpretation of the medieval (i.e. the "reel" Middle Ages).

⁷ I follow Bettina Bildhauer in using the term "medieval film." Although technically ambiguous (might it refer to films made *in* the Middle Ages?), the term is far more concise than the descriptors other scholars have used, including "medieval-themed films" (Elliott 5), or "films set in the Middle Ages" (Finke and Shichtman 6).

Although Harty's work was groundbreaking, later scholars have focused less on the degree to which medieval films can be considered historically accurate. Rather, they examine the aesthetic, cultural, and political reasons behind their creation of what literary scholar Nickolas Haydock calls an "imagined" Middle Ages. (2) Haydock, for example, advocates in his 2008 *Movie Medievalism* for an amendment of Harty's distinction between "real" and "reel" to account for Lacan's notion of the Real and the Imaginary. Lacanian theory argues that what we see on-screen in films "helps to frame our perception of the real world we encounter when we leave the theatre" (Haydock 7). Our understanding of the world is thus partly subject to how we view it in films. In the case of medieval films, Haydock argues, the interpretations of history we encounter on screen subconsciously shapes our understanding of history itself since we do not have access to a "real" Middle Ages as a point of comparison.

Indeed, Finke and Shichtman argue that films have become the dominant source of information about the Middle Ages. In their 2010 *Cinematic Illuminations: The Middle Ages on Film*, they report finding that "most of what our students know about the history, literature, and art of the Middle Ages comes from their viewing of films" (3). Of course, as a product of filmmakers' own values and imaginations, this knowledge of the Middle Ages is "compulsively retooled...to fit the changing priorities of the contemporary world" (Haydock 5). Finke and Shichtman argue that it is these films' proclivity to use the Middle Ages as a canvas onto which contemporary values can be projected that makes them worthy of scholarly study. They conclude that "the cinematic 'repackaging' of the Middle Ages for popular consumption is important in its own right for what it can tell us about our own cultural fantasies" (4). The live performances discussed in this dissertation similarly frame the Middle Ages as a product of contemporary desires and values.

Literary and film scholar Bettina Bildhauer takes Haydock's work a step further, arguing not that medieval films influence how we understand the Middle Ages, but that the Middle Ages created in these films exists entirely separately from the historical Middle Ages, and should be studied as a phenomena of its own. Indeed, in her 2011 *Filming the Middle Ages*, she references a common practice in medieval films of treating time as non-linear. On the question of whether medieval people actually viewed time differently than we do, she asserts: "this is not a book about the Middle Ages, it is a book about film; and films—as well as much of twentieth- and twenty-first century culture and thought in general—see the Middle Ages that way" (11). In other words, the "truth" of medieval history has become less important than generally agreed-upon constructions or imaginings of the Middle Ages. Films in Bildhauer's conception contribute to a cultural understanding of the medieval that is important because of "what it can allegorically say about the time of its own production" (20). Like Haydock's, Bildhauer's medieval film theory is focused more on the mechanics of contemporary constructions of the Middle Ages than on how the films deviate from history.

Although Haydock, Finke and Shichtman, and Bildhauer all advocate that these films write particular versions of medieval history, media studies scholar Andrew Elliott was the first to call the films historiography. His 2011 *Remaking the Middle Ages* uses film theory (including concepts such as narrative and montage) to argue that "the process of filmmaking and the process of writing history bear a number of similarities" (3). Advocating that "the 'truth' of this problematic era lies very much in the eye of the beholder" (2), Elliott contends that, while most people are able to identify a film as "medieval" by its costume aesthetic or its characters' ways of behaving, the exact meaning of the term "medieval" is unclear. Elliott argues that a major reason for this ambiguity is that the term "Middle Ages" itself was invented after the period we have

come to know as “medieval.” It was not a term used by medieval people, but by historians. Thus, its meaning shifts according to context. Films in Elliott’s estimation are instrumental in constructing this “retrospectively created neo-medieval period” (2). These films write history, complete with the biases of their creators. Elliott’s connection between film and historiography lays groundwork for this dissertation’s link between historiography and live performance by taking seriously the films’ versions of the medieval past as revisionist historical narratives.

Indeed, the third field with which this dissertation is in conversation is that of performance historiography, and in particular, work within performance studies that examines the relationship between performance and history. In his examination of the plays about the Holocaust and the French Revolution, for example, Rokem writes that history plays simultaneously stage the past as a reality for the characters and as a representation of history for the audience. Actors in these plays thus exist both in historical narratives and in contemporary theatres, bridging the gap between “the historical past and the ‘fictional’ performed *here* and *now* of the theatrical event” (13). This sense that the actors’ bodies have “doubled” makes these performers particularly well-suited to understand what Rokem calls the “unimaginable”—the horrors of the Holocaust or the human suffering that occurred during the Reign of Terror (36). Actors’ performing bodies and their emotional and physical experiences of traumatic events thus allow audience members to come to a deeper understanding of the past. Because of their ability to reanimate historical events in a manner that is both physical and immediate for audiences, Rokem terms actors in historical plays “hyper historian[s], who [make] it possible for us to recognize that the actor is ‘redoing’ or ‘reappearing’” (13). He argues that as they watch actors perform stories that take place in a specific past, audiences of these plays understand that actors are recreating or referencing an “original”—i.e. an

historical event that actually took place. I extend Rokem's argument to include both actors in plays and actors in less traditional spaces like the Renaissance Fair, who also bridge the gap between medieval stories and contemporary contexts and facilitate greater connections to the past.

Rokem does not argue that plays about history allow audiences to forget that they are watching a performance; rather these plays make the past visible both as temporally distant series of events and as a story unfolding in the present moment. These plays can simultaneously stage history and comment on it, inviting audiences to draw connections between their own understandings of their contemporary contexts and the history they see on stage. While my own work examines representations of a period which he does not discuss, I draw on Rokem's reading of the actor's doubled presence to argue that performing the Middle Ages necessarily involves a construction of the "real" medieval past which exists alongside the piece's interpretation of that past. Shakespeare's *Henry V*, for example, relies on a historical construction of Henry as a powerful medieval warrior with which to juxtapose the individual actor's representation of the character.

I am particularly concerned in this study with the degree of visibility that performances of medievalism lend to their construction of the "real," or at least the artistically and culturally appropriate version of the Middle Ages. While Rokem argues that plays about history work to make the past visible and immediate, in her 1993 *Unmasked: The Politics of Performance*, performance scholar Peggy Phelan suggests that it is often what is *invisible* on stage that is most important. Arguing that "if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture" (10), Phelan employs both psychoanalysis and feminist theory to disrupt the traditional Western narrative which grants agency and importance to the visual. She argues that what we see on stage in a performance continually references

and is defined by a reality that we do not see: “just as we understand that things in the past determine how we experience the present, so too can it be said that the visible is defined by the invisible” (14). She argues that the power of performance lies in what has “disappeared from view” because “a believable image is the product of a negotiation with an unverifiable real” (1). Performance thus always references a world outside of the theatre, constructing and relying on a shared understanding of that reality.

For Phelan, performance necessarily indicates replication—a process by which a performance obscures the original “real” it references and thus fails to represent this exterior reality accurately or completely. Both Phelan and Rokem thus privilege the performing body as the site of negotiation between the present and a period or space that is not immediately visible. In the case of performances of the Middle Ages, the original has been reconstructed so often that the “real” or historically accurate period has ceased to exist. I use Phelan’s argument that performance can re-validate what is missing from the stage to argue that the absence of the Middle Ages themselves creates a space in which performance continually searches for a history that has become invisible. Each successive creation of the Middle Ages on the bodies of contemporary actors stages a longing for a past that has disappeared.

In my construction of a field which explores the overlap of medievalism and performance studies, I place works of medievalism in conversation with those that characterize the performing body as a site of historical research and with film theory that has already begun to explore the connection between medievalism and representation. In the combination of these similar but distinctive fields, I create a theoretical and scholarly background which I can both draw from and move beyond. The juxtaposition of Dinshaw, Carlson, Bildhauer, and Rokem, among others, facilitates a detailed analysis of how and why contemporary performances of the Middle Ages function

historiographically to imagine history. The performances and spaces discussed in this dissertation reflect the methodologies and concerns of the aforementioned fields by disturbing temporal boundaries and allowing the Middle Ages to “touch” other periods in history. The Middle Ages of each play and space I discuss is thus a distinctive period created from centuries of imagination, history, legend, and fantasy.

PERFORMANCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES: NEW PERSPECTIVES

This connection between performance and post-medieval versions of the Middle Ages is grounded in contemporary performance theory as well as in recent scholarly arguments about medieval performance. Recently, medieval theatre historians including Michal Kobialka and Carol Symes have argued that performance was an effective tool of epistemology and meaning-making in the Middle Ages, thus historicizing a *medieval* use of performance as a methodology. Formal staged productions of mystery, cycle, and saints plays familiar to medieval theatre historians are only one part of an extensive tradition in the Middle Ages which suggests the extension of performance idioms to non-dramatic institutions as well. Literary theorist Anny Crunelle-Vanrigh, for instance, characterizes the medieval period as “a time when dramatic fictions, carnival, and civic displays had the streets as their natural stage, before permanent playhouses became a regular feature” (356). Activities such as schoolroom rhetorical exercises, tournaments, and the practice of prelecting (reading aloud) popular fiction and political documents all entailed considerations of representation and audience.⁸ Each one entailed the presentation of information in an engaging, often narrative form to observers. The

⁸ For detailed analysis of these non-traditional uses of performance, see Marjorie Woods’ *Classroom Commentaries* (2010), Louise Fradenburg’s *City, Marriage, Tournament* (1991), and Joyce Coleman’s *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (1996), respectively.

similarities in these practices speak to a widespread medieval understanding of the affective and/or rhetorical power of performing.

One of the most visible examples of medieval performance was in the medieval church. In his 1999 *This is My Body; Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages*, Kobialka argues that religious performance reinforced church authority, demonstrating the fluid nature of representation in medieval religious practice. Kobialka focuses on the *Regularis concordia*, a tenth-century monastic manual which contains the first description of the *Quem quaeritis*, a short dialogue between Mary and an Angel guarding Jesus tomb which is contained in the Easter mass and is often discussed as the first example of performance in the Middle Ages. Drawing heavily on the historiographical methods of Michel De Certeau and Michel Foucault, Kobialka argues that scholars who focus only on the *Quem quaeritis* misunderstand that the entirety of *Regularis concordia*, which governed the whole of monastic life, places a strong emphasis on systems of representation. Scholars who read it otherwise, Kobialka argues, treat it as “a historical document that is spoken to and forced to respond by speaking a language that is not its own” (19). In Kobialka’s argument, the *Quem quaeritis* is simply an example of the institutionalization of representational practices within monastic life, rather than an isolated performance event that functioned as the origin of Western theatre. Kobialka argues that performance, in terms of practices drawing on idioms of spectatorship and representation, was indeed integral to monastic life.

In addition to analyzing non-theatrical performance in the Middle Ages, recent scholars have argued that traditional medieval theatre functioned as opportunity for civic debate. In her 2007 *A Common Stage: Theatre and Public Life in Medieval Arras*, Symes contextualizes the plays of a small town in medieval France as public events which addressed political and religious concerns. In so doing, Symes disturbs traditional

narratives of the development of theatre in the Middle Ages, arguing against a characterization of the Middle Ages as “that age when theatre was allegedly “prohibited,” only to be miraculously ‘reborn’ at first in the churches (eleventh century), then in the towns (thirteenth century)” (184). Rather, Symes grants new concepts of political agency to Arras’ theatre and its creators. For example, she locates criticism of French expansion into Flanders within Jehan Bodel’s seemingly apolitical *Play of Saint Nicholas* (c. 1191), which stages a Christian crusader whose faith is tested by Saracens who find him praying after a disastrous defeat. Symes uses the play to examine how medieval audiences in Arras would have understood a play presumably about Christian history to be in direct conversation with contemporary political issues. She argues that productions of plays like the *Play of Saint Nicholas* indicate a medieval “public sphere” in which these issues could be discussed and debated.

In Symes’ argument, performance becomes an opportunity not only for entertainment, but for civic engagement of the kind Jurgen Habermas argued constituted the rise of the public sphere in the eighteenth century. For Habermas, the public sphere was born in coffee shops and salons which stocked pamphlets and other publications, encouraging engagement with political/economic events and developments. Symes’ description of the conversation generated by the culturally relevant plays of Arras recalls the free exchange of ideas that is central to Habermas’ public. Symes’ argument highlights the connection between performance and medieval identity upon which this dissertation draws to argue that performance opens conversations between the medieval and the contemporary. Like *Saint Nicholas*, post-medieval performances of the Middle Ages take up contemporary concerns against a medieval backdrop, creating space for public discourse. These performances form an affective connection between the medieval and the contemporary, allowing the two periods to “touch.”

METHODOLOGY: DEFINING AFFECTIVE MEDIEVALISM IN PERFORMANCE

Although representations of the Middle Ages are much more common on film and in literature than they are on the stage, there are numerous plays that interact to some degree with medieval characters or stories. In order to narrow the scope of my discussion, I focus on plays which stage the medieval in conversation with post-medieval contexts, thereby examining the ever-shifting role of the Middle Ages in the contemporary imagination. To accomplish this analysis, I take up a particular kind of medievalism with a much narrower definition than that of the field itself. As Tom Shippey, editor of the now-prominent journal *Studies in Medievalism* defines it, medievalism as a whole accounts for “responses to the Middle Ages at all periods since a sense of the mediaeval began to develop” (medievalism.net). I focus on a subset of Shippey’s medievalism, examining the effects of allowing the medieval to “touch” particular post-medieval periods. I’ve termed this practice “affective medievalism.” The term is drawn largely from Dinshaw, who argues the importance of making “affective relations across time” (2) in the practice of medievalism, particularly when analyzing twenty-first century notions of sexuality. Dinshaw argues that contemporary sexual identity and category formation are at least in part based on a particular understanding of how the Middle Ages defined normative and deviant sexual practice. Although the queer theory aspect of Dinshaw’s work is largely outside the scope of this dissertation, her investment in disrupting the temporal boundary between the medieval and the modern is central to my work. I take up Dinshaw’s methods and concerns, extending them to live performance in an effort to trace how contemporary bodies occupy the Middle Ages. I explore how, for example, a twenty-first-century play about the Holy Grail stages both contemporary and thirteenth-century ideas about achievement, spirituality, and sexual purity, thus opening a conversation between the two periods which enriches understanding of both. Through

this lens, I am able to explore what particular deployments of the Middle Ages tell us about the post-medieval contexts in which they were created, as well as how these constructed versions of the past inform our understanding of history.

Affective medievalism examines the processes by which contemporary society imagines new versions of the Middle Ages. It both identifies a production or space as in conversation with the medieval, and analyzes the ways in which particular versions of the medieval contributes to or disrupts previous constructions of the Middle Ages. As such, affective medievalism is performative. It both “enacts or produces that to which it refers” (Diamond 4), which performance scholar Elin Diamond identifies as a hallmark of performativity. Diamond explains performativity by discussing the construction of gender on the human body. Theorizing Judith Butler’s argument that gender is socially constructed rather than biologically based, Diamond writes, “it’s not just that gender is culturally determined and historically contingent, but rather that ‘it’ doesn’t exist unless it’s being done” (4). Gender is thus not the result of biology, but rather of a number of choices about clothing, behavior, ways of moving, speaking, etc., which humans make every day. By making these decisions, individuals perform what they understand to be “masculine” or “feminine.” Simultaneously, however, these choices also contribute to a cultural understanding of the definition of “masculine” and “feminine.” Because the terms are socially constructed, they are subject to revision as trends, economics, and politics change. Thus, gender is both a performance and a thing that is performed. Performances of affective medievalism work in a similar manner. They simultaneously create versions of the medieval (by juxtaposing the Middle Ages with particular contemporary contexts), and disrupt or contribute to pre-existing constructions of the Middle Ages. A combination of performance with affective medievalism allows me to explore the moments in which new versions of the Middle Ages are created. The

medieval in these performances is “always a doing and a thing done” (Diamond 1). The productions in this dissertation create the medieval on contemporary bodies while simultaneously positioning those bodies in relation to their historical counterparts.

All of the productions and performances in this dissertation stage this kind of affective medievalism, and suggest productive, provocative relations between historical moments. As such, they share a number of key characteristics, which this section will detail. To begin, each performance engages with a specific, constructed version of the Middle Ages (i.e. the Middle Ages of fairy tales, or that of the black plague). Second, these productions and performance spaces place that version of the Middle Ages into conversation with a similarly specific post-medieval context. In the course of this juxtaposition, these performances eschew linear narratives of history in order to explore the interrelatedness of the medieval past and the contemporary world. Finally, in the course of constructing a particular version of history, these performances engage metatheatrically with the creation of performance itself.⁹

The first question which I ask of each play or performance space I analyze is which version of the Middle Ages it relies upon. In order to do this, I draw specifically on Eco’s aforementioned categorization of the contemporary medieval in *Travels in Hyperreality*, as well as on Biddick’s argument that the Middle Ages exists in the contemporary imagination as space of both origin and non-origin. The plurality which

⁹ It is important to note at this point that this dissertation will not include contemporary productions of medieval texts. There have been relatively few noteworthy productions of cycle, liturgical, or morality plays in the last century, with the exception of Bill Bryden’s 3-part production of *The Mysteries* at England’s National Theatre in 1995, and Brian Kulick’s production of the same name for New York’s Classic Stage Company in 2001. Although both productions made reference to contemporary political situations (a large-scale miner’s strike and the attacks of September 11, 2001, respectively), they were more focused on revising the Mystery Play as a dramatic form than on creating conversations between the Middle Ages and the post-medieval moments. Similarly, the Mystery Play cycles that have been performed in York every 3-4 years since 1951 celebrate the medieval form, and are not usually invested in staging affective moments of “touch” between the medieval and the modern.

characterizes the Middle Ages in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has resulted in the opportunity for directors and playwrights to customize the Middle Ages to fit their particular needs. The Southern California Renaissance Faire, for instance, constructs the Middle Ages as an escapist paradise. Guests are encouraged to indulge in oversized turkey legs and glasses of mead, and female visitors often dress in extremely revealing costumes. Although the Faire is also often discussed as a family space, its particular version of history seems to grant a license for what might elsewhere be considered deviant behavior. This perceived distance from the world outside of the Faire is a carefully cultivated part of the space's ethos. Conversely, Disneyland's fairy tale version of the Middle Ages is strongly grounded in childhood fantasy. Park guests who choose to wear costumes dress as princes and princesses rather than tavern wenches. Unlike the Renaissance Faire, the park structures guests' experiences, ensuring as much as possible that each visitor has the same, carefully choreographed Disney experience. The park thus provides a controlled version of the Middle Ages which, as the fourth chapter of this dissertation argues, reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Thus, while both the Renaissance Faire and Disneyland posit the Middle Ages as a tourist attraction, they present opposing versions of the medieval.

After determining how a particular production uses and defines the Middle Ages, I next look for the ways in which the performance or space brings its particular version of the Middle Ages into conversation with the values, desires, and theatrical practices of another historical period (often that of the production itself). In William Shakespeare's 1599 *Henry V*, for example, the Chorus' speeches construct a picture of King Henry as a noble medieval lord and warrior, loved by all of his devoted subjects and feared by the effeminate French royalty. Shakespeare's audiences, however, had just witnessed Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, call into question the supremacy and power of their own

ruler in a 1599 rebellion. As early modern historians have argued, *Henry V*'s juxtaposition of the Chorus' reverent descriptions of Henry and the flawed Henry who appeared on the early modern stage as a character may have cast doubt on many of his supposedly heroic deeds as well as on his ability as a ruler. Thus, the play would have introduced questions of appropriate kingly behavior to audiences who made the connection between their own lives and the Middle Ages of the play.

Modern productions of *Henry V* often use its politics to comment on current events. Just after the joint British/American invasion of Iraq in 2003, for example, Nicholas Hytner set his English National Theatre version of *Henry V* in the contemporary Middle East. The production cast Henry's Middle Ages as quintessentially dark and violent, and used the historical setting to highlight the ugliness of modern warfare. Thus, Hytner placed a medieval story into direct conversation with twenty-first-century foreign policy. In contrast, Matthew Warchus' 1994 production of *Henry V* at the Royal Shakespeare Company juxtaposed the medieval story with World War 1, thus exploiting the nationalism present in Shakespeare's script to create nostalgia for a patriotic Middle Ages. Ian Glen's Chorus appeared with a poppy in his lapel, creating a visual link between Henry's England and that of 1914-1917. Hytner and Warchus' particular choices of time periods with which to juxtapose Henry's Middle Ages resulted from their use of Shakespeare's story to make distinctive arguments about contemporary war and national power.

In order to juxtapose the narratives of the Middle Ages against those of another period, the performances in this dissertation all disrupt linear time. Similar to medieval films, which Bildhauer argues "imagine alternative, non-linear perceptions of time [that] disrupt traditional narrative chronology" (25), these plays stage a deliberate anachronism which allows for simultaneous consideration of medieval and contemporary elements,

ideas, and/or characters. This practice has roots in medieval theatre itself. In the cycle plays, for instance, actors playing biblical characters were costumed as medieval—rather than ancient—people, thus blurring the distinction between the biblical past and the contemporary moment. As medieval theatre scholar Sarah Beckwith argues, in medieval productions of cycle plays, "the fictive localities of Calvary, Jerusalem, Herod's palace, Pilate's dais, and Lazarus' tomb are held in active tension with the public spaces of the city, and that tension is animated every time an actor assumes a role in the streets" (xvi). In this way, spectators were able to recognize their own world within biblical history, and to frame the concerns of the plays with their own contemporary aesthetics.¹⁰

The plays and performance spaces in this dissertation similarly disrupt periodization. As discussed in chapter four, for example, the creator of the first modern Renaissance Faire originally intended it as a medieval space (Simons 35). When potential sponsors balked at supporting an exploration of the Middle Ages, she decided instead to call it a "Renaissance Faire."¹¹ Although the change ushered in much corporate and commercial sponsorship, the alteration was in name only. The resulting Southern

¹⁰ Some scholars have attempted to generalize the collapse of linear time present in medieval plays and other art forms as a key feature of medieval historiography. In her 1990 *Stages of History*, for instance Shakespearian Phyllis Rackin argues that the medieval mind regularly blurred past, present, and future to the point that "all history [was] present history" (9). She takes as a basis for this argument medieval tapestries and paintings, which "could represent various stages of the same event" simultaneously. It is important to note, however, that Rackin's project includes the creation of a sharp distinction between medieval and Renaissance historiography. In order to argue that the notions of causality and anachronism came from Renaissance rather than medieval thinking, she emphasizes medieval examples of non-linear representations of time to much larger degree than do other scholars of medieval historiography.

¹¹ One potential Southern California radio sponsor noted, "I don't want anything to do with the Middle Ages; there were no civil rights back then (qtd in Simons 35)." In addition to displaying a puzzling confidence in the Renaissance as a period of progressive politics, attitudes like this one clearly reflect a common twenty-first construction of the Middle Ages as primitive and backwards. Comments such as this allow the Middle Ages to stand in sharp contrast to the achievements of modernity. The chapter on medievalist spaces in this dissertation will include a detailed analysis of the development of the Renaissance Fair.

California Faire, and indeed most other such spaces, combine medieval jousting and references to feudalistic hierarchy with appearances by Queen Elizabeth. In addition, food carts boasting Pepsi soda fountains next to casks of mead, and food vendors selling tofu burgers next to giant turkey legs are juxtaposed with all of this medieval and sixteenth-century pageantry. Further, guests do not restrict their costume choices to Renaissance garb—numerous Faire patrons embrace the “fantasy” side of the Faire and dress in fairy or pirate costumes. The Faire space suggests that this bleeding through of one time period into another both creates and sustains the ethos of the Renaissance Faire. The Faire is delimited as distinctive place in which medieval, Renaissance, and modern social interactions occur simultaneously, and which resists temporal boundaries.

In addition to constructing a flexible historiography, the performances in this dissertation often metatheatrically comment on the nature of the theatre or performance in general, and argue that a playwright orders the events of a play in a similar manner to a historian constructing narratives of the past. As Rokem notes, plays about history often “draw attention to different metatheatrical dimensions of the performance, frequently showing directly on the stage how performances about history are constructed” (7). By repeatedly reminding audience members that the version of history which they are witnessing is taking place in a theatre, these performances reinforce the notion that all narratives, and particularly all medieval narratives, are the result of conscious construction. The RSC’s *Morte d’Arthur*, for example, relied on a lighting effect to create Arthur’s famous Round Table on the stage floor itself, instead of incorporating a physical table as a stage prop. Thus rather than sitting at a table, Arthur and his knights stood around the circle of light created on the stage. Director Gregory Doran’s choice of a symbolic rather than a physical Round Table continually drew the audience’s attention to the architecture of the stage itself, and thus to the production’s location within the RSC’s

Courtyard Theatre space. This effect (one of many in the production that relied upon the audience's familiarity with basic staging conventions), effectively emphasized the RSC's stage as a space upon which iconic histories are constructed.¹² The contrast of the symbolic table and the physical bodies of the actors around it positioned the medieval Arthurian legend as an ephemeral, imagined space which centuries of later generations have attempted to fill. Indeed, all of the performances in this dissertation deal, to varying degrees, with iconic images or narratives like these. Metatheatrical moments like that of the RSC's *Morte* allow the productions to comment on the perseverance of these medieval elements within the contemporary imagination.

Throughout this dissertation, I also look for the ways in which performance either supports or disrupts a common contemporary understanding of the Middle Ages as conservative and patriarchal. The swashbuckling chaos of most Robin Hood stories, for example, is resolved when King Richard, the ultimate paternal embodiment of order and authority, returns from the Crusades. Similarly, only the knight who remains unsullied by sexual contact with a woman is able to attain the Holy Grail in the Arthurian tradition. Modern constructions of the medieval also tend to take for granted that the economic and political systems of the Middle Ages operated according to strict social divisions that left little room for the voices of women. I mine all of the productions and spaces in this dissertation for the ways in which directors and creators juxtapose these conservative readings of the Middle Ages with contemporary understandings of race, gender and sexuality. Chapter two, for instance, examines the effect of casting a black actor as Henry V on a production's critical reception. Similarly, chapter four examines the intersection of medieval and contemporary gender politics in Disneyland's medieval Fantasyland.

¹² Indeed, in the years immediately preceding the *Morte*, the RSC produced a complete cycle of Shakespeare's medieval history plays, thus, at least for repeat visitors, imbuing the theatre space with centuries of medieval history.

In order to accomplish this research, I combine attendance at performances and medieval spaces with viewings of videotaped productions. I attended the RSC's *Morte d'Arthur* in Stratford in August of 2010, and this dissertation employs detailed performance analysis of the production alongside reviews, production stills, newspaper and magazine articles and interviews with the creative team. Similarly, one of the three productions of *Henry V* I discuss occurred in 2009 in Austin, Texas. I attended the performance and have conducted numerous formal and informal interviews with its creative team. The other *Henry V* productions which I discuss I have viewed via archival video at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre in Stratford and London, respectively, on a research trip in the summer of 2010. Similarly, I viewed the two other productions of Arthurian legend—the original Broadway productions of Eric Idle's *Spamalot* and David Auburn's *Proof*—on archival video recordings in the Billy Rose collection of the New York Public Library in the summer of 2012. I combine analysis of these videos with examination of the same print sources which I employ for *Morte d'Arthur* as well as archival materials such as prompt books and directors' notes housed at the RSC and the National. I visited Renaissance Pleasure Faire in Irvine, California (the first such Faire in the nation) in the spring of 2010 and the spring of 2011, Disneyland in the fall of 2011 and of 2012, and *Medieval Times* in Dallas, Texas, in the fall of 2010 and the winter of 2013. In my work with all of these productions and medievalist spaces, I use detailed performance analysis and close readings to identify the version(s) of the Middle Ages which each space creates, as well as how they use an acknowledgement of performance or theatricality to stage the complex relationships between their own contexts and the medieval period.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The three body chapters of this dissertation analyze how the modern imagination constructs medieval history, legend, and fantasy, respectively. I analyze three productions of *Henry V* (1599), which I argue to be Shakespeare's quintessential medieval history play; three contemporary versions of the medieval legend of King Arthur; and three tourist spaces, all of which are broadly based in a medieval aesthetic, and which invite guests as well as staff to dress and behave as medieval people.

The second chapter (after this introduction) will take up Shakespeare's medievalism in *Henry V*. The play is the only history in which Shakespeare employed a Chorus to continually comment on and contextualize the main character's history. These Choral interludes allow Shakespeare to simultaneously dramatize both medieval events and the process of writing medieval history. In performance, the Chorus becomes an embodied historiographer, juxtaposing Renaissance reconstructions of Henry's history with narrations of the action occurring live before an audience. As a result of the inclusion of the Chorus, *Henry V* stages the events of history and their usage for future generations at the same time. Indeed, in order to highlight the medievalism of *Henry V* in particular, I read it against others of Shakespeare's histories. I mine three contemporary performances of *Henry V* which give the Chorus special prominence, including Matthew Warchus' 1994 RSC production, Nicholas Hynter's at the National in 2003, and Robert Faires' 2009 one-man adaptation in Austin, Texas, for ways in which productions of *Henry V* bring medieval history into conversation with post-medieval concerns and narratives. These productions allow new voices to tell the stories of the Middle Ages, often by involving the audience in the construction of Henry's history.

From Shakespeare, I move in chapter three to plays that stage medieval Arthurian legend. Noting the wide-spread fascination with the Holy Grail which continues in the

twenty-first century, I center my analysis on representations of the Grail quest within three plays. These plays—including the RSC’s 2010 production of Mike Poulton’s *Morte d’Arthur*, the original Broadway production of Eric Idle’s *Spamalot* (2005), and David Auburn’s 2000 *Proof*—construct distinctive versions of the Grail, each representative of achievement or excellence. This chapter explores the continued uses the modern imagination finds for the medieval Grail, and the myriad ways in which the holy object appears on stage. For Poulton and the RSC, the Grail remained ephemeral and elusive, made only of stage light and theatrical effects. For Idle, the Grail was a comically large cup hidden under an audience member’s seat. For Auburn, it was a complex and all-encompassing mathematical proof. Despite their vast differences, however, all three are identifiable as Grails. The Grail’s ubiquity in the contemporary imagination makes it simultaneously easily recognizable and impossible to represent. As RSC Assistant Director Justin Audibert asks, “and to show things like the Holy Grail—how do you do that? Come on with a shiny cup?” (rsc.org). Each of the productions discussed in this chapter solve this problem of representation by relating the Grail to the concerns and expectations of their particular audiences. Similarly, each play stages the quest for the Holy Grail in a unique but recognizable manner, and the chapter considers the changing meaning of the quest for twenty-first century audiences. In my consideration of *Proof*, for example, I argue that contemporary plays about the search for mathematical or scientific truths—which are growing in popularity as technology use spreads in the twenty-first century—stage a re-imagined version of the medieval quest narrative.

Performance-based explorations of the Middle Ages are not limited to stage productions. In fact, a significant amount of affective medievalism occurs in public places. The fourth chapter of this dissertation will thus take up the ways in which spaces including Renaissance Fairs, *Medieval Times* Dinner Theatre, and Disneyland’s

Fantasyland facilitate embodied affective medievalism. These spaces employ performers as costumed staff members in an effort to extend the experience of specifically constructed versions of the Middle Ages to visitors. Renaissance Fairs in particular also encourage guests to dress up, usually offering numerous stalls or booths dedicated to costume purchase or rental. The anachronism of these spaces allows visitors to become more than spectators, and to encounter the Middle Ages within the idioms of their own cultures and time periods. These spaces create publics which function as hybrids of medieval and modern values, experiences, and characters. I turn in this chapter to recent examinations of the public sphere, both modern and medieval, to ground my discussion of the participatory and performative nature of these spaces. Like stage plays, these spaces create narratives of the Middle Ages which they share with paying guests. Unlike theatres, however, these spaces provide guests the freedom (or the illusion of that freedom) to explore at their own pace. Thus, this chapter will also explore the relative degree to which these spaces control adherence to or deviation from proscribed medieval narratives.

The final chapter will conclude the work of the previous chapters, turning briefly to the role of the Middle Ages in the digital world and social media. I interrogate the future of affective medievalism as it relates to the twenty-first century's growing reliance on the cyber world, and analyze the continuing ways in which performance is intertwined with digital medievalism. Medieval poet Geoffrey Chaucer, for example, has quite a lively web presence which includes a popular blog, houseoffame.blogspot.com, written by an academic posing as the fourteenth-century poet. I suggest in my conclusion that the future of affective medievalism in performance will need to account for these digital representations of the Middle Ages.

CHAPTER 2: “A small room containing mighty men:” Staging Medieval History in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*

In the summer of 2010, I visited the archives of London’s National Theatre to research Nicholas Hytner’s 2003 production of *Henry V*. Given Hytner’s choice to produce the play months after the British invasion of Iraq in the wake of September 11, I was curious to see how Hytner and the creative team had conceived of the affective connection between medieval and twenty-first century politics. I was thus not surprised to find that the holdings included a packet of newspaper clippings and images of soldiers which Hytner made available in the rehearsal room along with the usual materials—a videotape of the production, designer sketches, prompt book, and a copy of the program. Equally unsurprising, given the amount of press the production had received, was the large notebook filled with reviews of the production. In an attempt to recreate the feeling of Hytner’s rehearsal room, I spread the images of Iraq over my research table as I opened the press notebook. As I read, a single, unexpected phrase appeared again and again: “notable black actor Adrian Lester as Henry...” I paused for a moment, wondering if the wrong press materials had somehow been included in the *Henry V* boxes. Almost nowhere in these reviews was there mention of Hytner’s attempt to bridge contemporary foreign policy with medieval Agincourt. Where was the connection to the images of wartime death and destruction that littered my table? As I worked it became clear that, for reviewers, Lester’s race overshadowed the production’s investment in violence and immediacy.

The disconnect between the press and Hytner’s interest in the medieval story was jarring. As I continued reading, however, it became apparent that what had been archived at the National was the plurality of the Middle Ages in contemporary discourse. While Hytner found a connection between the violence of Henry’s Middle Ages and that of his

own time, the British press was most invested in the medieval's predominant whiteness. As a play which itself presents doubled portraits of the main character and of the time period in which he lived, *Henry V* allows the medieval past to contain a number of diverse contemporary concerns. As such, Hytner's production facilitated individualized understandings of the connections between the Middle Ages and contemporary London.

This chapter will analyze the flexibility and plurality inherent in theatrical representations of medieval history. I take up William Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599), which I argue stands out amidst Shakespeare's ten plays about medieval English history as a work of affective medievalism.¹³ Until the late twentieth century, the play, which stages an unlikely English victory over French forces at Agincourt, was staged as "an emotional journey into patriotism, with Henry as the heroic helmsman" (Gurr 38). Indeed, *Henry V* is most popular during times of war or national crisis. A newspaper account of an 1804 production in Manchester during the Napoleonic Wars, for example, reports that the actor playing Henry asked God to bless "Harry, England, and *King George*" (Gurr 39), rather than the "Saint George" for which the text calls. Shakespeare historian Andrew Gurr notes that the *Henry V* also "triumphed" during both World Wars in England. Laurence Olivier's 1949 film, arguably the most well-known version of the play, is a celebration of patriotism and the strength of the English military. By the 1960s, however, numerous productions began to challenge the notion that *Henry V* staged a noble, heroic Middle Ages for which audiences should feel nostalgia. Rather, many directors found in the text a grim warning about the dangers of war, and a portrait of a

¹³ For the purposes of this chapter, I use the term "history plays" to refer to the ten plays which are marked "histories" in the First Folio's catalogue and which most scholars agree make up a distinct Shakespearian genre. These include two tetralogies (*1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, *Richard II* and *Henry V* in one and *1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III* in the other) and two single plays—*King John* and *All is True* (*Henry VIII*). I exclude plays from the other genres (comedy, tragedy, and romance), that can be argued to take place during the Middle Ages, like *Macbeth*.

Middle Ages that was far more gruesome than glittering. In either case, productions of *Henry V* create an affective connection between the Middle Ages and the present, relying on particular constructions of medieval history to comment on contemporary politics.

Although *Henry V* was originally written and performed in the sixteenth century, it is a play about the Middle Ages. It is the fourth in a tetralogy of plays which also includes *Richard II* (1595) and *Henry IV* Parts One (1597) and Two (1596-1599). Although there is some debate as to whether Shakespeare intended there to be a thematic connection between the plays, their focus on Henry's rise from childhood to kingship have caused scholars to refer to them as the "Henriad."¹⁴ The historical Henry V lived from 1387-1422 C.E. and ruled from 1413 until his death, presumably of dysentery. The Henry who appears in *Henry V* would have been recognizable to Renaissance audiences as the adult version of *Henry IV's* Prince Hal. Thus, Henry was a familiar character in the Renaissance, both historically and theatrically. To a much greater degree than in his other history plays, Shakespeare closely follows Raphael Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1577, second edition 1587)¹⁵ in his dramatization of Henry's 1415 French campaign. *Henry V* is tightly focused around the battles and their immediate causes, allowing the audience to judge Henry mostly by his wartime behavior.

The action begins with a discussion between two English bishops about how to distract the king from passing a law which would cut funds to the church. They land upon an obscure piece of Salic succession law which they interpret as evidence that the French King, Charles VI, is an illegitimate ruler and that Henry is the rightful king of both

¹⁴ See especially E.M.W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Michael Taylor's *Shakespeare Criticism in the Twentieth Century*, and Graham Holderness' *Shakespeare's History, Shakespeare: The Histories*, and *The Play of History*.

¹⁵ These two editions of Holinshed's *Chronicles* differ in ways that are significant to my argument of *Henry V's* medievalism, and will be explored later in this chapter.

England and France. When the bishops encourage Henry to assert his royal right overseas, he is hesitant, wanting to challenge Charles only “with right and conscious” (1.2.96). The mockery he receives from French ambassadors, however, convinces Henry to invade France, threatening that he is “coming on/To venge me as I may, and to put forth/My rightful hand in a well-hallowed cause” (1.2.291-93).

As the narrative moves to the battlefield, the play becomes a doubled character study which presents Henry as simultaneously noble and violent. After a brief scene in the Boar’s Head tavern and an episode in which Henry orders the execution of three English traitors, the action shifts to the French city of Harfleur—the site of the campaign’s first battle. After encouraging his weary and outnumbered soldiers to rush “once more into the breach” (3.1.1), Henry orders a siege and threatens the governor that resistance to the English army will result in the violent destruction of the town and its people. The governor surrenders, and Henry and his troops camp before continuing to Agincourt. During the heat of the battle at Agincourt, Henry learns that the French have dispatched soldiers into the English camp to kill the boys guarding weaponry and supplies. Outraged at the brutality of the act, Henry violates the rules of war, ordering the execution of his army’s French prisoners. The chronology of this sequence is disputed, but as I will demonstrate, key to understanding the how the play presents medieval history. Although his troops are outnumbered five to one, Henry’s army is victorious and the French king surrenders. The play ends as Henry seduces and marries the French princess Katherine, uniting their countries.

Considering the scope of the events Shakespeare dramatizes in his history cycles—from the death of King John in 1216 to the birth of Queen Elizabeth I in 1533—he can be argued to be one of the most recognizable and comprehensive writers of medieval history. Indeed some of his most famous characters, including the scheming Richard III

and the drunken Sir John Falstaff, come from the history cycles. While all ten of the history plays stage medieval subject matter and are shaped by Shakespeare's shifting historical and thematic concerns, *Henry V* presents a particularly affective kind of medievalism. It is the only history play, and indeed the only play in Shakespeare's canon, which employs a Choral figure who reappears throughout, historicizing Henry's actions and reminding the audience that they are in a theatre. Among other narrative devices in the play, these Choral interludes simultaneously dramatize medieval events and the process of writing history. In addition, Shakespeare's ambivalent treatment of Henry and the play's striking connections to Shakespeare's own historical moment mark both the instability of the Middle Ages and their post-medieval reoccurrences.

Shakespeare's treatment of the Middle Ages as historical text in *Henry V* makes the play well suited to explore "the myriad ways in which contemporary popular culture uses the medieval past as a fantasy frame for making sense of our own world" (Finke and Shichtman 13). I begin with analysis of the plurality which the Chorus embodies in the play's text, and then analyze the affective medievalism of *Henry V* as a text and in three such performances. First, Matthew Warchus' 1994 Royal Shakespeare Company production highlighted the play's non-linear historiography. In Warchus' production, the Middle Ages and WWI England coexisted in an exploration of memory, absence, and patriotism. Similarly, in his 2003 production for the National Theatre, director Nicholas Hytner constructed the Middle Ages as a stage for contemporary political and, to Hytner's surprise, racial discourse. Hytner's Henry, however, ruled a dark, unstable, and violent Middle Ages that were diametrically opposed to Warchus nostalgic fantasy space. Finally, Robert Faires' 2009 one-man adaptation in Austin, Texas, created a uniquely American version of the medieval story by exploring metatheatricality. All three of these stagings locate the play's Chorus in the gap between medieval history and twentieth/

twenty-first century production contexts. Similarly, they dramatize the particularly constructed nature of medieval history itself by highlighting the theatricality of Henry's war. These attempts to stage the process of writing history represent a new trend in the play's production history, which explores the connections between performance and historiography.

HENRY'S PLURAL MIDDLE AGES

The plurality inherent in *Henry V* is apparent in a comparison of two film adaptations of the play. For twenty-first century audiences, *Henry V* is probably most familiar from Olivier's 1941 film. Olivier's Henry is pious, noble, and, above all, patriotic. His war is just and, judging from the film's stylized battle scenes, bloodless. Kenneth Branagh's 1989 version in which he, like Olivier, played the title role is in many ways a revision of Olivier's film. Branagh's version is dark, violent, and gory. His Henry is moody and reactive, and is often either brooding or screaming in anger. As different as these versions are, however, they are both rooted in the text. Their diametric opposition comes from strategic textual cutting rather than radical re-imagining. The contrast between them speaks to the play's ambivalent treatment of Henry and his Middle Ages, which in turn comes largely from the interplay between Henry and the Chorus.

While *Henry V*'s focus on medieval events is common to all of Shakespeare's histories, the play's inclusion of a Chorus as a counterpoint to the action is unique.¹⁶ The Choral figure remains outside the action of the play but appears at the opening, at each act break, and as the play's epilogue both to narrate the events the audience is about to see and to comment on Henry's historical significance. The Chorus is the embodiment of

¹⁶ The closest approximation to the Chorus in the histories is "Rumor" in *2 Henry IV*, who "run[s] before King Harry's victory" (prologue, 23). Rumor will be discussed later in this chapter. There are a few instances of Chorus-like figures in the rest of the canon, including Gower in *Pericles*, but none of these are identified simply as "Chorus" as is the *Henry V* character.

affective medievalism, and highlights the ways in which post-medieval history will remember and construct Henry. As literary scholar Lawrence Danson writes, “the Chorus...is simultaneously an actor within the play and a privileged voice outside it” (29). The Chorus’ descriptions of the play’s title character as “the warlike Harry,” “the mirror of all Christian kings,” “the well-appointed king,” a “royal captain” and a “conquering Caesar” (Prologue 5; 2.0.6; 3.0.4; 4.0.29; 5.0.28) condition the audience’s opinion of Henry as noble.¹⁷ As such, the Chorus participates in a Renaissance tradition of constructing both Henry and his victory as glorious. Indeed, chronicle sources praise Henry as “the ideal English monarch” (Holderness, *The Play of History*, 67) with hagiographical reverence.¹⁸ For the Chorus, Henry rules a Middle Ages that is a “political utopia, a celebration of past grandeur... opposed to the miseries of...foreign domination” (Eco 70).

Shakespeare’s inclusion of the Chorus in a play about such a famous figure is a dramaturgical device which allows him to set up two distinct versions of King Henry which metonymically represent the play’s visions of the Middle Ages. Crunelle-Vanrigh has pointed out that by 1599, when Shakespeare was well-established as a dramatist, Choral characters were “old fashioned devices,” familiar from classical drama but not frequently seen on Elizabethan stages (355). The Chorus thus exists to provide a counterpoint to the version of Henry which the audience sees—a king whose insecurity

¹⁷ Although the Chorus appears to be gender neutral within the play, Renaissance staging conventions dictate that he would have been played by a man, and thereby suggest (although arguably) that the character itself was male. I follow that logic here except in the case of productions that specifically cast the Chorus as a woman.

¹⁸ Holderness also describes the counterpoint to these accounts of Henry as king—the “popular comic-romance tradition” of medieval and Renaissance stories about the youthful folly of Prince Hal (*Play of History* 67). These accounts usually included a version of Hal’s glorious transformation into Henry, however, and thus also contribute to the national mythology surrounding the medieval king.

causes him to threaten child rape at Harfleur, to question his kinship before the biggest battle of his career, and to execute French prisoners. He appears alternately unsure and reactive in the space of a war that is dirty and frightening, ruling a medieval period that is “a barbaric age, a land of elementary and outlaw feelings...Dark par excellence” (Eco 69), rather than a romantic utopia.

Shakespeare’s fractured portrayal of Henry is one of the few ways in which he deviates from Holinshed.¹⁹ In other plays, Shakespeare took liberties with recorded history, conflating numerous moments into a single scene—as in *2 Henry VI*’s Jack Cade rebellion, which combines elements from revolts in 1450 and 1387—or placing characters in scenes in which they historically could not have been present. Holinshed praises Henry, characterizing him as a king “of life without spot; a prince whom all men loved, and of none disdained, a captain against whom Fortune never frowned” (141). *Henry V* simultaneously reinforces and undermines this version, which would have been predominant in the minds of Shakespeare’s audiences. The Chorus/Henry combination facilitates the play’s presentation of a character and a time period which are simultaneously heroic and dark.

This doubled portrait of Henry has been one of the causes for debate about the play’s publication. Although they appear in the 1623 Folio edition of the play, the Choral speeches, along with a large number of other passages, are not included in the 1600 quarto. Scholars question whether the absence of these sections indicates that Shakespeare wrote them later, between the publication of the quarto and the Folio, or whether they were removed from the quarto for political reasons. Literary scholar Annabel Patterson argues the latter, claiming that the *Henry V* quarto is “a tactical retreat

¹⁹ Gurr, for instance, argues that with regard to *Henry V* “[Shakespeare] was more reluctant than other writers of history plays in his time to falsify the known accounts, and closely followed Holinshed’s story, sometimes versifying the precise words of his source, only telescoping events for dramatic form” (16).

from a complex historiography that might have been misunderstood, to a symbolic enactment of nationalist fervor” (39). Indeed, the quarto presents a simplistically heroic portrait of Henry by also omitting his threats before Harfleur and a soliloquy about the difficulties of kingship. Along with these omissions, the absence of the Choral speeches removes the possibility of an ambivalent Henry. If they were in fact omitted from the quarto rather than written after its publication, it is possible that Shakespeare meant the whitewashed version of Henry to be a reflection of Queen Elizabeth I, who was famously concerned with preserving an image of power.

In the Folio, Shakespeare disrupts an easy characterization of Henry as a hero by highlighting the contrast between the Chorus’ descriptions and the actions we see Henry perform. The Chorus teaches spectators to see Henry as the “well appointed king at Dover pier...and his brave fleet/With silken streamers the young Phoebus fanning” (3.0.4-6), for instance, just before they see him threaten horrific violence at Harfleur: “I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur/ Till in her ashes she lie buried./ The gates of mercy shall be all shut up./ And the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart./In liberty of bloody hand shall range/ With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass/ Your fresh fair virgins and your flow’ring infants” (3.3.85-91). A “well-appointed king” should not need to resort to such threats to achieve a victory which the Chorus ascribes to his virtue. The Harfleur speech also undercuts the Chorus’ image of Henry as the consummate leader, painting his soldiers as bloodthirsty ravishers whom he would be unable to control if they were let loose. These are not the men of the Chorus’ “brave fleet,” but hungry, vicious outlaws. While the speech is consistent with Henry’s vision of the war, peopled with soldiers “as familiar with men’s pockets as their gloves” (3.3.44), the contrast to the Chorus’ “silken streamers” is jarring. Shakespeare uses these contradictions to force the audience to accept that the play’s version of the Middle Ages

changes as it is considered from the perspectives of various characters.²⁰

Read in conversation with the action of the scenes it precedes, the act four prologue provides another clear example of the difference between the public Henry—the face of a noble Middle Ages—and the private man for whom the medieval war is a cause for despair. The speech valorizes Henry’s “royal face,” which shows no sign of fear to his soldiers, whom he calls “brothers, friends, and countrymen” (4.0.35, 34) before battle. On the eve of the battle at Agincourt, however, Henry disguises himself and walks among his troops, shocked to hear how little faith they have in him. He then appears alone, questioning his station as king: “what have kings that privates have not too,/ Save ceremony, save general ceremony” (4.1.220-1). The medieval and Renaissance view, of course, was that what kings “have” is divine right—the will of God that they should rule. Henry discards this right, lamenting that only his outward trappings, the “balm, the scepter, and the ball,/ The sword, the mace, and the crown imperial” (4.1.242-3) make him feel like a king. This self-doubt further disrupts the Chorus’ image of the king’s public “royal face.” Once Henry admits that he is a man rather than a divine ruler, he gives voice to doubt about whether his father’s deposition of Richard II will doom his chances at victory: “not today, O Lord,/ O not today, think not upon the fault/ My father made in compassing the crown’ (4.1.274-5). This invocation of the upheaval which led to Henry’s own reign again references the instability inherent in Eco’s “barbaric” Middle Ages, providing a further contrast to the Chorus’ romanticized version of the past.

The Chorus’ effusive act four prologue also precedes Henry’s order for the death of the French prisoners. The chronology of the sequence is famously unclear, making it possible to read Henry’s action as a war crime. In 4.7, the Welsh Captain Fluellen appears

²⁰ The play’s doubled version of events also undercuts the “academic, ecclesiastical, judicial...[or] poetic authority” that literary scholars Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann argue Renaissance audiences would have granted to Choral or Prologue figures (25).

on stage mourning the death of a group of English supply boys after a French ambush, calling the slaughter “cowardly” (4.7.4). He then praises the execution of the French prisoners within the English camp as retribution: “O, tis a gallant king” (4.7.8). Neither the killing of the French prisoners nor that of the English boys happens on stage, however, and Fluellen’s explanation does not match that of the play’s previous scene. In 4.6, Exeter arrives to tell Henry of the ground the English army is gaining. Henry hears an alarm, and deduces that the French are re-mobilizing forces. It is then that he orders the death of the prisoners, presumably to stop them from re-joining the French forces: “But hark, what new alarum is this same?/ The French have reinforced their scattered men./ Then every soldier kill his prisoners” (4.6.35-7). Here, Henry has not heard of the boys’ deaths, and his order appears to violate the rules of war. While this doubled report of the prisoners’ death may be an error on Shakespeare’s part, I argue that it is a further instance of the play’s de-stabilized vision of Henry.²¹ This introduction of doubt also echoes the ambiguity with which the play treats the Middle Ages. Just as the alternative version of the sequence in 4.6 complicates the characterization of Henry as “gentle,” it destabilizes the glory of war with France. Like their king, then, the Middle Ages of *Henry V* are both romanticized and dangerous.

As mentioned earlier, although both filmic versions of the play include the Chorus, the striking differences between their portraits of Henry illustrate the distance between the play’s two visions of the Middle Ages. While Branagh’s film is dark, graphic, and, as Branagh describes it, “much more gritty and bloody,” (Nightingale), Olivier’s World War II era interpretation is an optimistic celebration of England’s military

²¹ Other such potential errors are readily available within Shakespeare’s work, including for example, the two reports of Portia’s death in *Julius Caesar*. Nowhere, however, is there a similar scene that includes the amount of detail which *Henry V* does, leading me to argue that the two reports of the death of the French boys were intentionally ambivalent.

glory. Both Olivier and Branagh directed and starred in their respective films, and both created distinctive versions of the story which erase the text's famous ambiguity. For most scholars it is Olivier's film that stands out as the most iconic version of Shakespeare's play. Literary scholar Arthur Ganz, for instance, argues that

For theatergoers of a certain age *Henry V* is less of a history play than a problem play, the problem being Laurence Olivier's film version, which for its first audience so indelibly set many of the speech patterns and even physical relations that other versions, simply by being different, appear perverse (470).

While the film did create the template for such scenes as Henry's "St. Crispin's Day" speech, the staging of which Branagh closely mimics, Oliver's film also set the standard for an "unambiguously heroic" portrait of Henry and his Middle Ages (Gurr 48). Olivier's dedication of the film to "the Commandos and Airborne Troops of Great Britain, the spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture in some ensuing scenes" (*Henry V*, 1944) allows the film to celebrate an unbroken line of patriotic ancestry between Henry's medieval nobles and the later British troops. Olivier removed Henry's speech to the Harfleur governor and a scene in which he executes three English traitors, thereby creating an unproblematically virtuous Henry with unfailingly loyal followers. The English devotion to Henry is visible in the rapt and adoring faces of the subjects to whom delivers the St. Crispin's Day speech.

In Branagh's film, it is not the St. Crispin's day speech that so impresses Henry's troops, but his speech to them at Harfleur: "I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips/ Straining upon the start" (3.1.31-2). Branagh's Henry delivers the lines on horseback while the camera pans to Exeter, Bedford and Gloucester on the ground, whose faces are drenched with sweat and lit by the already flaming walls of Harfleur behind them. The speech comes after the defeat of Harfleur, and thus stands as a reminder of the battle's

brutality rather than an exhortation that the troops go “once more unto the breach” (3.1.1). Almost immediately after, Henry threatens the governor of Harfleur with rape and pillage, using an uncut version of the speech which Olivier’s film had removed. For Branagh, the scene at Harfluer is evidence of the play’s capability to tell

what really happened in France. All the eyewitnesses of Agincourt and Harfleur tell a story much more gritty and bloody than even we have described, with dysentery rife and an incredible stench and sensational brutality. French bodies piled six feet high, with most of them dying of suffocation in the crush, and wild Irishmen ripping off their clothes and running into battle naked in the filth. Terrible, unbelievable (Nightingale).

Branagh freely admits that he was heavily influenced by Olivier’s film, but his description of the “knights in shining armor... a[nd] kind of Camelot thing” of Olivier’s work suggests that the earlier film is a fairy tale version of the story (Nightingale). There is no mention in Branagh’s film of Henry as the “mirror of all Christian kings,” for example. Although Branagh argues that his is a “more complex” version of the play than Olivier’s, his treatment of Henry as a brutal general in a dirty, terrifying version of the Middle Ages similarly removes the ambiguity of Shakespeare’s text and presents a largely one-sided view of the iconic medieval ruler.

HENRY’S MIDDLE AGES OUT OF TIME AT THE RSC

As Henry prays on the eve of Agincourt, he is haunted with memories of his father’s misconduct. Henry assures God that he had Richard’s body re-interred with proper burial rituals and prayers, making it clear that past and present share the stage in *Henry V*. Further, with its warning about Henry VI’s loss of the territory Henry V gained, the Choral epilogue extends the space of the play to include the future. As an analysis of Warchus’ production will demonstrate, this disruption of linear time marks the play’s investment in memory and the resonance of Henry’s history. The reliance on the Chorus,

as well as the looming specters of both Henry VI and Richard II, stage the “playful, experimental approach to time both in the plot and in the narrative structures” (13) which Bildhauer similarly locates in medieval film. The play’s dramaturgy is thus invested in moments of affective “touch” between the medieval and later periods.

Henry’s prayer before Agincourt dramatizes the presence of past events: “not today, O Lord,/ Oh not today, think not upon the fault/ My father made in compassing the crown./ I Richard’s body have interred new,/And on it have bestowed more contrite tears/ than from it issued forced drops of blood” (4.1.266-71). By burying Richard II, Henry hopes to rewrite his own legacy, disrupting the narrative that would leave him to atone for his father’s sins with defeat on the battlefield. Henry constructs the past as a force comparably dangerous to the French army. Although Richard is physically absent from the scene, Henry’s prayer reendows the dead king’s body with a powerful presence which could alter the course of events. The “contrite tears” Henry cries are thus linked both symbolically and temporally to Richard’s blood, joining the two kings across what was historically fifteen years. For Renaissance audiences, Henry’s prayer would also recall Shakespeare’s *Richard II* (1595), written four years before *Henry V* and rumored to have been performed on the eve of rebellion against Elizabeth. The bridge between past and present would thus have been evident inside the playhouse. Henry’s prayers before Agincourt not only connect Richard and Henry, but Henry and Elizabeth as well.

Shakespeare’s conflation of past and present is unique to *Henry V*. Historian Phyllis Rackin argues that, in most of the history plays, Shakespeare demonstrates an investment in sixteenth-century historiography, which attempted to flatten history into linear and teleological sequences of cause and effect. She argues that “the new ‘politic historians’ of the Renaissance...impelled by a new concern with the life of this world...described historical causation primarily in terms of ‘second causes,’ that is, of human

actions and their consequences” (3). 1613’s *All is True* (*Henry VIII*), for instance, dramatizes the events leading up to the birth of Queen Elizabeth I.²² Although *All is True* relies on Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church for context, the play bypasses any discussion of the event in order to focus on the historical impact of the intrigues within Henry’s court. *All is True* frames James I, a distant relative of Elizabeth’s and England’s ruler at the time the play was composed, as Elizabeth’s direct descendent, prophesying that “her ashes new create another heir [...Who] shall star-like rise as great in fame as she was” (5.4.41-46). Shakespeare’s decision to end *All is True* with Elizabeth’s birth allows the play to construct history as a linear movement toward James’ inevitable rule, casting Henry’s relationship with Anne Boleyn as its “first cause.” Shakespeare’s mastery of Renaissance historiography in *All is True* implies that his use of a non-linear model in *Henry V* was a deliberate tactical choice.

While Henry’s Agincourt prayer stages a major disruption of linear temporality, it is the Chorus who most often embodies Bildhauer’s notion of fractured time. Literary scholars Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann place the Chorus in the tradition of the early modern prologue, which “ushered its early modern audiences over an imaginary threshold—a threshold both of and for the imagination as well as one both of and for the specifically dramatic, theatrical uses of the ‘wooden O’” (37). For Bruster and Weimann, this threshold exists between the world of the audience and the world of the play, facilitating the audience’s journey into the narrative unfolding on stage. The repeated appearances of the Chorus in *Henry V*, however, signal the doubled nature of the character as a threshold. Not only does he bridge the world of the spectators with that of the play, he also connects the medieval past with the present of the production, and, in the

²²The First Folio lists the play as *The Life of King Henry the Eighth*. Modern publications generally list *All is True* as the play’s subtitle. Here, I use *All is True*, following references to the play in seventeenth-century legal documents.

epilogue, with the future: “Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned king/Of France and England, did this king succeed,/Whose state so many had the managing/That they lost France and made England bleed,/Which oft our stage hath shown” (5.3.9-13). At the moment the Chorus prophesies England’s ultimate loss of the newly gained French territory, it is apparent that Henry VI’s failures have been present in all of his father’s victories, just as Henry felt his own father’s deeds affect his own.

Renaissance audiences would have known the outcome of both Henry’s war and that of his son before the play began, thus making the play’s affective connection between Henry’s past, present, and future even more obvious. In order to recreate this sense of “touch” between past, present, and future, contemporary directors must attempt to ensure that their own audiences are similarly unsurprised by the play’s outcome. Conveniently, the whole of the play’s story is present in the Choral prologue’s description of the “the very casques/ That did affright the air at Agincourt” (13-14) which will eventually appear on the stage. As Kobialka writes, “If it is possible to fathom that history is a perpetual movement of reorganization and realignment, the function of a historian is to move around the past and present rationalizations that established the visibility of his or her object of inquiry” (26-7). The Chorus is the character in *Henry V* who performs this dance between event and interpretation, allowing the audience to witness both the history of Henry’s life and how Henry’s victory will resonate across the centuries. It is the Chorus that flattens the “accomplishment of many years/ Into a hourglass” (Prologue 31-2) and points to a future which was, for audiences of the play, already centuries gone.

The play’s simultaneous dramatization of past, present, and future also reflects the nature of Shakespeare’s engagement with Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. Although the traditional belief is that Shakespeare used the 1587 version of the *Chronicles* in writing the histories, some scholars have begun to make the case for the 1577 version.

Renaissance historian Arthur Kinney makes a compelling argument, for instance, that Shakespeare's version of *Macbeth* (c. 1606) includes events that only occur in the 1577 version, so Shakespeare must at least have had access to it in the early years of the seventeenth century (20). The distinction is an important one, as, unlike the 1587 *Chronicles*, the 1577 version is illustrated by a series of repeating woodcuts. Most significant for a discussion of *Henry V* is an identical woodcut of a battle scene which appears in the sections narrating Henry's victory at Harfleur as well as those about Henry VI's loss of Calais. The repetition of the image creates a narrative link between the two battles, suggesting that the memory of the Harfleur victory is present at the Calais defeat, just as the later defeat touches any re-telling of Henry's earlier victory. Victory and defeat thus become equally meaningful, or equally meaningless. Although there is no hard evidence either proving or disproving that Shakespeare had access to the 1577 version as early as 1599, *Henry V*'s evocation of later history within Henry's own story dramatizes the repetition of the Holinshed woodcuts. Shakespeare's potential exposure to this image of cyclical history could help to explain the epilogue's narration of Henry VI's defeat.

Director Matthew Warchus explored this investment in memory and historical "touch" in his 1994 *Henry V* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. The production, Warchus' first at the RSC and similarly a Stratford-Upon-Avon debut for Warchus' Henry, Ian Glen, received few critical accolades. John Peter's *Sunday Times* review, which called the play an "undercast, rather run of the mill production," is representative. The production was groundbreaking, however, in its treatment of time and in its examination of the past. At the top of the show, the stage was empty except for a roped off space at its center in which a red robe hung on a dressmaker's dummy surrounded by red poppies. The ropes were made of thick red velvet suggesting the official barriers at a museum which separate the spectators from art. After a moment, the Chorus (Matthew Britton)

entered, regarding the museum-like exhibit as he slowly walked around it and tasking the audience to imagine the play's "two mighty monarchies" (Prologue, 20). Unlike the other actors who would appear in later scenes of Warchus' production, Britton wore a contemporary suit. The somber grey color of the jacket made the red poppy on his lapel stand out in jarring relief. The flower matched those of the exhibit, making Britton appear both part of and separated from it. For British audiences, his poppy, along with those surrounding what would become Henry's robe, was a clear visual reference to the poppies of Flanders Field, and to the Remembrance Day Services which continue to be held in England in which the country observes the sacrifices of soldiers from World War I onward. Britton's Chorus was thus recognizable and immediately meaningful to British audiences.

The juxtaposition of Britton's body with the dressmaker's dummy marked the production's emphasis on memory and preservation. The Chorus became the bridge between Henry's long ago past, the poppy-covered cemeteries of WWII, and the moment of the play's production. Henry himself was of course absent, and the audience was left looking at the symbol of his kingship as Britton urged them to use their own imaginary forces to atone for "our king's" absence (Prologue, 28). The image became a study in and memory and presence. Peter, for example, describes Britton's Chorus as "one of those upright, dignified elderly old men who march past the cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday," referencing the ceremonies at the Whitehall monument for British WWI soldiers who have been buried elsewhere. The "elsewhere" of Warchus' production became simultaneously the battlefields which the Chorus complains that the theatre can never contain, and the Middle Ages in which Henry fought. Peter's review calls Britton's Chorus both a "survivor" and a "witness," whose demeanor "heavy with experience" linked Henry's soldiers to those of WWI, framing the production as a memorial for both

groups and while also calling to mind Olivier's dedication of his *Henry V* to the British armed forces. The museum exhibit returned as the production's final image. Seeing the blood red robe and poppies for the second time imbued them with new meaning, namely the cyclic return of British warfare and violence, similarly implied by the repeated woodcuts in the *Chronicles*. The combination of fourteenth-century and WWI imagery which was still recognizable to twentieth/twenty-first century audiences staged what Bildhauer calls the "co-presence of several moments" (21), allowing historically remote events and contemporary contexts to "touch."

As Peter's review suggests, Britton's reverent tone in the prologue also recalled the British observance of Remembrance Day, which began as a tribute to the soldiers of WWI and has become a memorial for fallen British soldiers from all the country's wars. The holiday functions similarly to Veterans' Day (originally called Armistice Day) in the United States as a commemoration of the end of WWI and a memorial for fallen soldiers. The November 12, 1919 *Manchester Guardian's* description of London's first Remembrance Day Service, often quoted in British explanations of the memorial's significance, indicates the solemnity of the service:

The first stroke of eleven produced a magical effect. The tram cars glided into stillness, motors ceased to cough and fume, and stopped dead...The hush deepened. It had spread over the whole city...It was a silence which was almost pain. And the spirit of memory brooded over it all.

This "spirit of memory" pervaded Britton's Prologue, and the stillness of the exhibit, juxtaposed with the Chorus' call for the audience to fill the otherwise empty space with their own images of absent soldiers and horses "printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth" (Prologue, 27) recalls the "hush." Similarly, Warchus' program features an article entitled "The Royal Shakespeare Company: Building on a Glorious Past" and a photo

spread of Henrys and Choruses from past RSC *Henry Vs.* The article invited comparison between Warchus' production and past representations of Henry's history within the same theatrical space. The program also included letters written by soldiers from the 12th century to 1917, framing Henry's war with personalized narrative. As the production linked Henry to other wars via collective memory, then, the program encouraged reflection on the layers of history which separate Henry from Warchus' staging of his story.

Warchus and set designer Neil Warmington filled the Royal Shakespeare Theatre with images which referenced numerous medievalist constructions of the Middle Ages—from the romantic to the battle-torn. The French scenes, for example, were played in front of a backdrop that was reminiscent of the Olivier film in its storybook characterization of medieval castles rendered in pastels. Later, as the English prepared to invade France, heavy-looking iron swords which *Daily Mail* critic Louise Doughty calls “Excalibur-like” descend from the fly space on iron chains. For the Agincourt battle, the stage floor bore an enormous “HV,” and “1384-1422”—the years in which Henry lived. As the battle continued, dismembered body parts and pieces of armor appeared above the stage space, providing a jarring counterpoint to the peaceful blue sky against which they hung and referencing a version of the Middle Ages containing only suffering and disease. As more and more men were struck down in the battle scenes, their swords remained sticking upright out of the stage floor, marking the HV symbol with the instruments of war and death. *Guardian* critic Michael Billington complained of this mixture aesthetic styles: “if the intention is to contrast the romantic memory of war with the grisly reality, why does Neil Warmington's design offer us picture-book glimpses of fairytale castles or tempting vistas of sunlit French meadows?” While some audience members no doubt shared Billington's complaints, his characterization of the “intention” of the production seems

inaccurate. Rather than “contrast[ing]” the memory of war with the lived experience of it, Warchus’ production allowed various historical interpretations of war to exist simultaneously in the stage space, allowing for “an Agincourt ironically ablaze with poppies” (De Jongh 7), that was engaging in its historical pastiche. Some references, such as the years painted on the stage floor, however, were not immediately discernible, and no attention was drawn to them. It was left to the audience to notice that the production had literally staged itself on top of medieval history.

Warchus’ *Henry V* also included an original moment of connection between Britton’s Chorus and Glen’s Henry which is not present in Shakespeare’s text. Just before the scene in which Henry was to order the deaths of the French prisoners, Warchus’ stage went completely dark. The “alarm” for which the script calls sounded in the darkness like the unearthly howl of a suffering man. The stage stayed dark as the audience heard the sounds of battle—swords clanking together, arrows flying, etc. The lights came up on Henry as he slit a single French throat, and then the stage was plunged into darkness again. The lights came up again after a moment, as Henry sat in what appeared to be shock on the stage floor that bore his initials and birth/death dates. Britton’s Chorus entered, still wearing the poppy in his lapel, and helped Henry to stand up. They stood staring at each other for a moment before the Chorus turned and strode quickly off stage. This brief moment of contact, coming just before one of the most controversial moments in Henry’s history, was a moment in which Henry and the Chorus, representatives of England’s distant medieval and more recent twentieth-century past, respectively, came together to mourn a moment of wartime brutality. Their fleeting connection also constructed the Chorus as the intermediary between the medieval king’s deeds and contemporary audiences’ understanding of them. As literary scholar Gary Taylor argued in the production’s program, “greatness is always partly a matter of perspective, and

perspective is what the Chorus supplies. A sense of distance, which enables us to measure how this king and this victory tower over others.” While the moment did not offer commentary on Henry’s order to kill the French prisoners, it humanized Henry and his suffering just before he gave the command. Britton’s presence allowed a moment of remembrance for the unnamed soldier Henry had just killed, and primed the audience to read the French prisoners scene as another moment in which warfare would necessitate a loss of lives.

A second moment of contact between king and Chorus similarly staged a disruption of linear history. As he spoke the act four prologue (just after the production’s intermission), Britton’s delivery was slow and deliberate. He broke the flow of Shakespeare’s bouncing iambic pentameter, which he had hitherto respected almost unfailingly, to emphasize each word of his opening address: “Now. Entertain. Conjecture. Of a time...” (4.0.1). Time on stage seemed to slow as the central battle of the play approached. Each word of the prologue took on a deadly significance, and created a palpable tension. The stage was dark, lit only by the moon and stars over the English camp. Unlike the previous Choral speeches, which had been punctuated by sound effects like the clanging of a blacksmith’s shop preparing armor for war, there was no noise under the act four prologue, thereby forcing the audience to hang on each of Britton’s words. He paused for a moment near the end of the speech and fingered the poppy in his lapel, reminding the audience once again of more recent warfare, and his sardonic description of “a little touch of Harry in the night” (4.0.47) indicated that both the battle at Agincourt and the centuries of war that followed were inevitable. As Britton turned to leave at the end of the speech, Glen’s Henry was revealed standing behind him. It was impossible to be sure that Henry had not been present for the entirety of the Chorus’ speech, watching Britton connect his war to those which, for Henry, were still to come.

Henry became a witness to his own history, existing in a liminal space between the action of his war and British memory of it. By making both the past and the future visible to audiences, Warchus' production marked *Henry V* as a national monument to the history of English warfare.

SHAKESPEARE'S MEDIEVAL RENAISSANCE AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE

As previously argued, affective medievalism brings its specifically constructed version of the medieval past into conversation with another period. As Hytner discovered when his production spurned controversy about race and representation, *Henry V* provides fertile ground for engagement with numerous diverse concerns of post-medieval time periods. Examining Renaissance memories of medieval rulers, medievalist Richard Utz argues that “the most effective forms of connecting historical tissue to fill in the actual historical gaps between past and present rely on grounding them in material reality so that past and present appear to touch each other” (27).²³ This image of “touching” in turn recalls Dinshaw's definition of medievalism. For Shakespeare, the simultaneously bloody and heroic Middle Ages staged Renaissance concerns of kingship and rebellion, using sixteenth-century values to explore thirteenth-century events. In contrast to plays like the *Henry VI* trilogy, in which Shakespeare's focus seems to be constructing narrative from 63 years of history rather than drawing parallels to Renaissance England, *Henry V* simultaneously stages the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

In its ambivalent treatment of the past, *Henry V* stages two ways in which the Middle Ages “touch” the Renaissance. First, the Chorus' portrait of a victorious and

²³ Utz restricts his analysis of Renaissance uses of medieval kingship to sixteenth-century allusions to King Arthur. Interestingly, he argues that Shakespeare's own use of Arthurian legends or figures was limited—only the clown named Lancelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*. The resonance of Arthur throughout other historical time periods, however, is crucial to my examination of contemporary performances of the Middle Ages, and will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

virtuous English monarch would have incited notions of pride and nationalism during what Gurr calls a “militaristic decade, starting with vivid memories of the Armada of 1588, heightened by a renewed Spanish attempt at invasion in 1592, and marked by long campaigns that had begun across the North Sea in the 1580s” (1). Secondly, however, Henry’s battlefield enthusiasm linked him, not altogether unfavorably, with the Earl of Essex, Robert Dudley. The Chorus’ direct reference to Essex in the Act five prologue is one of Shakespeare’s rare engagements with contemporary events, and it insures *Henry V*’s relevance for Renaissance audiences.

Considering the Renaissance sense of “mirror”—related to the modern notion of a model—the Chorus’ construction of Henry as the “mirror of all Christian kings” in the act two prologue frames him as a positive example for current rulers, including of course Queen Elizabeth I. Just after this description, for example, the king orders the deaths of three men—the Earl of Cambridge, Lord Scrope, and Sir Thomas Grey—who have sold information to the enemy French camp. In a clever manipulation, Henry asks the three for advice about whether to forgive a man who spoke against him in public. When Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey argue against mercy for the unnamed offender, Henry turns their own sentence against them: “the mercy that was quick in us but late/ By your own council is suppressed and killed” (2.2.76-7). For a Renaissance audience, their threat to Henry’s rule would have resonated with general fears about rebellions against Elizabeth. On stage, Henry is merciless to those who turn against him—which audiences may have seen as a quality which Elizabeth would have been wise to cultivate. In the treachery scene, the Middle Ages are a simpler and more heroic time in which a powerful ruler is able to crush opposition before it becomes a serious threat.

Constructing the Chorus’ version of Henry as a model for Elizabeth demonstrates Shakespeare’s interest in allowing the play’s version of the past to “touch” the

historiographical climate of his own time. As discussed above, Rackin argues that historical thinkers in the Renaissance characterized past events as necessary precursors to the present (3). Along with this investment in narrative came the belief that the mistakes of the past could be avoided through a study of history. To the Renaissance mind “history...could raise the dead, inspire the living, reveal the secrets of stagecraft, teach the details of military tactics, expose the deceits of fortune, and illuminate the ways of providence” (3). Renaissance philosophies of humanism valorized individuals as agents of historical change. Thus, by studying the patterns of the past, a ruler would be able to make shrewd tactical decisions. Rather than framing Henry as a step towards Elizabeth’s inevitable glory, as Tillyard argues, Shakespeare framed Henry’s triumphs and mistakes as individualized events from which Elizabeth could learn. Similarly, literary scholar Graham Holderness argues that the histories stage “a recovery of the past; a revival of things lost and forgotten” (*The Histories*, 43).²⁴ Strikingly, the *Henry V* quarto was published just months after Essex’ arrest for treason. Patterson argues that the quarto purposely “had nothing to do with deposition, and very little to do with rebellion,” extrapolating that it was a strategic portrait of “a highly popular monarch whose most obvious analogy was Elizabeth herself,” who also strove to create an image of herself as a “popular” ruler (46). It is thus easy to see the quarto as a rallying cry for Elizabeth.

Of course, the noble and heroic version of the Middle Ages is not the only one present in *Henry V*. The play’s doubled portrait of Henry allows *Henry V* to stage Renaissance political concerns within a story about the Middle Ages. The Chorus’ evocation of Essex in the Folio’s act five prologue, for instance, links Henry to a

²⁴ Tillyard argued that Shakespeare “expressed successfully a universally held and still comprehensible scheme of history: a scheme fundamentally religious, by which events evolved under a law of justice and under the ruling of God’s Providence, and of which Elizabeth’s England was the acknowledged outcome” (*Shakespeare’s History Plays*, 320-1).

politically subversive figure. Essex was a favorite of Elizabeth's, and, due to his maternal relation to Elizabeth's mother Anne, her cousin. Rumors flew that the "virgin" queen maintained a sexual relationship with Essex, fueled by gossip about the freedom he often displayed around her. In 1599, Essex persuaded Elizabeth to name him Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and to allow him to try his hand at ending The Nine Years War, an Irish uprising which lasted from 1595 to 1603. Despite widespread English faith in his abilities, Essex was unsuccessful in Ireland and returned illegally to London in September of 1599. He was arrested, tried for abandoning the Irish campaign, and stripped of public office. The following year, he led an unsuccessful uprising against Elizabeth. Historical legend holds that on the eve of the rebellion, Essex commissioned Shakespeare's company to perform *Richard II*, a play that includes a scene in which Henry IV (father of Henry V) deposes Richard, the sitting monarch. Hearing of the performance, Elizabeth is rumored to have exclaimed "I am Richard II. Know ye not that," connecting her fate at Essex' hand to that of the overthrown ruler and marking a Renaissance connection between politics and performance.

In its comparison of Henry's triumphant return from France to Essex' journey from Ireland, the act five prologue argues that Essex' rebellion was inevitable: "As, by a lower but loving likelihood,/ Were now the general of our gracious empress,/ As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,/ Bringing rebellion broached on his sword" (5.0.29-32). Although the comparison between Henry and Essex seems only to construct Henry's return as a harbinger of great change, the Henry/Essex parallel is one of the Chorus' few complications of Henry's "sweet majesty" (4.0.40). The speech situates Henry squarely in dangerous Renaissance politics while historicizing Essex' efforts. Given Henry's own reaction to treachery, Shakespeare's juxtaposition of the king and a figure whom many Elizabethans saw as the ultimate traitor disrupts any easy

characterization of Henry, or, by extension, of the play's history. This ambivalence resonated strongly in a time when the seated ruler had no heir and no plans to marry, presumably leaving the throne in jeopardy after her death. Constructing *Henry V* as a conversation between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance meant that the doubled portrait of Henry as mirror/Henry as Essex reflected Renaissance political tensions. Shakespeare's Middle Ages were thus specifically engineered to contain the values and concerns of a post-medieval period.

In his 2003 production, National Theatre director Nicholas Hytner similarly emphasized the flexible nature of the medieval in *Henry V* and the ways in which the past can be made to touch a later period. As previously mentioned, Hytner, newly appointed artistic director of the National, staged *Henry V* months after the United States and England invaded Iraq. The production highlighted the hyper-relevance of the four hundred-year-old play's potential anti-war message by setting it in contemporary Iraq. Presented completely in modern dress, Hytner's *Henry V* underscored the futility of war, ending with the Chorus (Peggy Downie) weeping for the future of her country while prophesying the folly of Henry VI. For the British press, however, it was not Hytner's modernization of the play's setting that made the production radical, it was his choice to cast British actor Adrian Lester in the title role. Under other circumstances, the press' focus on the actor playing Henry, following such iconic performers as Olivier and Branagh, would not be out of the ordinary. Lester, however, is black. Reactions to Hytner's casting choice varied, but in almost every case commentary on Lester's race dominated critical accounts of the production. If reviewers mentioned the play's juxtaposition of the sixteenth-century play and twenty-first century international politics at all, they buried it deep within their pieces. Although Hytner intended the production as a commentary on wartime politics, the process of mapping fifteenth-century history onto

contemporary bodies characterized *Henry V* as a space for racial discourse above all. As such, I find medieval/twenty-first-century “touching” in both the press’ construction of the production’s significance and in Hytner’s desire to stage a *Henry V* which would speak directly to wartime audiences.

In particular, Hytner’s use of the Chorus highlighted the play’s treatment of distance, making Downie responsible for re-contextualizing the events of the past. In the epilogue, Downie’s Chorus appeared “an addled schoolteacher type trying hard to present this chapter in history as something glorious but incapable of sustaining the illusion... Ms. Downie’s crushed, open face has the look of a betrayed lover” (Brantley). *New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley’s choice to single out Downie’s epilogue constructs her Chorus as the bridge between history and present. Standing center stage as the rest of the company stood in silent rows behind her, Downie began the epilogue in a low, halting voice, pausing to wipe away a tear while noting that Henry VI’s defeat is an event “which oft our stage has shown.” The effect was powerful—she appeared to be weeping at the frequency with which the defeat is re-staged as well as at the loss of France. Her tears gave a new dimension to the epilogue’s inevitability—not only were Henry’s battles in vain, but, she implied, history has shown as great a fascination with war as the stage has shown for its depiction.

Downie’s behavior in the epilogue contrasted sharply to that of her prologue. At the top of the production, Downie entered dressed in a long blue skirt and bulky red sweater, her hair in a messy bun, carrying an armload of oversized books and papers which she shuffled through for a few moments before she noticed the audience and called in an exasperated voice for a “muse of fire.” As the production prompt book notes, the books which Downie carried were copies of *Henry V* already “in possession” at the National. While the play copies theoretically added to Downie’s schoolteacher

appearance, given the size of the National's Olivier stage it would have been impossible for more than a few observant audience members to realize what they were. Rather, the books mark Hytner's investment in the inevitability of violence. The play's war is pre-written in history (and in the play text) and thus cannot be avoided any more than the Iraq invasion might have been in the political climate immediately following September 11th, 2001. In this light, Downie's prologue stages the frustration of a teacher re-explaining a concept to students who refuse to learn. This clichéd schoolteacher image became sinister in the epilogue when Downie hinted that continued unheedfulness to history will cause countless deaths. The immediacy of both Downie's prologue and epilogue staged a conversation and moment of contact between Agincourt and Iraq. Downie's Chorus remained liminal, attempting teach the past and the future simultaneously.

Unlike Warchus, Hytner imagined his *Henry V* as an anti-war criticism of contemporary politics and politicians, noting that "it obviously felt like a play that would speak very directly now" (Rosenthal).²⁵ In an interview with journalist Daniel Rosenthal, Hytner described the production as a collaborative effort to highlight its political relevance: "the rehearsal room was littered with material about the historical Henry V and about contemporary warfare. People were bringing stuff in all the time." This "material" included the clippings and images I encountered in the National's archives. One of the most striking parallels between the action of the story and England's invasion of Iraq, however, came in the production's use of technology. Hytner's Henry was a political leader who relied on media rhetoric to justify his invasion of France, and most of Henry's long speeches were projected on large screens above the stage as if they were televised press conferences. Often, as in Henry's numerous threats to the French Dauphin, Hytner

²⁵ Many scholars read Branagh's film, for instance, as stringently anti-war. Stage versions that have similarly interpreted the play include Michael Bogdanov's 1986 English Shakespeare Company production.

provided French subtitles, heightening the audience's awareness of the international nature of the dispute. This device was particularly effective at the end of the first act, when it made public a set of Henry's lines which, in the original text, are meant only for his uncle, the Duke of Exeter. As Henry announced that "we have no thought in us but France,/Save those to God, that run before our business...We'll chide this Dauphin at his father's door" (1.2.302-8), Lester's face appeared on the projection screen as a giant image which dominated the theatre space. His features remained calm and controlled as he looked directly at the camera. His speech, however, was clipped, and terse, highlighting the imminent warfare behind his words. As the rest of the scene was staged around a conference table, the Exeter speech was the first moment in which Lester's Henry became noticeably powerful and literally larger than life.

While the dominance of Lester's features above the theatre space referenced both Henry's mythic status in British consciousness and former Prime Minister Tony Blair's own press conferences, the sheer size of the projection and its foregrounding of Lester's face made the actor himself hyper-visible. Although Hytner presumably intended the projections to reference the massive amount of media rhetoric surrounding the Iraq invasion, critics were more fascinated with the image on the screen than the implications of the technology. Indeed, reviews reproduced the Iraq conflict's attention to otherness and racial difference rather exploring than the moral quandaries of the conflict. The vast majority of reviewers opened with statements of surprise at or politically correct approval of Hytner's "progressive" casting decision.²⁶ Often, Lester was touted as a poster child for black actors, as in *Independent* reviewer David Lister's comment that Lester "follows the lead of Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh in breakthrough role as Shakespeare's

²⁶ Strikingly, the first British production to cast a black actor as a king was Michael Boyd's 2000 *Henry VI*. Boyd's production received a similar amount of attention from the press for the race of its main character.

warrior king.” While the comparison of any actor playing Henry V to these two iconic performances is natural, Lister goes on to call Lester’s Henry V a “breakthrough for black actors on the British stage.” Lister’s insistence on positioning Lester racially indicates his perception of the distance between Lester and Olivier/Branagh. Paradoxically, many reviewers complimented Hytner for not making an “issue” of Lester’s race, while simultaneously stressing that the production should be a flagship for future casting practices at the National: “Let’s hope that Nick Hytner continues with colour-blind casting and takes it to the extremes. Maybe one day we will have a white Othello again.” (West End producer Thelma Holt, qtd in Lister).²⁷ Holt’s suggestion of a white actor playing a black (or Middle-Eastern) character is of course jarring in its complete avoidance of the oppressive and exploitative history of blackface performance. What her comment also suggests, however, is that Hytner’s decision to cast Lester was inherently revolutionary in its “colorblindness,” and thus worthy of discussion and extensive critical engagement. The presence of Lester’s race in these reviews echoes the image of his prominent face in the projection of the Exeter speech.

Those reviewers who did not address race head-on usually included a seemingly off-handed reference to Lester’s race that highlighted how present it had been in their experiences of the production. Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph*, for example, commented of the National’s 2003 season: “the theatre will be stripped back to basics, and offer ‘accessible,’ no-frills productions in this epic amphitheater space, kicking off with Hytner’s own staging of *Henry V*...starring the superb black actor Adrian Lester in the title role.” Spencer’s inclusion of Lester’s race seems superfluous, but his was not the only review to connect the “accessibility” of Hytner’s staging to his decision to cast

²⁷ Holt’s comment recalls the long history of white actors performing Shakespeare’s Moorish king Othello in blackface, a problematic trend practiced by such actors as Laurence Olivier, Richard Burton, and Orson Wells. It was in fact the norm until the mid-twentieth century.

Lester. *Evening Standard* critic Luke Leitch, for example, linked Hytner's modernized version of the story to Lester's biography, casting Lester as an underprivileged black youth saved from poverty by a (white) system of education and the arts. The blatantly racialized politics of Leitch's review justify quoting it at length:

The National Theatre's new artistic director Nicholas Hytner will signal his intent to "bring new life to the old plays" by casting the British black actor Adrian Lester as Henry V...Lester was born and raised in Birmingham by Jamaican immigrant parents who separated when he was nine: his father was a carpenter who ran a contract cleaning company and his mother was a secretary. Educated at a Roman Catholic school, where he was one of only six black pupils, Lester used to sing in the cathedral choir and toured Europe in children's opera while earning pocket money with walk-on parts in *Crossroads* and practicing break dancing on the streets of Edgbaston. When he was 15 he joined the Birmingham Youth Theatre where he met actress Lolita Chakrabarti, whom he married in 1997. They have a 17-month-old daughter Lila and live in East Dulwich, in a house bought from the proceeds of his role in *Primary Colors*.

Leitch links the scenario of the black youth blessed with a talent for performing with the "new life" of Hytner's production. His review implies that an exploration of Lester's childhood, couched in a familiar rags to riches story, makes his *Henry V* more immediate. Leitch thus writes a narrative of *Henry V* in which Lester's body, rather than the play's critique of warfare, guarantees the relevancy of the "old" play. The struggle which Leitch assigns to Lester's childhood works as a counterpoint to the status he has achieved as an actor, and contrasts his experience of race as a child to that of his professional career. Like the majority of other critics who wrote about Lester and Hytner's production, Leitch ignores the affective medievalism inherent in a production that compares Henry's medieval war to a twenty-first-century Middle Eastern invasion. The reviews were less concerned with the connection Hytner had found to Henry's story than they were with the juxtaposition of a white king and a black actor.

Indeed, Hytner's *Henry V* paradoxically highlighted the whiteness which British

audiences had understood to be inherent to the Middle Ages themselves, represented here by Henry. Although Hytner has characterized *Henry V* as a space capable of storing a number of British traditions and cultural practices (Rosenthal), he fails to note that it is not only the text that carries these traditions, but the bodies of the actors as well. In the Rosenthal interview, Hytner denies that Lester's race has anything to do with his portrayal of Henry V, praising the actor instead for his ability to enact Henry's duality. What Leitch and Spencer's reviews reflect, however, is Hytner's introduction of a new body into the *Henry V* narrative. Although Hytner imagined that the contemporary relevance of his production would lie in the camouflage Lester was dressed in, critics instead focused on the body within the costume and the racial markers of his projected face. While the moment may have created an intertextual awareness of "black Othello" (*Othello* 2.3.32), a similarly warlike and alluring king, nowhere in published interviews did Hytner mention Lester's race as a factor in his interpretation of the character or the play.

The discourse around Lester's race and its implications for a "new" version of *Henry V* are particularly important considering both the play's status as national medieval mythology and the theatre in which it was produced. The National Theatre did not officially open until 1963, but the idea of a government supported theatre dedicated to preserving classic English works dates back to bookseller Effingham Wilson. His 1848 pamphlet suggested the need for "a house for Shakespeare in public ownership, where the works of the world's greatest moral teacher would be preserved" (qtd in Goodwin 5). Although official literature about the National and its cultural purpose eventually eschewed its the "moral" duties, the notion that state-sponsored theatre has an obligation to prescribe public sentiment is present even in Hytner's critique of the Iraq invasion. To produce a version of *Henry V* that can truly be characterized as "Shakespeare in public

ownership” is thus to explore how contemporary directors construct the medieval story in the images of themselves and their audiences. As Hytner’s production demonstrated, however, the indeterminacy inherent in post-medieval understandings of the Middle Ages allow the period to function equally for numerous types of contemporary tension.

METATHEATRICAL AFFECTIVE MEDIEVALISM IN THE AUSTIN, TEXAS *HENRY V*

Along with its investment in non-linear historiography, *Henry V* uses metatheatricity to stage the constructed nature of history. As Robert Faires discovered in his one-man adaptation, the Chorus’ speeches showcase the play’s interest in performance structure as much as they provide a doubled portrait of Henry. For Renaissance audiences, the Chorus’ descriptive speeches provided what scholars have called “verbal scenery,” filling out a stage which was largely bare of scenic elements and technologically incapable of distinguishing, for example, day from night.²⁸ Unlike other characters whose lines orient audiences within the world of the play, however, the Chorus’ prologue describes not Henry’s medieval court but the theatre’s “unworthy scaffold” (Prologue, 10). Drawing the audience’s attention to the unworthiness of the theatre space to “hold/ The vasty fields of France” (11-12), the Chorus urges the audience to *imagine* the medieval scene and to “eke out our performance with your mind” (3.0.35), inviting spectators to help construct the play’s version of the medieval. In this way, the “speeches of the Chorus use references to the theatre to “straddle the threshold between the presentation *of* the play and representation *in* the play” (Bruster and Weimann 135, emphasis original), continually reminding the audience that it is “representation” that allows them to witness Henry’s history. Similarly, the Chorus’ simultaneous definition of

²⁸ This technique is of course common to all of Shakespeare’s plays. In *Richard III*, for example, the troubled king wakes from a nightmare to exclaim “The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight” (5.3.180), a jarring image for a show that would have been performed in the afternoon.

Henry and his suggestion that the audience re-define him call attention to the spectators' complicity with these representational practices.

Significantly, the Chorus' references to theatricality usually occur alongside his praise of Henry. In the Act two prologue, for instance, the Chorus describes the "youth of England ...following the mirror of all Christian kings" before he describes a scene change: "there is the playhouse now, there you must sit/ And thence to France will we convey you safe./ And bring you back" (2.0.1-5, 32-7). Holderness argues that here and elsewhere the Chorus "calls the attention of the audience away from the dimension of history to focus on the physical conditions of the theatre itself" (*Play of History*, 75). I argue, however, that the Chorus' speeches indicate no separation between the material conditions of the theatre and an awareness of the process of writing history. By doubling imagery of Henry's loyal followers with descriptions of the playhouse, the speech draws attention to the ways in which the play stages affective medievalism by creating a particularly useful *version* of the medieval king. The Chorus never invites the audience to suppose that the man they see charging Harfleur, for example, is really Henry Plantagenet. Rather, although he presents his own definitive version of Henry's "sweet majesty" (4.0.40), the Chorus reminds the audience that "'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings" (1.0.28). He implicates the spectators in the creation of Henry by reminding them that the theatre necessitates imaginative participation.

The Chorus' metatheatricality is unique in Shakespeare's canon. His closest counterpart is the *All is True* Prologue, named "Rumor" in the text. Rather than reminding the audience that their imaginations must make up for the limitations of the theatre, however, Rumor instructs the audience to "think ye see/The very persons of our noble story/As they were living; think you see them great" (1.0.25-7). His speech insists that the history which the audience is about to witness is both true and serious. If

Rumor's prologue is to be believed, the goal of the production is to "draw the eye to flow" (1.0.4) rather than to allow multiple interpretations of the action. Instead of facilitating individualized experiences of the text, Rumor argues that the spectator who can "be merry" when in the play "mightiness meets misery" would have to be the kind of person who would "weep upon his wedding day" (1.0.31-32). The Brechtian Chorus who reminds his audience that the figures they see are *not* real thus defies Rumor's instructions. The emotional commitment which *All Is True* demands obscures the fact that the characters' suffering is fictional. The distinction between actor and character vanishes as "the spectator is exhorted to forget the discrepancy between personator and personated, to imagine the dead revived in contemporary presence" (Holderness, *The Histories*, 49). Rumor dismisses those who "come to see/Only a show or two" (1.0.10). In contrast, the *Henry V* Chorus functions as a "threshold," both inside and outside of the play (Bruster and Weimann 31), and thereby allows an integration of the world of *Henry V* with that of the spectators. Shakespeare constantly reminds the audience that they are watching a play *about* Henry which calls upon audience members to use the often contradictory evidence they are presented with to practice affective medievalism by re-creating an absent historical figure in a way that makes him immediate and relevant.

With the war against France as its central event, *Henry V* functions similarly to medieval tournaments, which Fradenburg argues underwent a process of "increasing ritualization, artificiality, theatricality...[a] shift from violence to ritual, reality to representation" that ultimately "made theatre out of the theatre of war" (192, 212). Fradenburg describes the tournament's reliance on the notion of spectatorship—the superiority of the knights (and, ultimately, the kings) involved in the staged battles was a function of the audience's familiarity with the semiotics of the joust. Thus, medieval tournaments relied on systems of representation to create the illusion of powerful

warriors and kings. *Henry V* stages this medieval understanding of representation. As do his characterizations of Henry, the Chorus' descriptions of war employ a deliberate theatricality to create an image of power and majesty: "Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege./Behold the ordinance on their carriages/With fatal mouths gaping on girded Harfleur" (3.0.25-27). Jousts were re-embodiments of battle, just as the "war" staged in *Henry V* recalls the one which Henry Plantagenet fought in 1415. Similarly, Henry's reputation as a great king is in part based on his reception as such by both medieval and Renaissance audiences. Further, *Henry V* demands a consent to imagination similar to that which Fradenburg ascribes to a medieval king's subjects. She argues that the notion of divine ordination required a suspension of disbelief similar to that which modern audiences bring to the theatre: "the sovereign is created in and through the inventive activity of his subjects; he depends upon their willingness to 'produce' him as unique, both through works of imagination and works of labor" (xii). In *Henry V*, the Chorus calls upon the audience to "produce" versions of Henry and the French war in which the medieval and the modern to "touch."

Medieval history itself becomes the "wooden O" in which "are now confined two mighty monarchies" (Prologue 13, 20). Audiences of contemporary performances are thus invited to make meaning of both medieval history and of Renaissance staging conventions. The aforementioned imaginary journey to France, for instance, transports the audience not only between locations within the play, but also from their own lives, "digest[ing]/Th' abuse of distance" (2.0.32), to the space of the play. This "travel" allows the audience to occupy the same space as Henry on the battlefield as well as in the playhouse, facilitating active participation rather than passive spectatorship. The Chorus constructs his audiences as witnesses, reiterating the importance of their own creativity and imaginations. This dramaturgical strategy opens the Middle Ages to contemporary

audience discourse, allowing for continual re-interpretations of the period based on individual experiences of the play.

Rather than focusing, as Hytner and Warchus did, on parallels between *Henry V* and specific moments in post-medieval history, Robert Faires used the Chorus' metatheatricality as the theoretical basis for his 2009 adaptation, produced by the Austin, Texas company Red Then Productions. In Faires' production, the play's sense of immediacy came from its experiments with theatrical representation. While Faires cut the script heavily to accommodate his one-man concept, he left the Chorus' speeches intact, emphasizing the character's suggestion that "a crooked figure may/ Attest in little place a million" (Prologue, 15-16). The prologue became not only an acknowledgement of the limitations of the theatre space to contain centuries of history,²⁹ but also a tongue-in-cheek nod to Faires' own dramatic undertaking. He delivered the Chorus' request that the audience "piece out our imperfections with your thoughts./ Into a thousand parts divide one man," for example, with a self-deprecating chuckle. Faires told Henry's story through a series of monologues from the Bishop of Canterbury, the French King, Montjoy the messenger, Exeter, Erpingham, the Dauphin, and Henry himself, but continually returned to the Chorus' speeches to frame the story and fill in the inevitable narrative gaps.

The Chorus was Faires' most animated character, approaching members of the audience directly to make sure they were following the complex narrative and speaking to them as old friends rather than as passive observers. Indeed, Faires' Chorus embodied what he terms the play's "open relationship with the audience" (University of Texas lecture). It was through the Chorus, for example, that Faires attempted the connection with the audience which, as he described in an interview with Austin radio host John

²⁹ Faires performed in Austin's Off Center—a grain and feed warehouse converted into an experimental performance space.

Aielli, was the motivation for the project itself:

One of the things that has always drawn me to this play is that its just so unapologetically theatrical...Here's this great story about this great king and this great battle and everything, and there is no way on earth we can do it justice on this stupid wooden stage, with no sets, and no furniture, there's no way we can do it justice, but you know what? We're gonna do it anyway, and you're gonna help us. You in the audience, you're going to imagine everything that's as big and fantastic, and all the royalty and all the pageantry, all the bloodshed—you're gonna imagine that all for us, and then its gonna work. So come along, you're in this with us. (*Aielli Unleashed*)

For Faires, the play only “works” if it secures the audience’s cooperation. In this sense, asking an audience to accept that a single man could embody the story is less fantastic than asking them to believe that the “vasty fields of France” could appear on a stage.

This appeal to the audience was perhaps most obvious in Faires’ staging of the act four prologue, which describes the “creeping murmur and poring dark” of the English camp on the eve of Agincourt (4.0.2). Rather than speaking from center stage as he had done for the majority of the other Choral speeches, Faires climbed the audience’s risers, delivering the majority of the speech from behind spectators and addressing numerous audience members individually and conversationally. He carried a large flashlight which he shone around the theatre and onto the empty stage space as he invited the audience to imagine “the foul womb” of night (4.0.4). The dramatic contrast of the flashlight to the darkness of the stage space itself created a foreboding atmosphere which the audience, like the English soldiers, could imagine “presented...so many horrid ghosts” (4.0.28). This moment simultaneously cast audience members as witnesses to Henry’s story and as characters within it. As a spectator, I felt included in the English camp, trapped within the theatre space and anticipating a morning which could bring either victory or defeat. As Faires noted in a November 2010 lecture at the University of Texas at Austin, the staging

of this crucially dramatic moment came from his desire to “build on the Chorus’ idea of audience involvement,” by inviting the audience to “become the other characters.” These “other characters,” however, were not Henry, Exeter, Bedford, or anyone else named in the script. Rather, Faires argued that the *spectators themselves* exist as characters within the world of the play—that their existence and subsequent judgment of the characters are vital to the play’s constructions of history. Thus, the Middle Ages of Faires’s *Henry V* was partially a product of the audience’s physical connection to the story.

In a similar attempt at involvement, Faires’ positioned the Chorus as a mediator between historical events and contemporary audiences. His Chorus was reminiscent of medievalist characters like the “famous historian” of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* who appears on screen briefly to fill in narrative gaps in the King Arthur story. While Terry Gilliam’s film ultimately rejects the historian, however, Faires stressed the character’s importance, imagining himself as both the narrator and the subject of the story.³⁰ He describes the Chorus’ thought process as a narration of both historical events and of theatrical representation: “we’re gonna cross the ocean from England to France... We’re not trying to fool you, that you’re doing anything but watching a play, but you’re in it with us” (*Aielli Unleashed*). Like Downie’s school teacher, Faires began to bridge the gap between audience and characters, implicating spectators in the play’s construction of medieval history.

Of course, Faires’ presence as a solo performer could have erased the play’s famously ambivalent treatment of Henry, just as his perceived authority in the Austin community as a prominent theatre critic may have disallowed audience feelings of inclusion or co-creation. Faires, however, undercut the singular viewpoint which was

³⁰ The Famous Historian’s speech, presumably part of a mock documentary series entitled “Pictures for Schools,” ends abruptly when Lancelot rides through the frame and slashes his throat.

implied by his body alone on stage by facilitating an “unspoken conspiracy between those who tell a story and those who listen” (University of Texas lecture). Indeed, while he acknowledges that what often draws directors to the play is its potential commentary on warfare, Faires argues that the play’s unique contemporality lies more in its metatheatrical acknowledgement of the stage-spectator relationship than its politics (University of Texas lecture). As such, he positions his work as a piece of solo performance, a form that solo practitioner/performance scholar Jo Bonney argues often “expects and demands the active involvement of the people in the audience (xiii). For Faires, this “active involvement” indicated that, although he was alone on stage, the complexity of Henry’s story could not be contained within his individual body. While a one-man production of another, less metatheatrically-oriented history play may have centered authority in a solo performer’s own interpretation, *Henry V*’s textual appeals to audience’s “imaginary forces” allow plurality. Faires’ production aligns with what Bonney describes as the ideal spectator/solo performer relationship, in which direct address ensures that “[the audience’s] energy resonates with that of the lone artist” (xiii). While individual experiences may have been varied, Faires’ continual engagement with the audience as the Choral was de-centered his own singular viewpoint.

Faires’ exploration of solo performance in a play which consciously constructs itself as a performance of history staged affective medievalism in its understanding of the fluidity of representation. As Kobialka argues, “the notion of representation in the Middle Ages was heterogeneous...it could morph or be morphed into different shapes once it entered a specific historical, cultural, or ideological constellation that attempted to form and to lay to rest the body that had disappeared a long time ago” (32). For Kobialka, this “body” is that of Christ himself, as represented in medieval liturgy by the wine and wafer of the communion ritual. This notion of representation as the flexible invocation of an

absent body, however, extends to the study of medieval performance in general (as examined in the introduction), and to contemporary explorations of medieval history like Faires' production. Thus, Faires' use of his own body as a site of representation was medieval in its appreciation and use of plurality. His one-man show continually called attention to itself as a virtuosic piece of theatre. Spectators knew (as Faires reminded them) that they must consent to a belief that his single body was simultaneously Henry, the Chorus, the French king, and the English traitors. At the same time, Faires' production acknowledged the absence on his stage of the medieval king and of his numerous dramatic representations: "I think there will always be the *Henry V* that existed before I started this" (University of Texas lecture). Faires' remark is ambivalent—both the historical Henry and Shakespeare's historicization of him preexist in history as well as in the minds of (some) spectators. This acknowledgement of both chronicle and production history which are always and already present in any staging of *Henry V* allowed Faires as the Chorus to self-consciously reference the theatrical context of his production.

Regardless of his audiences' potential familiarity with Henry's story, however, Faires, unlike Warchus and Hytner, could not rely on an image of Henry as a national hero. Thus, rather than examining English interpretations of the country's own history, Faires' *Henry V* constructed a distinctly American brand of medievalism, linked to that of the spaces that will be examined in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. For medievalists Susan Aronstein and Nancy Coiner, American medievalism is most obvious in Disneyland's Fantasyland, which constructs the Middle Ages as "a time figured as American pre-history [which] follows the narrative outline provided by the American dream of the local boy who, through his gumption, imagination, and hard work, achieves financial and familial success" (213). Aronstein and Coiner are referring to Walt Disney's version of Arthur in the 1963 movie *The Sword and the Stone*, in which the young

Arthur, a lowly but hard working squire to the corrupt and ignorant Sir Kay, realizes his destiny as England's legendary king when he pulls the famed Excalibur from its enchanted stone.³¹ Their medievalism is affective in its use of young Arthur's body as the moment of connection between the Middle Ages and twentieth-century America. Disney's modern coming of age story thus appears both authentically medieval and immediately recognizable to audiences distanced by both time and geography from the source of Arthurian legend.

Indeed, while Faires (of necessity) cut sizable sections from most of Henry's long speeches, he retained all references to Hal's tavern behavior in the *Henry IV* plays, including the French king's mock of "our wilder days" (1.2.266). As Henry reveals in a soliloquy early in *I Henry IV*, however, his drunken foolery was a strategy engineered to "falsify men's hopes" so that his "reformation...shall show more goodly and attract more eyes/Than that which hath no foil to set it off" (1.2.189-193). Like Aronstein and Coiner's "local boy," then, the young Henry invents his own identity—manipulating his father's perceptions until he was ready to assume kingship. In so doing, Henry positions his abandonment of the tavern as a monumental self-sacrifice in the name of responsibility and piety. Faires' choice to highlight Henry's self-engineered "transformation" thus echoes the "gumption, imagination, and hard work" of the American Dream. Further, Faires de-complicated Henry by cutting the execution of the French prisoners and greatly downplaying the violence of Henry's threats at Harfleur. These cuts allowed him to avoid long standing debates about the morality and effectiveness of Henry's wartime reign, and to position Henry within familiar American

³¹ The story's source, T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*, the first part of his famous Arthurian tetralogy *The Once and Future King*, is itself an extrapolation on Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, which does not cover Arthur's childhood. As such, the novel and the Disney movie themselves become reinterpretations of the Middle Ages.

theatrical and ideological histories. Constructing a Henry who is the medieval ancestor of Willy Loman, for instance, requires the imaginative leap which the Chorus calls for from the first moments of his prologue. All of Faires' efforts to create a recognizable Henry, and to involve the spectators in this process of construction, rely on the play's metatheatrical acknowledgement of the theatre and the history of representation itself.

CONCLUSION: HENRY AS A HYPER MEDIEVALIST

Both the text of *Henry V* and the productions discussed in this chapter are invested in bridging the past with the present, and, to differing degrees, with the future. Henry brings his family's troubled past on to the battlefield, for example, gaining territory in France which his son will ultimately lose. Productions of *Henry V* use medieval events as well as audiences' knowledge of the play, the character, and Shakespeare himself to stage conversations between history and contemporary concerns. As Holderness notes, "when history becomes important in a particular present, chronological distance does not act as an impediment to perceived contemporary relevance" (*The Histories*, 6). Productions of the play which allow medieval and post-medieval periods to "touch" animate Bruster and Weimann's notion of the Chorus as a "bridge." In addition, considering *Henry V*'s unique inclusion of an on-stage historian, I argue that the play also stages the process of writing history. This new construction casts the Chorus as what I term the "hyper medievalist," an expansion of Rokem's notion of the "hyper historian."

On its most basic level, *Henry V* is, as Rokem characterizes history plays in general, an "aesthetic adaptation or revision of events that we more or less intuitively (or on the basis of some form of general knowledge or accepted consensus) know have already occurred" (6). Although the degree to which Shakespeare altered his chronicle source (itself a selective presentation of historical fact) is crucial to his complex characterization of Henry, the playwright was working with pre-existing material. In the

case of *Henry V*, he was also dealing with a character who existed in the Renaissance imagination as “a prince whom all men loved, and of none disdained, a captain against whom Fortune never frowned” (Holinshed 141). As such, *Henry V* stages a consciously constructed version of history which has been continually re-imagined to address the needs and values of numerous later time periods. Significantly, however, Shakespeare’s simultaneous exploration of Henry’s valor and his questionable morality indicates the playwright’s refusal to limit himself to a single version of history. The interplay between the Chorus’ descriptions of Henry and his own dramatized actions reflects the tension inherent in re-creating a history of which there are no living witnesses.

Henry V’s simultaneously historical and fictionalized narrative dramatizes both fact and interpretation. Rokem argues that actors who play historical figures become witnesses for the past because they “enable us to believe ...[they] have seen what in some ways has to be told again” (xii). In Rokem’s conception, Adrian Lester, Robert Faires, and Warchus’ Ian Glen became witnesses to Henry’s story because they existed simultaneously within Henry’s Middle Ages and in the playhouses in which their respective versions were staged. They tell Henry’s history through their own bodies, mingling his story with their own, as became hyper-apparent in Lester’s case. The physical presence of the actor playing Henry casts him as the hyper-historian, which Rokem defines as an actor in a history play who “serves as a connecting link between the historical past and the ‘fictional’ performed *here* and *now* of the theatrical event...mak[ing] it possible for us...to recognize that the actor is ‘redoing’ or ‘reappearing’ as something/somebody that has actually existed” (13). In this definition, the actor’s doubled presence in the theatre and within the play’s narrative allows him/her to re-perform historical events. The existence as both a historical and contemporary figure becomes the site at which affective medievalism takes place. It is through the actor that

audiences can see how particular versions of the medieval are constructed, and how they resonate with contemporary contexts. Indeed, the difference between a historian and a hyper-historian lies in the process of embodiment. The actor as hyper-historian *becomes* the historical figure, interpreting the events of the past through contemporary performance. As Rokem goes on to argue, “the hyper-historian becomes painfully ‘present’ at the event itself, carrying the mimetic force of the theatrical event” (201). Glen, Lester, and Faires’ bodies, for example, stand in for the absent Henry.

Within the frames of their productions, however, Lester, Faires, and Glen’s capacities as witnesses are limited to their interpretations of Henry himself and of his singular motivations, beliefs, and actions. The presence of the Chorus within the play adds another layer of interpretation. Unlike Henry, the Chorus is both emotionally present in the story and invested in communicating it to an outside audience. His ability to “witness” thus goes further than that of the actor playing Henry, allowing audiences to “confront [a] sense of separation and exclusion” (Rokem xii) from historical events. As noted above, the *Henry V* Chorus exists both within and outside of the action of the play. He is able to describe images like the king’s “silken streamers,” implying that he is able to view a scene which the play does not stage. Productions often experiment with this notion of an omni-present Chorus, sometimes allowing the character to remain on stage throughout, or bringing him on for particularly powerful moments, as in the moment Glen and Britton shared in Warchus’ version. Often the Chorus seems to have an emotional stake in the action, even though the character is outside Henry’s reach. Downie’s tears in Hytner’s epilogue, for instance, indicated that her interest in Henry’s story was more than an academic one, as her behavior and costume might have otherwise suggested. In contrast, Britton’s costume, with its prominently placed buttonhole poppy, suggested his emotional involvement in the medieval war by implying that, as a veteran,

he too knew the stress and danger of warfare.

The Chorus' doubled position as both character and outsider anticipates feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver's definition of witnessing, which she argues includes both the act of "*eyewitness* testimony based on first hand knowledge, on the one hand, and [of] *bearing witness* to something...that can't be seen, on the other" (16, emphasis original). While the Chorus gives "eyewitness testimony" to events like Henry's preparation's for Agincourt, in the case of *Henry V* the "something that can't be seen" is the resonance of Henry's war throughout history—the emotional effect of connecting medieval combat over French land to contemporary conflict over land, religion, and political ideals. In short, the Chorus as witness facilitates the immediacy of *Henry V* in by simultaneously experiencing and explaining events with and for an audience.

The Chorus' unique placement prompts me to term the character a "hyper medievalist." As previously discussed, affective medievalism necessitates the selection of a specific version of the Middle Ages to be put into conversation with the events, values, etc. of a post-medieval period. Warchus' production, for example, stages affective medievalism in its linkage of the Battle of Agincourt to WWI. Since *Henry V* creates space for conflicting versions of the Middle Ages, the Chorus' decision to emphasize Henry's valor is the decision to present a Middle Ages in which virtue and piety triumph over evil. Simultaneously, however, it is the Chorus who continually points to the artificiality of the theatre, inviting the audience to consider the ways in which historical narrative, like the playhouse itself, is always and already a construct. Thus, the Chorus both legitimates a specific version of history and then hints at the ways in which that history is arbitrarily constructed. Like the hyper historian, the Chorus' presence both on stage and in the story marks the character's investment in the past as more than academic or theoretical. Rather, the Chorus represents a *lived* medievalism, implying that our

understanding of Henry's Middle Ages is fluid. If hyper historians "reenact certain conditions or characteristic traits inherent in...historical events, presenting them to spectators through performance" (Rokem 13), hyper medievalists similarly embody the theoretical and interpretive processes of affective medievalist inquiry. The Chorus performs the process of selection and deletion inherent in staging the Middle Ages, while also retaining a stake in the narrative itself.

Shakespeare's choice to create this hyper medievalist character particularly for *Henry V* is a reflection of the playwright's fascination with Henry as a plural figure throughout his career. For example, *1 Henry VI*, believed to have been one of the first plays Shakespeare wrote, begins with Henry V's funeral, at which the Duke of Gloucester nostalgically laments that Henry's "deeds exceed all speech./ He ne'er lift up his hand but conquered" (1.1.75-6). References to Henry throughout the *Henry VI* plays in particular are tinged with nostalgia for a fallen symbol of glory. These references, coupled with *Henry V*'s own staging of Henry's violent threats at Harfleur and his slaughter of the French prisoners, indicate that Shakespeare is reluctant to reduce Henry—or medieval history—to a singular definition. Rather, the Chorus' exhortation that the audience should "into a thousand parts divide one man" (1.0.24) reflects the ambivalent treatment Henry receives at Shakespeare's hands. While any single Henry can act as hyper historian to a specific version of the story—consider the difference between Oliver and Branagh's Henrys—the Chorus as hyper medievalist can mark the process of creating Henry. *Henry V* thus challenges the notion that medieval history can ever be a static entity. To stage medieval history is indeed to stage the changing ways in which we use the Middle Ages themselves. The following chapter takes up this notion of the how the modern has adapted the medieval by examining changing conceptions of the Holy Grail.

CHAPTER 3: “To Search for an Impossible Dream:” Staging Medieval Legend and the Contemporary Holy Grail

On July 5, 2012, *The New York Times* printed an article hailing what reporter Dennis Overbye’s headline called the “Holy Grail” of the world of physics. The article concerned the discovery of a new subatomic particle which, as Overbye writes, could be the key to “the existence of diversity and life in the universe.” Although the term “Holy Grail” is never used in the text of the article itself, its appearance in the headline signals the importance of the particle. Rather than demonstrate a literal connection between the particle and the medieval Arthurian legends from which the Grail arose, Overbye’s invocation of the Grail is shorthand for the value and significance of the particle’s discovery. The single use of the term also marks Overbye’s assurance that the Grail is a familiar and meaningful concept to his audiences, rather than a medieval artifact that requires contextualization or explanation.

To medieval romance authors, the Grail was a physical object, often the cup which Christ used at the Last Supper or the vessel Joseph of Arimathea used to catch Christ’s blood at the crucifixion. As Overbye’s article demonstrates, however, twenty-first-century culture has divorced the Grail from its medieval roots almost entirely. Rather, the Grail has become a staple of popular culture. As medieval historian Richard Barber argues, “If you open a newspaper today, you are very likely to come across two or three references to ‘the holy grail.’ But it is not simply ‘the Holy Grail,’ it is the ‘holy grail of...’ a particular line of commercial or scientific development, or of a competitive sport, or of a type of product” (367). Laurence Frost of *Reuters*, for example, calls Volkswagon’s manufacturing process the “Holy Grail” of the automobile industry (reuters.com), while *Euronews* argues that television commercials aired during the Superbowl represent the “Holy Grail of advertising” (euronews.com). The frequency with

which contemporary writers and advertisers evoke the Grail belies a centuries-old fascination with the mysterious object and with the quests, both legendary and factual, that have been undertaken to find it.

This chapter analyzes three stage versions of the Grail quest narrative, mining each for the ways in which their varied definitions of the Grail are in conversation with the larger contexts of the plays themselves. In each case, the search for the Grail entails a degree of pleasure, either in the object itself or in the work undertaken to find it. The popular appeal of the plays in this chapter, often in contrast to their critical reception, seems to be a function of the pleasure inherent in the Grail quest. This pleasure indeed mirrors the contemporary fascination with “finding” the Middle Ages. Medieval historian Veronica Ortenberg, for example, writes of modernity’s “dream of rewriting, reinterpreting, reconstructing, indeed *finding again*, the golden age of the medieval period” (ix, emphasis mine). Ortenberg’s notion of “finding again” is particularly relevant for twentieth- and twenty-first-century versions of the Grail, which work as affective medievalism to re-cast the medieval object in terms of their own political, aesthetic, and cultural concerns. The quest for a contemporary Grail becomes a metaphor for finding the Middle Ages themselves, and what Dinshaw calls a “refraction” of the present (19).

The medieval Grail functioned specifically within the legends of King Arthur and the Round Table. Arthur himself is ubiquitous in the contemporary imagination, as reviewer Libby Purves notes in her *London Times* review of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC)’s production of *Mort d’Arthur*, discussed in this chapter: “From Tennyson to T. H. White and C. S. Lewis, from Camelot to Spamalot, the Round Table haunts us.” Critics and historians characterize interest in Arthurian legend as a popular culture phenomenon, permeating media from film to comic books, video games to

historical societies dedicated to finding the “historical” Arthur.³² Although post-medieval versions of Arthurian legend tend to focus on the political and sexual intrigues of the Round Table, the Grail was at the center of the medieval Arthurian canon. Indeed, Arthurian scholar Nigel Bryant characterizes the quest for the Grail in the Middle Ages as “the single most important element in the story of King Arthur” (1).

The productions discussed in this chapter similarly foreground the Grail, casting it as a metonymic representation of their versions of the Middle Ages themselves. In these plays, which include Mike Poulton’s *Morte d’ Arthur* (2010), Eric Idle’s *Spamalot* (2005), and David Auburn’s *Proof* (2000), as in modern Grail theory in general, “the Grail can be anything or nothing, a holy object or a hoax” (Lacy 12). Like interpretations of the historical Henry V, the meanings and implications of the various Grails in these plays both inform and are influenced by post-medieval contexts. In each, “to search for the Holy Grail is to search for an impossible dream [as well as] to reuse a medieval myth” (Ortenberg ix). These plays frame the elusive medieval object within contemporary versions of desire. This chapter moves from a contextualization of the medieval Grail itself to analysis of these three plays and of their quests for contemporary versions of both the Grail and the Middle Ages.

Although all three plays share the four key characteristics of affective medievalism outlined in the introduction of this dissertation, this chapter will analyze each play through the lens of the particular criterion that best displays the show’s treatment of the Grail and of the Middle Ages. The RSC’s *Mort d’Arthur* relies on an exploration of theatricality to provide a modern experience that resonated as closely as

³² Barber, for example, argues that “in the last half-century the Arthurian legends have been transformed from an antiquarian curiosity and a topic for a handful of poets and artists into one of the most frequently revisited areas of a new type of popular culture. Arthur himself appeals to the public interest in historical mysteries, and to the increasing enthusiasm in Britain for local history” (301).

possible with the medieval Grail. *Spamalot* uses a medievalist conflation of past, present, and future to stage a twenty-first-century understanding of the Grail as both an object and a symbol of personal desire. Finally, Auburn's *Proof* follows the narrative structure of the Grail quest and places the Middle Ages into conversation with a specific post-medieval context—in this case the twenty-first-century mathematical academy—staging a Grail which represents abstract, unattainable perfection. Beginning with the *Morte*, which stages the most recognizably medieval Grail, and moving through *Spamalot* and *Proof*, both of which present the Grail as increasingly symbolic, this chapter will analyze these three plays in their original productions for the ways in which they present these various versions of the Grail. In each case, as the chapter will demonstrate, the Grail introduces a sense of plurality into contemporary Arthuriana.

The first known reference to the Grail in the Middle Ages was Chrétien de Troyes' romance *Perceval le Gallois*, c. 1181-1191.³³ In Chrétien's version, the Grail is a mysterious object revealed to a young knight, Percival, in the castle of a wounded king. It appears in a procession in the king's hall and then disappears. Chrétien died before he finished the romance, leaving a number of questions unanswered, including those about the nature and function of the Grail. The ambiguities of Chrétien's Grail led to four medieval "continuations" of the story as well as many stand alone Grail romances, including Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie* (c. 1200), which is largely concerned with the origins of the Grail, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (c. 1215), and the French prose *Lancelot* (c. 1215), also called the Vulgate Cycle, a five volume work that

³³ Of course, as literary scholar Sandra Ihle argues, "It is clear that medieval authors were eager to keep their audiences aware of the fact that they were using sources; they made reminders of this either in order to verify their own works' authenticity or to signal the improvements they made on received material" (19). Chrétien was no exception, and often implies that he is taking his Grail material from "old books" or older sources. Scholars have not located earlier Grail material, however, and ascribe Chrétien's claims to a desire to make his work seem authentic.

covers the majority of Arthur's life. *Lancelot* was one of the main sources for Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (c.1470). Although Chrétien introduced the Grail as both a cup and a mystical object with the power to heal a king and save a kingdom, the association of the Grail with holiness comes from Boron, who wrote that the Grail was used to catch Christ's blood during the crucifixion. *Perlesvaus*, an Old French romance c. 1210, describes the Grail as appearing "in the shape of a child" and of "a crowned king nailed to a cross with a spear thrust in his side" (qtd in Barber 97), drawing on both Christian iconography and a story from Arthurian mythology in which Merlin appears to Arthur in the shape of a child. The ambiguous physical nature of the Grail has spurred centuries of debate.

Although, as Bryant argues, "there never appeared a clear and definitive 'legend of the Grail'" (1), Malory's 1485 *Le Morte d'Arthur* contains the best-known of the medieval Grail stories, and it is the most important source material for the plays analyzed in this chapter. As printed by William Caxton, the *Morte* is a twenty-one book saga detailing the lives of Arthur, Merlin, and a number of the major knights now recognized as members of the Round Table. Malory worked mainly from the French prose *Lancelot*, adapting and simplifying it into "the most studied and best understood—although by no means uncontroversial—version of the Grail Quest in English" (Boardman 128). Medievalist Phillip Boardman's mention of the controversy surrounding Malory's work refers both to the large number of medieval stories which Malory conflates, as well as to the fact that Malory wrote the *Morte* while in prison for allegedly raping a married woman.³⁴ Despite his less than chivalrous biography, Malory's influence on English understandings of Arthuriana, and the Grail in particular, is inarguable. Medievalist Leslie

³⁴ The truth of this charge is difficult to ascertain, as "rape" in the medieval vernacular may have simply meant "flirt with." For more on Malory's colorful biography, see P.J.C. Field's *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*.

J. Workman, for instance, calls the *Morte* “the greatest and most comprehensive treatment of the matter [of the Grail]” (2).³⁵ Malory’s influence is of course due in large part to the availability of the *Morte* after Caxton’s introduction of the printing press to England in 1476. Most editions of the *Morte* indeed include Caxton’s original preface.

In Malory’s version of the Grail story, Galahad, Bors, and Perceval locate the Grail at the palace of the wounded Fisher King, although only Galahad is worthy enough to become its guardian. Malory’s treatment of the Grail is also distinct in that the Grail appears as a mystical vessel with healing powers numerous times before the quest itself. The first of these is at the castle of King Pellas, where Pellas’ daughter Elaine uses it to heal a wounded Lancelot. The two then sleep together, and soon after Elaine gives birth to Galahad, Lancelot’s son and Malory’s eventual Grail knight. Throughout the *Morte*, Malory remains consistent in characterizing the Grail as a cup. As Barber argues, ‘Malory defines the Grail as an object much more clearly than does the French original...the reader knows exactly what the object for which [the knights] are searching is like’ (214). He also removes any ambiguity about the sacred nature of the cup, consistently referring to it as the “Sankreall” (“Holy Grail”) or the “Holy Grayle.” As medieval literary scholar P. J. C. Field notes, “everywhere, both words and symbols constantly stress its holiness” (149). Just as Malory’s Grail is the most recognizable medieval version for contemporary readers, then, the sense of familiarity which he creates around the Grail would have also been immediately comprehensible to his medieval audiences.

In Malory, as in most medieval versions of the Grail story, the holy object is the

³⁵ Examining variations between Arthurian manuscripts, for example, Caroline Eckhardt writes that there is “no noteworthy medieval literary development of the Grail quest theme [...] known in English other than Malory’s” (114). Similarly, In his survey of Arthurian Romance, Derek Pearsall argues that Malory is most present in the minds of modern writers who treat the quest, and writes that Malory’s treatment of the “human conflict” of the grail story is his “greatest triumph in the *Morte D’Arthur*. It was impossible for later writers not to be absorbed into, or forced into a reaction against, his account of things” (84).

subject of a quest, which, as Arthurian scholar Norris Lacy argues, “[is] the very essence of romance” (xv). The term “quest” in the Middle Ages carried a number of meanings, including “seeking, desiring, asking, planning, or obtaining,” or even “investigating or interrogating” (Eckhardt 110). All of these are present throughout the Grail literature, as is what literary scholar Caroline Eckhardt describes as the term’s medieval connotation: “a particular kind of anxiety or excitement that is associated with moving into strange territories or pursuing an uncertain goal” (110). The pursuit of the unknown is particularly apparent in the Grail quest, in which knights pledge themselves to the pursuit of a mysterious object whose defining quality seems to be its resistance to definition. Even given such elusive objects, quests in medieval romances were “heavily conventionalized” (Lacy xv), usually containing a call to arms, an oath, and a number of imposing obstacles, and often the distraction of a love interest. The quest for the Grail follows a similar pattern in most versions of the story, beginning with the Grail’s mysterious appearance and the knights’ pledge to “search for the grail for a year and a day and never stop until [they are] successful—which is only in rare instances” (Lacy xv). In the Arthurian tradition, quests usually also include a pledge of loyalty to Arthur, and a promise to achieve the quest in the name of the Round Table and its brotherhood, marking the quest as a traditionally male space.

As the authors of contemporary Grail narratives follow Dinshaw’s impulse to “make connections across time” (2), they adapt these medieval versions of the Grail and the quest. A plurality similar to that which characterizes the Middle Ages in the modern imagination also defines the twentieth- and twenty-first-century Grail. It is sometimes an object, as it is in *Spamalot*, sometimes a symbol, as it appears in the RSC’s *Morte d’Arthur*, and often, as in *Proof*, a representation of abstract perfection. Barber captures the contemporary plurality of the Grail when he argues that, in the twentieth century, “the

Grail becomes a mirror, reflecting the preoccupations of the individual writer and their individual milieu. It drifts free of its Christian connotations for all but a handful of writers...everything in the old stories is questioned and reshaped” (290). All of the contemporary Grails in this chapter function within particular narrative parameters for specific artistic purposes. Like productions of *Henry V*, they imagine the Middle Ages in their own images, and stage their own concerns within a medieval framework. In all three, affective medievalism’s investment in metatheatricity helps to address the mysterious nature of the Grail itself.

THE RSC’S *MORTE D’ARTHUR*: MANIPULATING THEATRICALITY

In 2010, The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) staged a version of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* adapted by Mike Poulton and directed by RSC Chief Associate Director Gregory Doran. Previously, the RSC had produced a number of workshops of the play under the direction of the previous Artistic Director, John Barton, who shelved the project after becoming convinced that the sheer size of the Arthurian story made it impossible to stage. Doran’s production overcame these fears by focusing on the narrative of the downfall of the Round Table, thus creating order amidst Malory’s sprawling source material. As this section argues, Poulton follows Malory in constructing the Grail as a key element in the destruction of Arthur’s fellowship. In order to stage a Grail that was simultaneously recognizable to modern audiences and reflective of the medieval connection between the Grail and the Round Table, Doran relied heavily on theatrical spectacle, using self-reflexive staging techniques to present both the Grail and the Round Table as lighting effects rather than physical objects. The result was a contemporary version of the Grail which, like the medieval Grail, was simultaneously familiar and mysterious. It is through an exploration of Doran’s theatricality that we can see “exactly how these materials [Grails, in this case,] can be related to each other and

exactly what we get by making them touch” (Dinshaw 2). The affective medievalism of Doran’s *Morte* lies in his desire to make the modern and the medieval “touch” by manipulating theatricality.

The causal relationship between the Grail and the Round Table upon which Poulton’s script relies is common in medieval Grail literature. Boron was the first to make the connection explicit, writing that until the Grail quest, “the Round Table will have one seat vacant, and the one who will fill the empty seat needs to have been in the presence of the Grail” (qtd in Barber 43). The Grail quest thus provides the ultimate test of Arthur’s knights. Indeed, in some traditions, including Malory’s *Morte*, the Grail knight is introduced into Arthur’s fellowship solely for the purpose of questing for the Grail, and he ascends to Heaven soon after finding it. Further, the achievement of the Grail usually has disastrous consequences for the future of the Round Table. The Grail knight’s virtue highlights the sins of the rest of the knights and introduces dissent into the fellowship, particularly between Lancelot and Arthur. Similarly, just before the Grail quest, a blood feud begins to develop among Arthur’s knights which introduces instability and dissent into the fellowship. As Lacy writes, “the Grail quest and Arthurian chivalry are ultimately incompatible, [and] we must recognize that, with the accomplishment of the quest, Camelot *must* fall” (5). The holiness of the Grail cannot share the same narrative space as the destruction caused by the feud and the rift between Arthur and Lancelot. Thus, achieving the Grail quest is an ambiguous feat, since it signals the triumph of the higher concerns over earthly disputes. The Grail knight has attained a spiritual victory, but the price is the destruction of his earthly fellowship. It is perhaps for this reason that the Grail knight appears late in Arthur’s court—his arrival signals the group’s imminent demise.

Doran made this connection between the Grail and the Round Table hyper-visible by creating both table and Grail from light. Lighting Designer Tim Mitchell used a gobo

—a metal screen placed in front of a lighting source which controls the shape of the emitted light—to project a Round Table onto the stage floor, around which the actors stood. The effect continually drew the spectators’ eyes to the stage itself, reminding them that they were viewing this legendary story within a theatre. Similarly, Doran’s Grail comprised only a series of prismatic reflections on the back wall of the theatre. Both audience and actors were able to see only the light which the Grail emitted, rather than the holy object itself. Doran discussed these choices in an interview, noting that “the less literal you are when you’re trying to stage these epic stories, the better and more effective. The more you...let the audience imagine, the better it works” (Worthington). Both the Grail and the Round Table necessitated this use of imagination. Rather than appearing as distant historical objects, Doran’s Grail and his Round Table became phenomena which the audience could experience and interpret. Doran’s choices to cast the stage itself as the Round Table and to reflect the Grail’s light off of the theatre’s back wall created affective, physical connections between the medieval and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Poulton’s script is divided into three sections: The Fellowship of the Round Table, The Adventures of the Sangrail, and The Morte d’Arthur. It follows Arthur (Sam Troughton)’s story from the moment he pulls a sword from a stone to become King of England to the moments after his death in which his knights and his wife mourn for him. A list of the events covered in the play would be prohibitively long, but highlights include the blood feud that erupts between brothers Gawain, Agravain and Gareth and the sons of King Pellinor; the schemes of Morgan Le Fay, Arthur’s jealous half-sister; Merlin’s magical trysts; the love between Arthur’s wife Guinevere and his favorite knight Lancelot; the revolt of Arthur’s nephew Mordred; and, of course, the quest for the Holy Grail. A narrator appears on stage at numerous points in the action, functioning like the *Henry V* Chorus to move the action between locations or to fill in narrative gaps. As in

Malory, after the achievement of the Grail quest, Arthur's Round Table dissolves as petty feuds, murders, and betrayals occur in rapid succession.

Following Malory, Poulton places the story of the Grail between the rise of the Round Table and its destruction, thus casting the Grail quest as the lynch pin on which Arthur's Fellowship hangs.³⁶ The moment in Doran's production in which the Grail appears on stage for the first time reinforces both its mystical nature and its place in the destruction of the Round Table. Just before the Grail entrance, Mordred (Peter Peverley) and the brothers Gawain (Oliver Ryan) and Agravain (Dharmesh Patel) left their places around the Round Table light and savagely attacked Sir Lamorack (Dyfan Dwyfor), a knight who had slept with Gawain and Agravain's mother Margawese and thereby deeply shamed their family. As Mordred stabbed Lamorack in his back, a choir began to sing in Latin. Dwyfor, Ryan, and Patel made their way back to the Round Table, and the stage became sharply illuminated with what Poulton calls in his stage directions a "strange light" (55). The sound of thunder rumbled through the theatre, startling the knights and creating general confusion around the table. Doran underscored the importance of the moment by including on-stage narration as the events of the appearance occurred:

Then anon they heard the cracking and crying of thunder, and they thought the place should fall apart about their heads. *An earthquake.* In the midst of this blast entered a grace of the Holy Ghost. And no knight might speak one word a great while, and so they Grail, covered with white samite, but none might see it, nor none saw who bore it. And all the hall was filled with sweet odours and every knight was refreshed with such meats and drink as he loved best in the world. And when the Holy Grail had been borne through the hall, the holy vessel departed as suddenly as it had come. Then had they all breath to speak (55).

The narrator's description of the white samite-covered Grail recalls Malory's version of

³⁶ Interestingly, in one of his few departures from Malory, Poulton follows an older medieval tradition in naming Percival, rather than Galahad, as the only successful Grail knight.

the Grail but contrasts jarringly with the ephemerality of Doran's Grail, made only of reflected light. This disconnect allowed the medieval Grail and the audience's own images of the object to exist simultaneously. Like the Round Table, the Grail was a product of Doran's theatrical imagination, rather than a physical object.

Assistant director Justin Audibert explained the use of a symbolic Grail and Round Table as a response to audiences' anticipated familiarity with the legend: "and to show things like the Holy Grail - how do you do that? Come on with a shiny cup? Hmm. There are some brilliant things you can do with just simple crystals and light and shadows" (rsc.org interview). These were two of many choices which led *Guardian* critic Michael Billington to praise the production's "heightened, ultra-theatrical symbolism." Rather than physical artifacts of history, Doran's Grail and Round Table became symbolic representations of the Middle Ages from which they arose. Their lack of corporality was a continual reminder of the ways in which the twenty-first century constructs Arthur and his knights, as well as the Middle Ages themselves, as figments of collective imagination, rather than as identifiable or definable entities.

Doran's introduction of Percival (also played by Dyfan Dwyfor), the Grail knight in Poulton's *Morte*, similarly emphasized the medieval connection between the quest and challenges to Arthur's fellowship. In the midst of the confusion after the Grail's appearance, the hermit Nacien (Patrick Romer) approached Arthur to introduce Percival, and to ask Arthur to receive him into the brotherhood of the Round Table. According to Malory, Percival is the son of Pellinor, one of Arthur's knights whom Gawain and Agravain killed because Pellinor had killed their father, King Lot. This also makes Percival the brother of Lamorack, Pellinor's other son, whom Gawain and Agravain had killed moments before. Nacien mentions also that Percival is descended of Joseph of Arimathea, a detail not found in Malory's *Morte*. At the mention of Percival's ancient

heritage, Troughton's Arthur led him to take Pellinor's place at the center of the Round Table. A bright beam of light shone down, illuminating both Dwyfor and his new place at the Table. Poulton's stage directions call this a "beam of light from Heaven" (58). Standing in his place of honor, which Nacien claims "appertaineth to [Percival] and to none other," Percival warns the knights that "he that is not clean of his sins shall never see the mysteries of Our Lord Jesu Christ" (58). The mystical and hyper-theatrical nature of Percival's illuminated seat linked him visually to Doran's light-based Grail. Further, the same actor, Dyfan Dwyfor, played both Lamorack and Percival. Although part doubling was both common and necessary in a play which includes over 100 characters, the specific doubling of the Grail knight with a knight instrumental in the Round Table's blood feud is particularly symbolic. In the RSC's *Morte*, Poulton's focus on Percival combined with Doran's casting and staging choices meant that the Grail knight was tied both narratively and physically to the blood feud that killed Lot, Pellinor, and Lamorack, and threatens to create a major rift in Arthur's fellowship.

The moments after the Grail left the stage were a visual representation of the Round Table's fragmentation. Before the Grail's arrival, the knights had been standing around the Round Table with their swords placed on the stage within the illuminated circle. As the Grail departed, the ring of men around the table broke up, and knights scattered across the stage. Some, including Lancelot and Gawain, remained close to the table, but the sense of symmetry and order created by eight men standing around a circle of light was destroyed. As a contrast to the strength and stillness of earlier Round Table scenes, the visual image of the disintegrating circle was striking, and a clear theatrical representation of the destructive consequences of the Grail's arrival. Observing the chaos around him and listening to his knights vow to seek the Grail, Troughton's Arthur prophesied, "I am sure, when they depart hence they shall nevermore come into my

kingdom—and many shall die upon this quest—men I have loved as well as mine own life” (57). Even with Percival installed in his father’s vacant place, the image of the Round Table as an unbroken circle departed with the Grail. As in Malory’s *Morte*, the apparition of Doran’s Grail reflected its effect on what Ihle calls the “the literal and immediate Arthurian present” (113). For Arthur, the Grail signaled the loss of his beloved knights, and forecasted the end of the Round Table itself. For the RSC’s audiences, the immateriality of Doran’s Grail foregrounded the importance of the theatre itself as an affective bridge between the medieval stories and spectators’ contemporary experiences.

Throughout the *Morte*, Doran manipulated the Grail’s visibility, continually creating linkages between it and the Round Table. Although Dwyfor’s Percival achieved the Grail, the action of his discovery happened offstage and the object itself did not appear. Rather, Romer’s Nacien narrated the end of Percival’s story, and his ascension to Heaven: “and coming out of Heaven, at that time, was seen an hand—and it took the holy vessel, and the spear, and so bore them up into the light” (66). In Lancelot (Jonjo O’Neill)’s quest, however, the physical presence of the Grail was crucial to understanding the connection between the knight’s sins and his failure in the Grail quest. Lancelot entered the chapel where the Grail was housed, and an Angel told him that he “shall have no power to see it no more than a blind man may see a bright sword” (60). Lancelot fainted upon hearing the Angel’s words. As he lay motionless on the stage, the Grail appeared once again as refracted light, shone brilliantly, and faded just before he woke. Although the audience could see the Grail, Lancelot’s spiritual and moral “blindness” prevented him from seeing it, much less grasping it. In contrast to Percival’s achievement, Lancelot’s failure was deepened by the physical presence of the Grail as a symbol of the knight’s fall from grace. The appearance of the Grail as O’Neill’s Lancelot slept ironically demonstrated Lancelot’s spiritual distance from it, rather than his physical

proximity to it. As *Guardian* critic Michael Billington surmised, “what emerges powerfully is a vision of a kingdom that reaches for peace, mercy and justice but ends in fractious bloodshed” (13). Lancelot’s inability to achieve the Grail even as it shares stage space with him was a indeed visual reminder of the Round Table’s inability to achieve peace in the kingdom.

Doran’s use of theatrical spectacle to distill the sprawling medieval Arthurian source material is a result of his interest in Malory as a thoroughly medieval writer. As aforementioned, it was Boron that cast the Grail as simultaneously necessary to the Round Table and as a key to its destruction. By emphasizing Boron’s causal connection, Doran staged a medieval version of the Grail. Indeed, Doran shared his interest in Malory’s medieval context in an interview with Suzanne Worthington: “Malory is at his best when he is writing about his own [medieval] times,” and commented on the resonances he finds between the medieval wars Malory would have witnessed and his descriptions of Arthurian battles. Although Malory never wrote for the theatre, Doran saw a natural connection between the medieval writer and performance, and took care to contextualize Malory’s work within narratives of theatre history.

In particular, Poulton and Doran grounded the *Morte*, and indeed their version of Malory himself, within a recognizable theatrical tradition by referencing shared memories of Shakespeare’s medieval English history. Poulton’s notes in the production’s extensive program make a number of connections between Shakespeare and Malory:

Malory was born a year after Henry V’s miraculous victory over the French at Agincourt, he backed the Lancastrians against the Yorkists—he died as the time of the great Yorkist victory at Tewkesbury—and his epic was published in the year of the Battle of Bosworth Field. Malory’s Arthur begins his life heroically as Henry V and ends it more like Henry VI, disillusioned, bullied by his family, his lands in chaos (Poulton).

All of these events happen to be major plot points in Shakespeare's history plays (*Henry V*, *Henry VI*, and *Richard III*, respectively), which the RSC had staged only three years before the *Morte* as *The Histories Cycle*. Indeed, medieval literary scholar Helen Cooper refers in the program to Malory's work as "the source of Shakespeare's own historical knowledge" (5). In choosing to contextualize Malory's life with moments in Shakespeare's histories, the RSC relied not on audiences' knowledge of historical details, but of their experiences of these moments as pieces of theatre. *The Histories Cycle*, which included all eight of Shakespeare's history plays, ran in repertory for nearly two years. Poulton and Doran could thus have expected many audience members to remember those plays and the characters in them as they read the *Morte* program. The production's two intermissions granted audience members ample time to read through the extensive program materials, and indeed many of my fellow spectators turned to their programs almost as soon as the lights went up for both intervals. Poulton's notes about Malory's biography thus primed them to imagine the *Morte* in terms of Shakespearian history, suggesting performance as a productive lens through which Malory can be read. The program materials also indicated connections between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, allowing audiences to discover moments of "touch" between them.

Despite lukewarm critical reception, the production seemed to have a mass popular appeal. The *Morte* marked one of the first attempts by a major British company to stage Arthur's story since the nineteenth century, and tickets for the production sold out almost immediately after they went on sale.³⁷ When I visited the RSC in August of 2010, I was told that there had been far fewer returns for the *Morte* than for any RSC

³⁷ The 1890s saw a number of verse productions of Arthurian legend that were highly influenced by pre-Raphaelite design aesthetics. Most of these productions were also critically panned, although the beauty of their costumes and sets were often praised. See Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV's "King Arthur Plays from the 1880s" for further information and analysis.

production in recent memory, and that a number of patrons had seen the show more than once.³⁸ This public demand is significant, considering critics' near-universal dismissal of the show, particularly in regard to the density of the source material and the potentially unflattering comparisons to be made between the *Morte* and the 1975 *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.³⁹ There is clearly a popular desire for a staged version of such a familiar story, which contains the iconic and recognizable symbol of the Holy Grail. Indeed, many of the negative reviews of the production indeed seem invested in critiquing the contemporary fascination with Arthur rather than the production itself. Doran's production thus became a highly theatrical celebration of a popularly recognizable Middle Ages. The production's manipulation of spectacle and experiments with visuality allowed Doran to stage a version of the Grail story that was simultaneously medieval, in its relationship to the Round Table, and strikingly immediate. Doran's Grail thus retained its elusive quality from medieval romances, but also remained recognizable and present for RSC spectators.

SPAMALOT: STAGING A PERSONALIZED GRAIL IN DISRUPTED TIME

One of the most frequent critical comments about the RSC's *Morte d'Arthur* was that it bore an unfortunate resemblance to the immensely popular version of Arthur and the Round Table created by British sketch comedy ensemble Monty Python. Although

³⁸ Interestingly, the popularity of Doran's *Morte* is similar to that of the National Theatre's 1985 production of *The Mysteries*, a three-part adaptation of the medieval mystery plays. There is indeed much productive work to be done on the popular demand for medieval stories on British stages.

³⁹ *Daily Telegraph* critic Charles Spencer, for example, noted that although audiences can be assumed to know Arthur's story, the production's "great chunks of exposition and narrative" and large number of characters made watching the production a "constant struggle." In a similar comment on the contemporary familiarity of Arthur, BBC 4 reviewer Kristy Lang called the production "painfully Monty Python-esque... you've got loads of actors walking on in very heavy fighting men's boots, and saying 'verily, in the forest, Arthur slew King Uriens, and here they are in the forest now.' ... You have to make it very frightening, otherwise the audience will laugh."

there are indeed moments of levity and humor in Poulton's *Morte*, as there are in Malory's, the comparison soon falls apart. Monty Python's 1975 *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* is a send-up of the seriousness of the Arthurian legends, replete with on-camera sound foley, killer bunnies, musical numbers, comically ridiculous amounts of bloodshed, and humorously anachronistic comments on British class politics, to name only a few of its now iconic devices. The Grail does not appear in the film, since just before the knights seem to be about to achieve it, modern-day police appear to halt filming. In 2004, Eric Idle, a member of the Python troupe, developed a stage version of the film called *Spamalot*, taking the title from from one of the film's songs in which Arthur's knights sing of their propensity in Camelot to "eat Spam a lot."

Although the show spoofs both the Arthurian source material and the twenty-first-century's fascination with it, *Spamalot* actually offers a unique and rich examination of Grail mythology. Indeed, *Spamalot* is the only play discussed in this chapter—and, as far as my research has proven, the only known stage version of Arthur's story—to put the Holy Grail on stage as a physical object. Further, in contrast to most other theatrical versions of Arthuriana, the plot of *Spamalot* almost entirely comprises the search for the Grail. Ironically, however, even as it allows audiences to see the Grail for possibly the first time in theatrical history, *Spamalot* implies that it is not the physicality, but rather the ideal of the Grail that makes it worth the quest. The term "Grail" within the musical refers simultaneously to the cup itself, to the dream of succeeding on Broadway, and to the allure of true love. The flexibility of Idle's Grail is particularly striking in comparison to that of Doran's *Morte*, which seemed to be a specific object, even if actors and audience members could only see it as reflected light.

Further, *Spamalot* stages the non-linear historiography that characterizes affective medievalism, allowing medieval romance, the 1975 Monty Python film, and twenty-first

century Broadway to share the same stage space. This musical's multiple points of reference reflect the "co-presence of several moments" which Bildhauer finds in medieval film (21). This affective conflation of past, present, and future reception creates a Grail that is both a physical object and a symbol for hope, desire, and achievement. Similarly, Idle's Grail reflects Barber's assessment of the medieval Grail quest's unorthodox nature within Arthurian legend: "its existence owes much to the shadowy borderland between imagination and belief, which are two influences on its development. It never fitted into the orthodox scheme of things" (Barber 4). It is this idea of the Grail as the object of both "imagination and belief" that fuels *Spamalot*, resulting in an ever-changing Grail which can be seen from a number of perspectives simultaneously.

The musical, directed by Mike Nichols on Broadway, is "lovingly ripped off" from the earlier film, according to its poster and marketing materials. It begins as a "Famous Historian" (Christian Borle) narrates the life of a great king named Arthur, who gathered brave and chivalrous knights together for a holy quest in 932. The action of the musical begins as Arthur (Tim Curry) roams England to find knights for his Round Table. Before the knights can make their way to Camelot, God (voiced by Python actor John Cleese), descends from the heavens and challenges the knights to the quest of the Holy Grail. The excited knights consent and begin their search immediately. The Lady of the Lake, a character unique to the stage version of the Python story, appears to encourage the knights with a song entitled "Find Your Grail," advising the knights to "keep your eyes on the goal,/ Then the prize, you won't fail,/ That's your Grail" (13). The knights manage to locate the Grail castle, but are chased away by hostile French knights. Dejected, they wander through a "very expensive" forest (36) composed of what look to be cardboard cutouts of trees, only to be challenged by the "Knights Who Say 'Ni.'" Before they allow him to cross through their forrest, the Knights challenge Arthur to

create a Broadway musical. As Arthur realizes the seeming impossibility of this challenge, which he conflates with the Grail itself, the Lady of the Lake comforts and encourages him. With her help, Arthur discovers that he has been in a Broadway musical all along, and has thus achieved his personal version of the Grail. Led on by a clue left for them in a cave, Arthur's knights then go on to discover the physical Grail, hidden under a seat in the first row of the audience. The musical ends with a double wedding as Arthur marries the Lady of the Lake (who reveals that her first name is actually Guinevere), and Lancelot, who has discovered his homosexuality over the course of the quest, marries a boy he saved from a tower. The wedding is accompanied by a reprisal of "Find Your Grail" which urges knights and audience members alike to "find your male," thus re-defining the Grail once again as a symbol for love and happiness.

Idle's "Famous Historian" facilitates the musical's "non-linear perception of time" (Bildhauer 25). In *Holy Grail*, a knight kills the Historian early in the narrative, allowing the irreverent spectacle of the film to triumph over historical details and accuracies. Although the presence of *Spamalot*'s Historian does not guarantee an investment in historical fact, Borle serves as the bridge between the action on the stage and the audience's interpretation of it. Like the *Henry V* Chorus and the narrator in Doran's *Morte*, he serves as an example of Rokem's "hyper historian," who is both a narrator and a character "present at the event itself, carrying the mimetic force of the theatrical event" (201). This notion of the narrator/historian's existence in both Arthur's Middle Ages and the audience's twenty-first century casts him as the embodiment of the show's affective medievalism. Borle can both relate the story of a historical king who "arose from chaos with might" to become a "man with a vision" (1), and also interact with the characters onstage. During his opening monologue, for instance, the large red curtain he had been standing in front of opened to reveal a large dance number

celebrating the antics of fishermen and their wives in Finland. Borle stopped the song, yelling at the performers “I said ‘England’” (2), and thus altered the course of the events on stage. Despite his power to intervene in stage action, however, Borle’s costume, language, and authority marked him as a commentator who existed outside the medieval narrative.

Borle’s narration combined twentieth-first-century constructions of the Middle Ages with medieval legend, creating a hybrid space in which Idle’s historical satire could thrive. The Historian tells the audience that the action of the play occurs in 932 CE England, for example, but also that this was the time of a large-scale plague in England. Aside from the fact that most Arthurian histories and romances place the king c. 500 C.E, rather than in the tenth century, plague came to England between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Historian’s narration is thus factually inaccurate, but only technically so. For the majority of contemporary audiences, particularly those familiar with a construction of the Middle Ages as “dark par excellence” (Eco 69), the conflation of Arthur and the plague seems natural. Similarly, audiences are ready to accept Borle’s anachronistically Chorus-like assertion that Arthur and his knights “formed a band whose names and deeds would be told throughout the centuries” (22). For Idle’s audiences, the genealogy of Arthur’s fame includes both medieval legend and twentieth-century sketch comedy. Borle’s narration and commentary highlighted the visibility of these multiple historical versions of Arthur’s story. Unlike John Young’s Historian in *Holy Grail*, who is killed early on, Borle reappeared throughout *Spamalot*. Indeed, most of his entrances were greeted with cheers and applause from the audience. Aside from Borle’s own appeal as an actor, this enthusiasm stemmed both from the pleasure inherent in having insider knowledge—in this case of the differences between the film and the play—and from a recognition of his power within the musical to move the action along.

Spamalot also relies on audience familiarity to stage the future of the Grail story. Lancelot decides to join the quest, for example, after hearing that the knights' deeds will be so famous that "we'll be shot by Michael Moore" (11). The line, which anachronistically guarantees future reception, is sung by the character "Not Dead Fred" (also played by Borle) during a musical re-imagining of the famous *Holy Grail* scene in which a man attempts to resist being thrown onto a cart of plague victims by proclaiming "I'm not dead yet!" In this single line, Idle draws upon the medieval plague, the Monty Python film, and the promise of future versions of Lancelot and Arthur's quest. Additionally, if this future version of the knights' military exploits is indeed told by liberal documentarian Michael Moore, it might have a very different tone than more traditional celebrations of the Round Table. Borle's doubled role as the Historian and as Fred thus allowed his body, like those of the actors playing Shakespeare's Chorus, to be a physical representation of the production's affective historiography.

As the object of a quest which simultaneously takes place in the Middle Ages, in audience's memories and, as Fred suggests, in future versions of the legend, *Spamalot's* Grail is plural and ambiguous. In Nichols' production, after a plywood cutout of a giant pair of feet descended from the fly space and Cleese's booming voice informed the knights that they must set out in search of the Grail, the cup itself appeared as an animated projection. It shone radiantly on an upstage screen and then faded away, as Cleese instructed the knights to "get on with [finding the Grail because] these people don't have all night" (26). As the knights stood blinking in confusion, Curry's Arthur explained that the Grail was the vessel used in the last supper. Curry thus demonstrated an odd foreknowledge both of the quest and of its object. His assurance resonates with what Bildhauer identifies as a modern understanding of the medieval concept of the "short future," which she defines as "a sense of the future as so short that it is perceived

as already present” (25). The knights immediately began to argue about the Grail, questioning Arthur’s certainty about its purpose and significance:

Lancelot: The Grail is a cup?

Robin: God the almighty, the all-knowing, has misplaced a cup?

Lancelot: Apparently. [...]

Robin: Can’t we just buy him another one?

Arthur: Look, its not just about a missing cup. It’s a metaphor. We must all look within us. That’s where we’ll find the Grail.

Robin: Somebody swallowed it!

Arthur: Nobody swallowed it; it’s a symbol! Look, just go and find it (26-7).

Nichols’ display of the Grail itself was unique among stage versions of the quest. The knights’ ensuing dialogue, however, immediately undermined any certainty that the image seen on stage was the definitive version of the Grail. Arthur, for example, calls the Grail a metaphor only seconds after he refers to it as the cup used at the Last Supper.

The Grail here works as both object and signifier, and thus is not reducible to a single physical representation. *Spamalot* indeed stages Barber’s argument that the centuries-worth of Grail literature available to contemporary readers has meant that “there is no one ‘truth’ about the Grail...the force that shaped it is not history, but imagination, the creative thought that subtly built on an unfinished story” (365). Because the production juxtaposed the medieval notion of the Grail as the Last Supper cup with the contemporary use of it as a symbol of personal achievement, Nichols’ Grail was a product of centuries of “imagination.”

One of the production’s more unusual interpretations of the Grail was as a metaphor for Broadway success. As mentioned above, Arthur agrees to stage a Broadway

musical in exchange for crossing the forrest of the Knights Who Say Ni. Although it seems as if Arthur's knights' theatrical endeavors temporarily eclipse their search for the Grail, the two become conflated. Indeed, when the Lady of the Lake appears in a later scene to tell Arthur that he has been in a Broadway show all along, she speaks of helping him complete his "quest" (67), and only encourages him to find the physical Grail as an afterthought. The revision of the Grail quest to include the achievement of a Broadway musical also stages a conflation of time periods, as the Knights Who Say Ni warn Arthur that the musical cannot be "an Andrew Lloyd Webber one" (47). Their demand juxtaposes medieval legend, *Holy Grail*, the audience's contemporary sensibilities, and familiar narratives of Broadway history, including the vast financial and popular success of Webber's series of "mega-musicals."

Just as the achievement of the medieval Grail had both positive and negative effects, including the destruction of the Round Table, Broadway success was an ambiguous achievement for Idle and Nichols. Indeed, much of *Spamalot*'s satirical dramaturgy subverts the traditional Broadway model which the Knights Who Say Ni attribute to Webber. For instance, the musical includes a song titled "The Song That Goes Like This," which the Lady of the Lake and Galahad create out of a number of musical theatre clichés: "It starts off soft and low/ And ends up with a kiss/[...] They all will hum along/We'll overact like hell" (18), poking fun at the formulaic and predictable nature of most mainstream Broadway hits. During "The Song that Goes Like This," the Lady of the Lake and Galahad appear on a small wooden boat surrounded by candles, clearly a send-up of a similar scene in Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*, currently the longest running show in Broadway history.⁴⁰ In one of the show's frequent moments of metatheatricity, Sir Robin notes that *Spamalot*'s irreverent treatment of treasured theatre history seems to

⁴⁰ As of September 23, 2012, *Phantom* had been performed 10,257 times.

disqualify the production from success on the quest for Broadway: “we don’t stand a chance [on Broadway] ...Broadway is a very special place, filled with very special people” (48). Like the puppet musical *Avenue Q* (2009) after it, *Spamalot*’s success was largely based in undermining this “special” theatrical form in which it participated. Idle indeed spoke disparagingly in an interview with *Times* reviewer James Bone, of “the long desert years of Andrew Lloyd-Webber, when there was little to laugh at but the acting.” Thus, the object of Arthur’s revised quest was success in a form toward which both characters and creators admittedly felt ambivalence.⁴¹

Ironically, the show was remarkably successful in the very theatrical medium it set out to mock. *Spamalot* won the Tony award in 2005 for best musical, thus placing it in the same category as Webber winners like *Phantom* and *Cats*. For Broadway producers, success is measured in box office receipts, and *Spamalot* was no exception. As Jesse McKinley reported in the *New York Times*,

[*Spamalot*] sold \$1.6 million in tickets by 5 p.m. [on opening day], one of Broadway's biggest single-day takes at the box office... [and] also had advance ticket sales of around \$20 million before it opened...[which] puts it in fairly rarefied company; *The Producers*... sold more than \$3 million the day after it opened; *Hairspray*... sold about \$1.5 million; and *The Lion King* sold \$2.7 million the day after it opened.

This financial success is likely due in part to the immense popularity of *Holy Grail*, and perhaps also to the public desire for theatrical versions of the Grail story. Indeed, it is

⁴¹ Also of note here is Sir Robin’s comment that “we won’t succeed on Broadway if we don’t have any Jews” (48)! This fascinating and troubling comment references the long-standing relationship between Broadway and Jewish-Americans and immigrants, including iconic names such as George and Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin and Oscar Hammerstein. Sir Robin’s comment invites work on the connection between the Grail and ethnically-situated narratives of Broadway success, which unfortunately lies outside the scope of this chapter. For an excellent historicization of the Jewish experience on Broadway and the interconnections between humor, race/religion and economics in the professional theatre world, however, see Andrea Most’s *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

similar to the aforementioned popular appeal of Doran's *Morte d'Arthur*. Idle's response to *Spamalot*'s success highlights the self-awareness of the musical's dramaturgy and the pleasure he took in including criticism of commercialized theatre in a show produced on Broadway: "that's the joy of it, that Python thing....We recognize the form that we're in...That's postmodernism, isn't it" (qtd in Eggers)? Thus, *Spamalot* was able to cast the Grail as a symbol for Broadway success while still undermining the legitimacy of that success. Like Doran's construction of the Grail as both a glorious achievement and a harbinger of the Round Table's destruction, Idle's ambivalent treatment of the Broadway quest staged a medieval understanding of the Grail as a complex and potentially dangerous object.

Unlike Doran's *Morte*, however, *Spamalot* also stages the achievement of the physical Grail, and in doing so forges another moment of "touch" between the present and the future. Arthur and the knights discover a cryptic message indicating that the Grail can be found at "AIOI," which Arthur's servant Patsy (Michael McGrath) recognizes as a reference to Schubert Theatre seat number A101. He exclaims, "A101! Of course, it's in the audience! Oh sire, look! We have found the Holy Grail! It was through the 4th wall" (73)! The knights rush from the stage and locate a humorously large golden cup under the seat of an audience member in the front row. Curry's Arthur drew a further connection between the Grail and Broadway audiences in his struggle to maintain the dignity of the Grail in the face of the laughter coming both from his knights and the audience: "of course the Grail can always be found in the hearts of those who gather together to believe in it" (73). The audience member who was sitting over the Grail was brought onto stage and commended as a hero of the quest. Arthur guaranteed that her "name will be remembered in New York forever. Along with the names of Mayor Giuliani, and Joey Buttafuoco" (73). The superfluity of Arthur's assurance that the

audience member will be remembered throughout history recalls Henry V's St. Crispian's day speech in its promise of future praise for a legendary deed. Simultaneously, Arthur's references to recent history repeatedly conflate the medieval Grail with present-day New York City, creating a Grail that exists because there was a Broadway audience for it to be hidden within.

Indeed, Idle argued in an interview with *Newsweek's* Devin Gordon that "one of the things I love about the show is that it...enlists the audience's help in putting together a rudimentary plot. That's part of why we go to the theater: because of how much the audience is part of what's created." The film version of *Holy Grail* ended before the achievement of the Grail, necessitating that Idle create an entirely new moment for his live audiences rather than relying on their familiarity with the film's narrative. At the moment of Grail achievement, Idle staged a Grail that existed within the spectators' space, thus creating a version of the holy object which literally touched the world of the audience. This moment of physical contact epitomized the production's affective medievalism. While the particular audience member sitting above it may have had no hand in the actual achievement of the Grail, her presence suggested a removal of the Grail from the medieval narrative space to that of the twentieth-first-century audience. Just as the Lady of the Lake argues that the Grail is born from personal desire, the physical Grail in *Spamalot* came literally from outside the world of the legend, acting as a bridge between the story and the spectators.

Similarly, in the quest-as-Broadway narrative, achieving the Grail means finding a Broadway audience. McKinley's aforementioned *NY Times* review of the show and its box office success argues that "*Spamalot* may already be grasping the holy grail of Broadway: new audience members." McKinley goes on to note that the musical attracted a demographic previously unreachable by Broadway producers: "men; specifically, the

kinds of teenagers and 20-somethings who find jokes about fish, flatulence and the French absolutely sidesplitting and who normally wouldn't be headed to the theater unless dragged by a girlfriend, school trip or court order.” This demographic, along with a number of other audience members, presumably, bought tickets because of *Holy Grail*. Thus, the musical's success depended on its juxtaposition of the medieval and the recently historical with the tastes of contemporary consumers. At the crucial moment of quest achievement in *Spamalot*, the medieval Grail, the 1975 film, the contemporary audience, and the future success of the show itself become conflated.

PROOF: FINDING THE GRAIL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ACADEMY

Like Idle's *Spamalot*, David Auburn's 2000 play *Proof* juxtaposes medieval and modern to stage a quest for a symbolic Grail. Unlike the musical, however, *Proof*'s medievalism is structural, rather than literal, and the term “Holy Grail” never appears in the text. Rather, *Proof*'s persistent quest narrative and its focus on a mysterious, powerful object demonstrate the ubiquity of the Grail quest in the contemporary imagination. The play stages two mathematicians' search for the ultimate proof, which one character refers to as “the most important mathematics in the world” (47). While the nature and mechanics of this proof remain mysterious—rather like those of the Holy Grail itself—it is believed to be a theorem that will unite several branches of mathematics and possibly reveal a universal truth about the human experience. It thus has much in common with Overbye's “Holy Grail of Physics.” Similarly, both of the characters who search for the proof see it as a tool for personal or spiritual salvation. Their academic quest leads them through hundreds of notebooks left behind by a once-brilliant math professor. This section analyzes *Proof*'s combination of the medieval quest with the world of the twenty-first-century mathematical academy, arguing that Auburn's play is an unconscious modernization of the Grail story. I draw here on contemporary Grail theory which

suggests that the twenty-first-century understanding of the Grail as a symbol can be traced to the Middle Ages. I follow Dinshaw's affective "impulse toward making connections across time," arguing that *Proof's* Grail exists in a conversation between the modern and the medieval, and as a result creates space for a feminist re-imagining of the quest structure.

Proof begins with an imagined conversation between Catherine, an unemployed twenty-five year-old woman, and her father Robert, a famous university mathematician. Robert has died two days before the action of the play from what appears to have been Alzheimer's Disease. Hal, a graduate student who used to work for Robert, arrives and asks Catherine's permission to look through the hundreds of notebooks Robert has left behind. Hal hopes to find a particular proof which he suspects Robert has written—a brilliant piece of math that will, if published, save Hal's own fledgling career. Catherine's sister Claire arrives the next day for Robert's funeral, after which she and Catherine host a reception at the house. Hal and Catherine sleep together after the reception, and the following morning she offers to help him find the proof. She gives him a key to a locked drawer in Robert's office, which contains a notebook with the proof written inside. As Hal becomes more and more excited about the math in the notebook, Catherine reveals herself as the proof's author.

Both Hal and Claire accuse Catherine of lying, claiming that she "doesn't have the math" (25) to have written the complex and field-changing proof. Hal and Catherine argue, and he takes the proof to be analyzed by a team of mathematicians. In the meantime, Claire convinces Catherine to sell Robert's home and move to New York, suspecting that Catherine may have the same mental illness which caused the deterioration of Robert's mind. The play ends as Hal returns, moments before Catherine's departure. He tells her that the proof indeed "checks out" (40), and that he will believe

that it is hers if she can talk him through it. The lights dim as Catherine opens the proof notebook and “begins to speak” (89). This final stage direction marks the first time in the play that Catherine has engaged directly with the proof or its contents. Although I do not argue that Auburn set out specifically to modernize Grail literature, the structure of *Proof*’s quest recalls that of the medieval romances, and the object of Auburn’s quest is both as desirable and as mysterious as the medieval Grail. The play thus relies on audiences’ familiarity both with the quest narrative and with stereotypes of the contemporary academy.

A Grail-based reading of Auburn’s play recasts the medieval quest in academic terms, and, until Catherine is revealed to be the proof’s author, posits Hal as the Grail knight whose dedication to the quest is a result of his intellect. Although it exists as words within a notebook, the Grail which Hal seeks is much less of a tangible object than the medieval Grail, and Hal’s search for it occurs in Robert’s office rather than the vast medieval forest. Still, Hal’s dedication to Robert resembles that of the medieval knights to Arthur, as does his pledge to dedicate any success which the Grail-proof brings him to his former mentor: “it would be under your dad’s name. It would be for your dad” (17). Although Catherine is convinced that “there’s no connection between the ideas. There’s no ideas. It’s like a monkey at a typewriter. A hundred and three notebooks full of bullshit” (15), Hal persists, believing in Robert’s abilities and the existence of the proof. Hal’s retort to Catherine, “I’m prepared to look at every page, are you?” is a less strenuous version of the Arthurian knights’ customary pledge to quest for the grail “for a year and a day and never stop until [they are] successful” (Lacy xv). After a late night working in Robert’s old office, Hal justifies his work to Catherine: “I don’t have time to do this, but I’m going to. If you’ll let me. I loved your dad” (16). In the 2000 original Broadway production of *Proof*, directed by Daniel Sullivan, Ben Shenkman’s Hal was

relentless in his pursuit of the notebooks. Although Catherine (Mary-Louise Parker) moved restlessly around the stage as she tried to dissuade Hal from looking through the notebooks, Shenkman remained still, standing in front of the screen door that led into the house from the porch, and thus into Robert's study and to the notebooks. In his refusal to move from the door, Shenkman thus claimed the house as the space of his quest, and his stillness conveyed the strength of his resolve.

Proof also stages the mystical nature of the medieval Grail, creating a mathematical Grail as the object of Hal's search. As discussed above, much of the allure of the Arthurian Grail comes from its status as a mysterious object to which only a select few are qualified to have access. The value of the Grail thus lies in the difficulty of its achievement. The same can be argued of Auburn's Grail, although the notion of "achievement" refers in *Proof* to the creation of the proof as well as to the discovery of it. Hal describes the proof as prohibitively difficult to write: "I know how hard it would have been to come up with something like this. I mean, it's impossible. You'd have to be...you'd have to be your dad at the peak of his powers" (64). The strength and purity required to find the medieval Grail make it a similarly privileged object. Barber argues that this idea of restricted access has guaranteed the continued popularity of Grail stories: "the idea of secret knowledge is a major element in the twentieth-century image of the Grail" (291). Indeed, most contemporary versions of the Grail, including that of Doran and the RSC, treat the object as mysteriously powerful. Auburn's emphasis on the arcane, mystical qualities of his proof indeed resemble Doran's elusive version of the Grail which never appeared physically on stage.

Further, like the medieval Grail, Auburn's proof is a uniquely powerful object. The proof's potency however, comes from its connection to the twenty-first-century academy rather than to the medieval church. Neither Catherine nor Hal discuss the

mechanics of the proof or the math it contains until the final moments of the show, leaving the audience with a vague sense that it has something to do with prime numbers. Despite Hal's expertise, when he sees the proof for the first time he can only guess as to its contents: " [it] looks like it proves a theorem...something mathematicians have been trying to prove since...since there were mathematicians, basically. Most people said it couldn't be done (47). In Hal's estimation, this is not simply a brilliant piece of scholarship, it is the ultimate piece of math which provides the key to an intellectual and objective truth. *New York Times* critic Bruce Webber calls it "emotional math, the sort that everyone and no one understands," that was created and discovered by intellectuals with "the gift for abstraction." The combination of the proof's elusive meaning and its groundbreaking implications aligns it with a contemporary construction of the Grail as the symbol of "an abstract perfection, the idea that somewhere a perfect solution or object can be found" (Barber 367). Auburn's proof recalls Barber's "perfect solution" since it ostensibly arises from Robert's work, which Hal argues united disciplines from economics to astrophysics. Similarly, Field argues the connection between the medieval Grail and modern science, noting that "it could be said that the Holy Grail of twentieth-century physics was a 'Theory of Everything.'" (141). Like *Spamalot's* Grail, Auburn's proof is both object and metaphor. The achievement of Auburn's Grail, however, has universal rather than personal implications.

Exploring the "affective relations across time" between Auburn's proof and the medieval Grail facilitates a number of interventions into the medieval Grail tradition, the most significant of which is the introduction of a female Grail knight who both creates and achieves the Grail. *Proof's* medievalism casts the Middle Ages as a time of both adventure and mysticism, but revises the gendered world of the Arthurian quest in order to posit questions about authenticity and epistemology. Indeed, unlike medieval versions

of the Grail quest, *Proof* suggests origin and authorship as central concerns of the Grail narrative. As stated in the introductory section of this chapter, there is no definitive Grail origin story, although Barber writes that most medieval Grail stories identify it as the vessel used at the Last Supper, which Joseph of Arimathea later used to catch Christ's blood during the Crucifixion (118). Even Barber's narrative, however, leaves out the question of who created the Grail. In the case of "the most important mathematics in the world," on the other hand, the question of authorship is crucial. When Catherine accuses Hal at the top of *Proof* of stealing one of Robert's notebooks, one of her biggest concerns is that he will publish Robert's work as his own, thereby allowing him to "write [his] own ticket to any math department in the country" (17). The authorship question becomes further complicated by Catherine's assertion that she, not Robert or one of his male colleagues, wrote the proof.

Sullivan highlighted the strangeness of Catherine's revelation of herself as the proof's author by allowing Robert, who is dead by this point in the narrative, to appear framed in the doorway of the house as Parker made her surprising announcement. He remained on stage as the lights faded to black for the intermission. As the action returned to Catherine's revelation in the second half of the play, he lingered behind the screen door, writing, and presumably unseen by any of the other characters.⁴² Although Robert exited as the dialogue of the scene began, his non-scripted presence served as a reminder of the academy's authority, which Catherine claimed to have surpassed in writing the proof. His appearance as Catherine insisted she wrote the proof seemed to undermine her claim, suggesting his presence, both physical and authorial, as integral to the proof. The timing of his Bryggman's exit, however, coming just as Catherine began to defend herself

⁴² Act two of *Proof* actually begins with a flashback scene in which Catherine and Robert discuss Catherine leaving home to study math at Northwestern. The scene lays the groundwork for Catherine's mathematical knowledge. The scene described above is thus the second scene of the second act.

and her work, focused audience attention on Catherine and suggested a forfeiture of any claim Robert may have had to the work. Thus, Parker's Catherine became the central character in a play that had previously been focused on Hal's search through Robert's work.

For Hal, part of the shock of Catherine's revelation is her gender. Women in the medieval quests to which *Proof* provides a modern parallel served only as reminders of male strength. Medieval literary scholar Dorsey Armstrong indeed describes women in Malory's *Morte* as "the object[s] through and against which a knight affirms his masculine identity...and his right to belong to the heteronormative masculine community of the Arthurian court" (36-7). Lancelot, for instance, demonstrates his value as a knight of the Round Table by saving countless damsels in distress, whose only defining features are the intricacies of their plights. In these stories, women's usefulness to what Armstrong calls Arthur's "inclusive vision of masculine homosociality" (139) is thus in inverse relation to their strength as individuals. The only significant woman in the Grail story is Elaine, who in most traditions was Lancelot's lover and the mother of Galahad—the knight who achieves the Grail. By giving birth to the Grail knight, she facilitates the achievement of the Grail, but does not otherwise participate in the quest for it. In *Proof*, the mathematical academy functions similarly to the Grail quest as an exclusionary and masculine space. The only female mathematician other than Catherine mentioned in the play is Sophie Germain, a nineteenth-century prime number theorist who had to write under a masculine pen name in order to lay the foundation for modern number theory. Hal characterizes her "taste for the mysteries of numbers" as foundational to both his and Robert's work (36), and yet Catherine has to remind him that Germain lived over a century before he began his own work. The details of Germain's life are unimportant to Hal; like Elaine she functions only as a facilitator of later, more important, work.

Catherine destabilizes Hal's notion of the gendered academy by insisting that she is the author of work that could revolutionize the field. Before the revelation of the proof, Hal had insisted that he, and not Catherine, was the only one qualified to search through Robert's notebooks. When Catherine volunteers to help him, he retorts, "you don't have the math, It's all just squiggles on a page. You wouldn't know the good stuff from the junk" (19-20). Shenkman delivered these lines slowly and deliberately to Parker, standing on her porch while she sat below him on the steps. He was quite literally talking down to her, demeaning and infantilizing her. For her benefit, he calls the math he hopes to find, which he will later characterize as "the most important math in the world," merely "the good stuff," which Catherine will only be able to see as "squiggles." Although Hal is otherwise eloquent in his descriptions of Robert's work, Catherine's proposition shocks him into short, simple, unambiguous statements in response to Catherine's suggestion of her own participation in the quest: "you can't...You don't have the math" (20). Throughout *Proof*, math becomes its own exclusionary, male language—the means by which those who have been initiated can achieve knowledge that is not universally accessible. Auburn's dramaturgical choice to end the first half of the play with a quick blackout after Catherine's line "I didn't find it, I wrote it" (47) emphasizes the importance of her admission. The abruptness of the act break allows audiences to sense how disturbing Catherine's line truly is, and suggests a connection between modern and medieval exclusionary gender politics.

Catherine's defense of herself as the author of the proof, and thus a member of this elite male institution, is central to Auburn's re-imagined quest. Parker conveyed the gravity of her argument by slowing her usually fluid and nonchalant delivery to clearly enunciate "I wrote. The Proof" (61). The strength of her delivery at this critical moment here stopped the rapid-fire flow of Shenkman and Johanna Day (Claire)'s dialogue about

the absurdity of Catherine as author. *Daily News* critic Fintan O'Toole commented that the complexity of Auburn's script means that "what Parker has to do... is not to show us the truth of Catherine's character, but to withhold it. Instead of filling in the gaps as actors usually do, she has to illuminate their mystery." O'Toole's notion of "mystery" refers both to Catherine's secret status as the proof's author, as well as to the elusiveness of the proof itself. The moment of her revelation was the height of her embodiment of this "mystery." It is shocking because of the challenge it poses to the traditionally gendered mathematical academy.

The ultimate proof of Catherine's authorship, and of her mastery of the abstract theory which allows her work to "touch" the medieval Grail, comes in the last line of Auburn's play: "let QN equal N prime. It's pretty basic number theory, but it just felt wrong to be using it to get to the Gauss--you get contradictions..." (Dramatists Play Service edition, p 75). This is the first time in the play that any of the characters discuss specific theories or techniques. Interestingly, Auburn does not include the mathematical lines in the version of the script published by Faber and Faber. The lines are only available as optional dialogue in the Dramatists' Play Service acting edition. The popularly sold Faber and Faber version includes only the stage direction "she begins to speak" (83). As Parker spoke the final lines, the lights in the Walter Kerr Theatre faded to black and the music swelled. Although these technical elements seemed to indicate the end of the show, however, Parker took off the backpack she had been wearing and sat close to Hal on the set's porch steps, indicating that she was just beginning her explanation of the proof, rather than ending it. The implication of Sullivan's staging choice was that the narrative continued beyond what the audience was allowed to see, although the production itself ended as Catherine spoke. Thus, the content of the proof continued to elude even the most mathematically savvy spectator, allowing it to retain the

arcane nature of the Grail even as Catherine explained it to Hal. Only those who have seen the show in production or read the acting version of the script know even the first lines of Catherine's explanation. Thus, just as the Grail revealed itself only to the worthy, even the most introductory information about Auburn's proof is available only to theatre goers and practitioners, rather than to the public at large.

Proof's affective juxtaposition of the medieval Grail and the contemporary mathematical academy is part of a larger trend of late twentieth- and twenty-first century plays that stage a quest narrative within the academy. These plays include Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* (1993), Hugh Whitmore's *Breaking the Code* (1988), and Michael Fryan's *Copenhagen* (1998), along with movies like Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), all of which dramatize a high-stakes search for truth within the fields of physics, history, or mathematics. There is a general lack of scholarly work on *Proof*, but what little there is often criticizes the play as the weaker of the "academic quest" group because it fails to reveal the precise nature of the object for which its characters search. Performance scholar Elizabeth Klaver, for instance, argues that Auburn's lack of specificity about his proof belies a "troubling cultural assumption" that abstract mathematics lies outside the intellectual capability of most audiences (13). The mysterious nature of the proof, in Klaver's conception, "makes *Proof* a weaker play than *Arcadia*," in which the object of main character Bernard Nightingale's quest is described often and in great detail (12). Interestingly, however it is this very elusiveness which highlights the medieval origins of *Proof's* quest narrative. Similar to the Grail's test of medieval knights' spiritual worth, the proof's difficulty proves Catherine's mathematical ability. Its defining characteristic, in Hal's description, is "how hard it would have been to come up with" (64). Rather than demonstrating a mistrust of his audiences, then, Auburn's lack of specificity allows the proof to function as a symbol rather than an easily

identifiable object. As is the case with the Grail in the contemporary imagination, the mysterious nature of the proof seems to increase its appeal.

The importance of Auburn's Grail proof thus lies in what it signifies, rather than in its specific characteristics. Similarly, the post-medieval Grail is "a mystery, a historical and literary puzzle and...[an example of] the shifting kaleidoscope of knowledge which is all we can really grasp about the past" (Barber 364). Both the proof and the Grail symbolize the quest for knowledge, and their importance is largely a product of the difficult process of achieving them. Boardman accounts for the variability in medieval versions of the Grail by arguing that it is meant to be understood as a flexible representation of achievement rather than as a specific object. It thus appears in whatever form best symbolizes a particular quest. It is a serving platter in Chrétien, for instance, because of the story's focus on the question of whom the grail *serves* (13). Likewise, in Auburn's play, Hal characterizes the proof vaguely as "the most important mathematics in the world" because it functions as a symbol for universal truth. As a piece of academic work, its meaning is also dependent on authorship and context. For Hal, the proof is the last of Robert's work, and thus an opportunity to gain personal fame and to redeem Robert's reputation. For Catherine, the work proves her ability as a mathematician in an exclusive, problematically gendered world. The non-specific nature of the proof thus facilitates a what Dinshaw would call a moment of contact between the medieval quest and the contemporary academy.

CONCLUSION: SINGULAR ARTHUR, PLURAL GRAIL

Morte d'Arthur, *Spamalot* and *Proof* stage versions of the Holy Grail reflective of the expectations, desires, and beliefs of twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences. In so doing, they share the qualities set out in this dissertation as particular to performances of affective medievalism—placing the Middle Ages into conversation with specific post-

medieval periods, relying on metatheatricity to stage the process of writing history, disrupting linear narrative, and embracing the plurality of the Middle Ages in contemporary discourse. Like the Middle Ages themselves, the Grail remains elusive and resists easy definition. In her discussion of T.S. Eliot's Grail in *The Wastelands*, modernist literary scholar Jessie Weston claims that

No theory or origin of the [Grail] story can be considered really and permanently satisfactory, unless it can offer an explanation of the story as a whole...and of the varying forms assumed by the Grail: why it should be at one time a Food-providing object of unexplained form, at another a Dish...and yet everywhere and always possess the same essential significance; in each and every form be rightly described as *The Grail* (qtd in Barber 249, emphasis original, *sic*).

To define the Grail is to embrace its inherent plurality. It is thus possible for manifestations as diverse as Poulton's reflected light, Idle's oversized prop hidden under an audience seat, and Auburn's mathematical proof to all be characterized as representations of the Holy Grail. Each of these appearances of the Grail also carry with them centuries-worth of Grail symbolism, allowing audiences to recognize them as the scared objects of their own respective quests.

The very appearance of both the Grail and an Arthur figure in these plays mark them as particularly notable in the canon of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Arthuriana, since contemporary versions of Arthur's story usually omit the Grail and focus instead on a single, recognizable portrayal of the medieval king. In most versions, the narrative is predictable: Arthur is a hero who saves England from outside powers (or corrupt nobles or churchmen), and he is deeply in love with his wife Guinevere, who inevitably falls in love with Lancelot, Arthur's best knight. As Ortenberg argued in 2006, "Arthurian interpretations of the last thirty years rely on those themes which have made [the]...myths popular from the beginning: adventure, magic, love and romance, bravery,

brotherhood, nobility and treachery” (Ortenberg 171-2). Arthur’s familiarity in the contemporary imagination is largely a product of the stability with which he has been represented. In turn, modern versions of the medieval quest that deal directly with the Grail, including Steven Spielberg’s 1989 *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, and Terry Gilliam’s 1991 *The Fisher King*, do not contain a King Arthur figure.⁴³ The reason for the modern disconnect between Arthur and the Grail seems simple: Arthur himself does not attempt the Grail quest, making it irrelevant to prevalent post-medieval narratives of his power or nobility. Similarly, the Grail is at best tangential to the romance between Lancelot and Guinevere, although Lancelot’s relationship with Guinevere is partially responsible for his inability to achieve the Grail. As demonstrated in previous sections, the Grail introduces variation and doubt to Arthur’s world, providing numerous possibilities for adventure as well as for religious introspection or metaphysical inquiries. It thus destabilizes any unilateral interpretation of Arthur and his world.

Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Lowe’s 1960 musical *Camelot* is representative of this modern tendency to omit the Grail from Arthur’s story.⁴⁴ The well-known musical stages the Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot love triangle, but takes care to present Arthur as an ideal ruler while Guinevere and Lancelot continually push the boundaries of traditional morality. Guinevere sings songs glorifying the questionable deeds that happen in “the lusty month of May,” for example, while Lancelot condemns virtue in a song entitled “Fie on Goodness.” Their unambiguously wicked affair destroys the Round Table. On his deathbed, however, Arthur sings the musical’s title song, and implores a young boy to tell the story of Camelot as the “one brief shining moment” of goodness and peace in history.

⁴³ The exception to this is of course *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a satire of both Arthur and the Grail, and may this be seen as a commentary on the relationship between the king and the legend.

Although this version of Camelot fell to human folly, the musical creates a nostalgia for the medieval past and for the goodness and innocence of its ruler. This nostalgia is an important marker of the musical's affective medievalism, since "the glory that was Camelot was, of course, a feeling later associated with the Kennedy Presidency. Hearing the final chorus of the title song, a theatergoer may respond with a memory of a time of idealism in our country" (Gussow). The ambiguous nature of the Grail and the moral complexity of the quest would thus have undercut Camelot's investment in nostalgia. Similarly, blaming the Grail quest for the destruction of the Round Table would have undermined the idea that Arthur's kingdom fell because of the wickedness of adultery.

Since there have been few theatrical versions of Arthur outside the ones discussed in this chapter, film has become the primary medium for contemporary explorations of Arthuriana. Although there have been upwards of 60 filmic adaptations of Arthurian legend, the two most recent and most widely distributed versions, Jerry Zucker's *First Knight* (1995), and Antoine Fuqua's *King Arthur* (2004), are representative in their separation of the Grail from Arthurian legend. Although the two films are as aesthetically different as are Olivier and Branagh's versions of *Henry V*, unlike the Henry films they construct a single narrative of their main character. In *First Knight*, Arthur (Sean Connery) is a triumphant warrior who returns to England after defending his country from vaguely defined foreign invaders. He vows to dedicate himself to peace and harmony, and promotes the Round Table as a symbol of justice and equality. Arthur even manages to retain his heroism in the face of his wife (Julia Ormond)'s affair with his best knight (Richard Gere). Lancelot rescues Guinevere from numerous attacks and kidnappings, and on his deathbed Arthur asks Lancelot to "take care of her," seeming to refer to both Guinevere and England itself. This blessing, and the fact that the clandestine lovers never consummate their relationship, allows the movie to work as a contemporary

love story while still constructing Arthur as heroic. *First Knight* glorifies Camelot as a shining example of peace and harmony, with Connery's Arthur at the helm. Thus, the Grail quest's reminder of Lancelot's folly and subsequent unworthiness would seem out of place. Indeed, *New York Times* film critic Janet Maslin notes that *First Knight* is invested in "eliminating the large part of Arthurian lore" in order to focus on "a stiff, grandiose version of Camelot's triangular love story." The Grail is a significant part of the omitted "lore," and would presumably have distracted from the film's familiar narratives of romance and chivalry.

King Arthur is in many ways a prequel to *First Knight*, dramatizing a teleological argument that Arthur's greatness as a king is due to his strength and compassion as a warrior. The film is an origin story, tracing the history of the Round Table and Arthur (Clive Owen)'s relationship with a small band of Sarmatian knights against the backdrop of the Roman colonization of England. Both *King Arthur* and *First Knight* value Arthur's battlefield strength (although *First Knight* examines this only through his stories about past wars), his commitment to equality and freedom, and the mutual attraction between he and Guinevere. In *King Arthur*, Guinevere (Kiera Knightly) is a skilled warrior who fights fiercely for her tribe, the Woads. She marries Arthur at the end of the film, however, undercutting the image of her as an independent, strong woman which had seemed present for the majority of the narrative. Franzoni's self-proclaimed attempt at historical accuracy justified the elimination of some of the familiar Arthurian elements, including, of course, the Grail.⁴⁵ As *NY Times* critic A.O. Scott argues, "in the name of accuracy, apparently, some familiar legendary elements have been altered or dropped

⁴⁵ The opening titles of the film proclaim that Fugua relied on recently discovered archaeological evidence" to construct a historically accurate portrait of the medieval warrior who served as the basis for centuries of Arthurian legend. The reality of this claim is quickly undercut by the reference in the opening titles to the vague "Dark Ages" rather than to a specific period.

altogether...Since the knights of the Round Table are stubbornly pagan...they are not about to go off in search of the Holy Grail.” Scott continues, calling the film “a blunt, glowering B picture, shot in murky fog and battlefield smoke, full of silly-sounding pomposity and swollen music.” Indeed, even for all of its claims at historical accuracy, *King Arthur* simply provided a dark backstory for the familiar glorification of Arthur and his knights.

The Grail quest disrupts the simple morality of stories like *First Knight*, *King Arthur*, and *Camelot*. As Ihle argues: “The appearance of the Grail in Arthur’s kingdom effects a near reversal of all formerly accepted values: earthly prowess is no longer sufficient and in fact, rather than proving one’s knightly worthiness, may only reveal his sins” (55). Part of Arthur’s shock at the adultery in *First Knight* and *Camelot* is Lancelot’s former reputation. Similarly, the brave Arthur of *King Arthur* would never have let his knights attempt a dangerous quest like that of the Grail without accompanying them. Thus, these versions had to purge the Grail because it introduces uncertainty and doubt into their presentations of the noble Arthur and the idyllic Camelot. Poulton’s *Morte*, *Spamalot*, and *Proof*, however, work to replace the Grail within Arthur’s story. As works of affective medievalism, they stage contextually-relevant versions of the Holy Grail which remain firmly within the domain of recognizable Arthurian legend, and introduce a plurality to modern representations of the medieval king’s story. As such, they employ a quintessentially medieval object to explore contemporary understandings of desire, achievement, purity, and strength. Similarly, the following chapter argues that the containment of the medieval within recognizable idioms is a central feature of the American tourist industry.

CHAPTER 4: “We Gladly Accept Master Card and Lady Visa:” Staging Medieval Fantasy in Tourist Attractions

As I walked down the dusty path of the Southern California Renaissance Faire on a late May day in 2010, one of the female members of my group turned abruptly and ran toward a drink booth. As the rest of our group watched and laughed, she held the top of her bodice away from her chest and let the woman serving drinks drop a cup of ice down the front of her costume. She gasped and rejoined our group, sighing “there is *no* way it was this hot back in the day. How could people have worn things like this all the time??” (Fieldnotes, 8 May, 2010). She was attired, as was I, in a heavy brocade bodice, full cotton skirt, linen shirt, and chemise. The temperature hovered around 90 degrees, average for a late Spring day in California, but not ideal for spending the day outside wearing heavy layers. Since I was hoping to observe how the Faire facilitates performances of the Middle Ages, I was intrigued by her contrast of “back in the day” to her contemporary experience. For the woman visiting the Faire with me, dressing as an indeterminately historical figure highlighted the physical differences between her own time and the one which she hoped to experience. Ironically, she had not only paid the Faire’s \$25 admission fee, but over \$200 for the clothing she found to be so uncomfortable. She admitted, however, that she counted this discomfort a necessary part of “experiencing the Faire” (field notes 8 May, 2010).

For visitors like my Faire companion, to “experience the Faire” is to use specific sensorial experiences to both construct and participate in a recognizable version of the Middle Ages, a period which otherwise exists in the contemporary imagination only as an unspecific “back in the day.”⁴⁶ Experiences like hers function within an economy of

⁴⁶ As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, the Southern California Renaissance Faire was originally intended to be a medieval fair, and the aesthetics of the Middle Ages continue to influence the space heavily.

tourism that makes particular versions of the Middle Ages accessible to those who visit them. These spaces, like the theatrical productions of medieval history or legend discussed in previous chapters, stage affective medievalism. Unlike the aforementioned productions, however, Renaissance Fairs allow customers to locate the Middle Ages within their own bodies, and invite guests to construct medieval history as a function of contemporary experience. This chapter takes seriously the medievalism of the Renaissance Fair, along with *Medieval Times* Dinner Theatre and Disneyland's Fantasyland, analyzing them as spaces which allow guests varying degrees of freedom to create personalized versions of the Middle Ages. Visitors to these spaces function as historical tourists who seek exotic time periods rather than, or perhaps in addition to, locations which are geographically removed from their own lives.

The creators of these spaces construct the Middle Ages as othered in order to attract customers, promising an opportunity to tour an exotic time period which nevertheless "touches" the present. Eco terms these kinds of non-specific evocations of the medieval past "the Middle Ages as pretext." Within this construction of the medieval, Eco argues, "the Middle Ages are taken as a sort of mythological stage on which to place contemporary characters" (68). Spaces like *Medieval Times*, Disneyland, and the Renaissance Fair which construct "the Middle Ages as pretext" allow guests to juxtapose elements of their own lives with specific versions of the medieval, as well as to participate selectively in the elements of the Middle Ages which appeal to them. These spaces thus provide opportunities to experience affective medievalism in action. Eco's notion of the medieval past as a "stage" also evokes the reliance on performance which unites these non-theatrical spaces.

Each of these spaces is invested in particular aspects of the Middle Ages, but they all stage medieval fantasy and a sense of escapism. These spaces do not stage specific

historical events, as do productions of *Henry V*, nor do they always present identifiable medieval personalities like King Arthur or Lancelot. Instead, they rely on medieval narratives and motifs, such as the spectacle of the tournament or the romance of courtly love. These spaces contribute to the plurality with which contemporary culture views the Middle Ages while simultaneously allowing guests varying degrees of freedom to intervene and participate in these constructions of the past. Thus, the affective notion of touching is physically realized in these spaces. As later sections will argue, for instance, Renaissance Fairs grant guests a relatively large degree of agency, while Disneyland presents a more choreographed tour of medieval fairy-tales.

Although the spaces in this chapter function differently than stage plays in a number of practical and theoretical ways, all three share the characteristics of affective medievalism. While each of these spaces presents enough material for a chapter or a book of its own, I focus here on the particular aspects of each that are most closely tied to the aesthetics of affective medievalism. *Medieval Times* stages a mock tournament, using performance as epistemology in order to create a semi-immersive medieval spectacle. Like Faires' *Henry V* and Doran's *Mort d'Arthur*, the medievalism of *Medieval Times* lies in its self-conscious exploration of performance. *Medieval Times* replicates the growing importance of the spectator to twelfth-century tournaments, which Fradenburg argues were "carefully orchestrated... movement[s] from war to the imitation of war" (194). Conversely, Disneyland's version of the medieval, which park historian Steven Fjellman refers to as "Distory," (59) erases all traces of war, plague, poverty, oppression, and hardship, leaving only a palatable version of the past grounded in fairytales and fantasy. The park's continual creation of nostalgia normalizes this sterilized version of the past and projects it into the future, thereby championing heteronormative ideas of gender and sexuality. Disneyland's emphasis on tradition demonstrates an investment in non-linear

historiography, particularly in the fairy tale space of Fantasyland. Finally, the Southern California Renaissance Faire contrasts a mead-soaked Middle Ages with a regal Renaissance, facilitating conversation between two historical periods and framing them both with contemporary expectations. Faire historian and performer Kimberly Tony Korol-Evans calls the Faire a “threshold” (71) between sixteenth-century England and contemporary America. I extend Korol-Evans’ image of the Faire as liminal threshold and argue that the Faire also stages a conversation between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Despite their differing agendas, all three of these spaces construct versions of the Middle Ages which are carefully tailored to guests’ expectations and fantasies, reducing the vastness of the medieval to what can be toured in a day.

Tourism/ Touring the Middle Ages

Because all three of the public spaces discussed in this chapter are run by for-profit companies which market to tourists, an examination of these spaces as affective medievalism requires an analysis of the ways in which their visitors “tour” the Middle Ages. As an industry, tourism relies on the modern desire to travel outside normal spheres of habitation. This travel can be business related, but most contemporary understandings of tourism equate the term with travel for pleasure, or for explorations of cultural, historical, or socially significant locations⁴⁷. In addition to the opportunity to interact with history, *Medieval Times*, Disneyland, and the Renaissance Faire offer pleasurable, leisure-based experiences which are removed from visitors’ daily lives. As such, these spaces construct the Middle Ages as both excitingly foreign and eminently recognizable. Cultural studies theorist Jennifer Craik describes this simultaneous appeal to the exotic and the familiar as a hallmark of tourism: “tourists revel in the otherness of destinations,

⁴⁷ See especially the essays in *Touring Cultures: Transformations in Travel and Theory*, edited by Chris Rojek and John Urry (1997).

people, and activities because they offer the illusion or fantasy of otherness...At the same time the advantages, comforts, and benefits of home are reinforced through the exposure to difference” (242). Thus, touristic travel highlights contrasts between customs, conditions, and circumstances that exist in the tourist’s home and at his/her destination. Tourists occupy destination spaces temporarily, and use their time away from home to collect experiences and memories that necessarily exist outside of their more familiar contexts.

Increasingly, tourists are seeking cultural experiences in destinations that are temporally as well as geographically removed from them. As Shakespeare historian Dennis Kennedy argues, increased ease of travel both nationally and internationally in the past fifty years has allowed greater access to sites considered to be historically significant. He writes, “the past is particularly important for tourism: jet travel since about 1960 has become a form of time travel... making us historians of heritage and connoisseurs of the alien” (175). This increased accessibility has, in turn, fueled desire to visit historical spaces in order to physically inhabit the past, if only briefly. As Kennedy’s argument suggests, the past functions similarly to a distant location by offering contrasts between a visitor’s home life and the site which s/he tours. Visitors to ancient sites like the Roman Coliseum or the Parthenon, for example, are able to feel the distance between themselves and the bodies for whom these sites were contemporary. Kennedy argues that tourists in these spaces “are modernity’s paradoxical consumers who seek not [only] merchandise but...sensation or renewal, inspiration or plain diversion” (175). Tourists in historical spaces hope to gain access to the lives of historical individuals, and thus to experiences not otherwise available in contemporary existence. A similar desire to physically occupy history is, in part, what drives guests to *Medieval Times*, Disneyland, and Renaissance Fairs, all of which offer recreations of history at a fraction of the cost of visiting foreign

historical sites.

Indeed, what tourists experience even in actual historical spaces are most often modern reconstructions of buildings, restored to the best of a contemporary architect's ability. This is particularly the case for medieval sites, complicating the question of their authenticity. As medievalist Steve Watson argues, "with the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin, and later, William Morris and the arts and crafts movement, the medieval... became a resort, in the sense of an ideological alternative to the industrial-urban nature of nineteenth-century modernity" (247). The romanticization of the Middle Ages led to revivals of medieval architecture and aesthetics, producing spaces which indicate more about how the nineteenth-century understood the Middle Ages than they do about the Middle Ages themselves. As will be argued later in this chapter, for instance, Sleeping Beauty's castle at Disneyland is itself a decontextualized reconstruction of nineteenth-century medievalism, which thus represents Disney's interest in fairytales rather than in historical accuracy. As medievalists argue, there are centuries' worth of these medieval revivals alive within popular consciousness. As tourist destinations, *Medieval Times*, Disneyland, and the Renaissance Faire function as hybrids between the medieval and the time period in which they were created.

Because the three spaces covered in this chapter make varying claims about their own authenticity, each presents guests with a particularly complicated opportunity to tour history. All three sites present a carefully constructed version of medieval history, grounded in their creators' assumptions about how contemporary Americans perceive the Middle Ages. Thus, *Medieval Times*, Disneyland, and the Renaissance Faire are peopled with knights in shining armor, damsels in distress, evil villains, drunken peasants, and giant turkey legs. These icons of twenty-first century medievalism provide the "familiarity" which these spaces rely upon to appeal to tourists. These conventional

characters and images highlight the distance between visitors' home lives and the medievalist spaces they visit, while simultaneously reassuring visitors of the proximity and, to some degree, the stability, of the past. These spaces thus offer a Middle Ages based in visitors' expectations rather than in historical fact.

Of course, as most tourist spaces, *Medieval Times*, Disneyland, and the Renaissance Faire are profit-seeking, and their versions of the Middle Ages are only accessible to those who can afford the admission price. Currently, an adult ticket to the Southern California Renaissance Faire costs \$25, an adult entry to *Medieval Times* is \$58.98 plus tax and processing fee, and adult admission to Disneyland is \$80. Indeed, touring the medieval comes with a hefty price tag. As sociologist Alan Bryman has argued, "the [Disney] parks provide an image of a Utopia that is not only congruent with middle-class values; the Utopia *is* middle-class America" (95, emphasis original). Most scholarship of these spaces, however, has largely ignored these economic considerations. In describing how the Maryland Renaissance Festival encourages visitors to perform as historical characters, for instance, Korol-Evans writes, "most of the over 250,000 patrons who grace the festival each year enjoy all that the sencescape has to offer... They enter in jeans and t-shirts and leave in brocade gowns. Their first drink of the day is from a plastic cup; their last comes in a pewter mug" (93). While these physical experiences do facilitate a feeling of affective contact with the Fair's version of history, and often encourage the kind of performance which Korol-Evans suggests, this feeling comes at a price. A "brocade gown" at the Southern California Faire can cost upwards of \$500, while a pewter mug is usually in the \$80 range. In its consideration of affective medievalism of these spaces, then, this chapter examines the economic implications of performing within them and the ways in which each frames the notion of a "public" space within the economy of tourism.

***MEDIEVAL TIMES'* PERFORMANCE OF SPECTACLE AND SPECTATORSHIP**

Upon arrival at the Dallas, Texas, *Medieval Times* castle, one of nine such establishments in North America, guests are provided with a cardboard crown in one of six colors which aligns them with a particular knight for the evening. From the ticket stalls, they are led into a small room where a photographer poses couples and groups around a wooden throne, and then into what appears to be a large medieval hall. The high-ceilinged room is vast, and houses two bars, souvenir shops offering remembrances of a performance yet to come, racks of costumes for guests who desire further photo opportunities, and an area in which children line up to be “knighted” by an actor dressed as a medieval king. Guests mill around, examining replicas of medieval weapons, watching the knighting ceremonies, or buying drinks. Eventually, doors at the far side of the hall open into the performance space—an indoor oval sand-covered playing area roughly the size of a football field with guest seating on all sides in three tiered rows. Guests are seated in sections according to the colors of their cardboard crowns, and will be invited throughout the evening to cheer for the knight who wears the color corresponding to their section. The lights in the room are kept low, focusing attention on the performance space.

A dinner consisting of several varieties of meat is served *sans* silverware because, as each actor/waiter is instructed to say, such utensils did not exist in the Middle Ages.⁴⁸ Curiously, the vegetarian option does come with utensils, perhaps in an acknowledgement of the anachronistic nature of a medieval vegetarian, which will be discussed later in this chapter. As guests eat, the show begins. The current *Medieval Times* storyline revolves around a Spanish king longing for a peace treaty with

⁴⁸ Medieval people did, in fact, carry personal spoons and knives. *Medieval Times*, however, is invested in an image of the Middle Ages as primitive, and therefore exotic, which favors guest expectation over historical accuracy.

neighboring kingdoms. This narrative gives way early on, however, to numerous displays of horsemanship and falconry and to the tournament—the main event of the evening. Several rounds of jousting competitions in which knights on horseback ride the entire length of the playing space are followed by hand-to-hand combat in the center of the space until a winner is declared.

Medieval Times' marketing materials advertise the company as a hybrid restaurant/performance space which allows visitors to "leave [their] world[s] behind and join...an age of valor and chivalry [where] all the pageantry of our ancient realm, and a sumptuous feast await" (program, 1). Geographer Dean MacCannell refers to this kind of constructed ambiance within a tourist site as "staged authenticity" (175). This construction of what is essentially a theatrical set allows visitors to simultaneously acknowledge the falseness of a space and to pretend that the space represents historical reality. Visitors to *Medieval Times* make a conscious decision to participate in the spectacle which surrounds them. The highly structured nature of a visit to *Medieval Times* facilitates the company's resemblance to a themed amusement park. Further, as became apparent during my visits to the Dallas, Texas, castle, guests at *Medieval Times* function simultaneously as tourists and performers in a large-scale historical reenactment. Unlike reconstructions of events like the American Civil War, *Medieval Times* uses idioms of performance, spectacle, and spectatorship to stage a history which guests remember from childhood stories rather than from history books. The company's self-conscious use of performance marks its production of history as highly choreographed affective medievalism. *Medieval Times* simultaneously constructs an exciting performance event and an imagined version of medieval history, grafting visitors' memories of family fun to their shared cultural memories of the Middle Ages.

Using the familiar structure of a theatre program which gives information about

the bodies which spectators see on stage, *Medieval Times* attempts to frame the joust with a medieval narrative of chivalry and combat. The commemorative program substitutes short biographies of the show's characters for the names and resumes of the actor/combatants themselves. While it is virtually impossible, for instance, to find out the name of the performer playing the Blue Knight ("our" knight on my first visit to *Medieval Times* in November, 2010), for example, I learn from the program that the fictional Blue Knight is named Don Alberto del Mau, and that "as a young squire Del Mau earned his place among the knights of the realm in a desperate battle." Further, I am informed of Del Mau's violent sense of justice: "renowned as a champion of the defenseless, his blood will not be cooled, nor his vengeance postponed." As Phelan argues, "Mimetic representation requires that the writer/speaker employs pronouns, invents characters... examines the words and images of others, so that the spectator can secure a coherent belief in self-authority, assurance, presence" (5). Del Mau's biography in the program allows guests to experience Phelan's doubled "belief" in the *Medieval Times* tournament as both a spectacle witnessed inside a performance space and as a representation of historical combat. Thus, *Medieval Times* uses the program to activate guests' preconceptions about medieval kingdom, allowing them to "secure belief" in the authority of *Medieval Times*.

Indeed, *Medieval Times* takes care to stage a version of the Middle Ages grounded in audience expectations. According to its website, a visit to *Medieval Times* allows guests to access a world in which "a childhood daydream comes to life." *Medieval Times* thus casts the Middle Ages as Eco's mystical pre-history which houses fantasies of powerful kings, chivalrous knights, and evil warlords. Significantly, *Medieval Times'* marketing materials do not specify whether it is the historical Middle Ages or *Medieval Times'* version of the medieval that creates and fulfills this daydream. The company

assumes that audiences have more or less common exposure to Arthurian legends and Disney versions of medieval fairytales but, considering its visibility within popular culture, *Medieval Times* also has a large hand in promoting its version of history.⁴⁹ Corder stresses how formative a visit to *Medieval Times* can be for young children—not because it is strictly educational, but because parents who bring their children to *Medieval Times* have ““sparked a fairytale come alive” for a child who “dreams of being a princess or a knight” (*Journey Behind the Scenes*). The promotional videos on the company’s website are targeted at children, depicting a young boy who dreams of a knight, and then meets one at *Medieval Times*. The company thus cultivates the very fantasies which it aims to fulfill.

There are undoubtedly financial benefits to marketing the performance to families rather than to adults alone, but this connection between the Middle Ages and childhood has historical roots. Dutch historian Johan Huizinga’s 1919 highly influential *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (*Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen*), for instance, is predicated on the image of the Middle Ages as the childhood of civilization. Huizinga describes medieval people as children inhabiting a fairytale world which the modern mind can only imagine: “We have to transpose ourselves into this impressionability of mind, into this sensitivity to tears... before we can judge how colorful and intensive life was back then” (7). Although Huizinga’s work has been roundly dismissed by medieval historians, it represents an

⁴⁹ Indeed, the published origin story of *Medieval Times* attempts to create a narrative beginning with the tournament spectacles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and ending with the contemporary performances. The establishment’s website indicates that although the first *Medieval Times* dinner theatre opened in Majorca in 1973, it was inspired by a long Spanish tradition of “classic equestrian skills and medieval pageantry that took place in outdoor arenas.” According to the website, as the chain spread to the United States, creators retained the original’s “commitment to the accuracy of weapons and costumes.” This emphasis on performing a centuries-old tradition attempts to lend authenticity and historical authority to the joust, and Corder has argued that the goal of *Medieval Times*’ performance event is to convince guests that “[they’re] watching something that’s remained unchanged for centuries” (*Journey Behind the Scenes*, emphasis original).

important trend of medievalism which persists in spaces like *Medieval Times*. Both *Medieval Times* and Huizinga present the Middle Ages as a primitive, child-like setting for an exciting, idealized fantasy world.

The souvenir DVD available to guests highlights the ways in which *Medieval Times*' theatrical practices, including casting and rehearsal, resonate with this romanticized version of the medieval. In his interview on the DVD, Director of Stunt Choreography Michael Baker argues that "the qualifications that *Medieval Times* is looking for in a knight are probably quite similar to the qualifications that would make a good candidate for a real knight...to me it comes down to character and integrity and work ethic and the ability to take direction...and *trust*." Of course, Baker's statement both ignores the medieval requirement that knights be of noble birth and highlights the feudal nature of the relationship between performer and director. His evocation of medieval knights, however, casts the bodies of *Medieval Times*' performers as equivalent to those ancestral bodies which popularized the joust centuries ago. The historical accuracy of his statement is thus less important than the effect it has on visitors' imaginations. By attempting to contain medieval practice in contemporary acting, *Medieval Times* uses affective medievalism to construct its actors as historical signifiers, activating fairytale notions of chivalry and loyalty.

This emphasis on representation at *Medieval Times* mirrors the ways in which medieval tournaments used mock battle to signify warfare. Writing of medieval efforts to re-frame violent knightly practices in tournaments, Fradenburg argues that "the aristocratic body is remannered by the joust: once a practiced and trained body...it becomes increasingly a dramatized and civilized body...the space in which it operates is redefined as scene rather than battleground" (195). Tournaments removed knights from battlefields and placed them onto purpose-built performance spaces, thereby containing

battlefield bloodlust within structured spectacle. Similarly, at *Medieval Times*, performers' bodies become signifiers of the Middle Ages, attempting to contain centuries of military history within contemporary fight choreography. Both the joust and *Medieval Times* stage the spectacle of warfare, turning violence into an exciting performance. Although the risk of injury is much less at *Medieval Times* than it would have been at a medieval joust, owing to actors' extensive fight training and Baker's choreography, both versions of the event rely on spectators' desire to witness violence in a controlled environment.

For most spectators, however, *Medieval Times*' narrative of medieval violence obscures the historical Middle Ages, replacing it with a fantasy constructed from centuries of re-imaginings of the medieval. The bodies of the unnamed performers become effigies for medieval knights, "fill[ing] by means of surrogation a vacancy created by the absence of an original" (Roach 36). Knights, like the historical Middle Ages themselves, have disappeared and been replaced with post-medieval constructions of chivalrous and honorable warriors. *Medieval Times* is an example of performance scholar Joseph Roach's description of performances that "carry with them the memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions—those that were rejected, and, even more invisibly, those that have succeeded" (5). The plurality of the Middle Ages in the contemporary imagination means that spaces like *Medieval Times* reference popular notions of the Middle Ages which have "succeeded" in replacing the period itself for modern consumers. For example, although *Medieval Times* features a villain (who is unambiguously evil, and just as unambiguously vanquished), the show ignores the Crusades, the Black Plague, peasant revolts, and religion in favor of familiar narratives of chivalry and romance. The absence of other aspects of medieval history is largely unmarked, largely because *Medieval Times*' creative team does nothing to dispel the idea

that their Middle Ages is based on anything other than fact. Cordner goes so far as to argue on the DVD that “if you’re at our show, that would have been your experience at a medieval tournament a thousand years ago.” The implication of Cordner’s presentist argument is that the act of witnessing destroys the distance between contemporary tourists and medievalist performers. For Cordner, *Medieval Times*’ surrogated joust replaces any need to learn about the historical joust. *Medieval Times* thus functions similarly to medieval movies as a major source of information about the Middle Ages and medieval practice.

Interestingly, *Medieval Times*’ emphasis on the spectator recalls medieval theatrical practice. Guests are sensorially immersed in dazzling visual spectacle, the sounds of clanging weapons and thundering horse hooves, and the smells of live animals, tournament field dust, and quasi-medieval food from the moment they enter the castle. The result is a “flamboyant seizure of space and time” which Symes argues was an essential element of medieval performance (138). She writes that medieval performers used sensory tactics like “the redirection of the gaze through the occupation of the built environment...the adoption of postures, garments, or habits of speech recognizable to the targeted audience; [and] the reiteration and recording of claims to authority” (138) in order to command audiences’ attention in crowded public spaces. Although *Medieval Times* uses an indoor rather than an outdoor performance space, the overwhelming visual, oral, and olfactory experience of being inside a *Medieval Times* castle, combined with the space’s own claims to its historical accuracy, create an illusion of authority. The air inside the playing space is musty and humid, the result of hundreds of nights’ worth of performances featuring live horses. On my first visit, we were seated in the front row, which allowed us to hear the noise of horse hooves, smell the dust kicked up from the joust, and see the sweat on the foreheads of the knights who rode past us. This, along

with the smells and tastes of the meal we ate, allowed us to become caught up in the space's "staged authenticity." Of course, the historical accuracy of *Medieval Times*' reliance on the senses to create a performance is most likely a lucky coincidence rather than the result of detailed research. Still, the immersive nature of the *Medieval Times* castle does recreate what scholars understand to have been the sensorial experience of medieval spectatorship.

The link between medieval performance practices and *Medieval Times* also includes the importance of spectacle to both medieval and twenty-first century tournaments. Medieval tournaments were popular from roughly 1150 until 1350, when large-scale combats gave way to smaller jousting competitions. The events were opportunities to display horsemanship and weaponry skills and for young knights to make names for themselves while encountering less risk than they would in an actual battle. As tournament historian David Crouch argues,

medieval knights were armed men, and they were at liberty to use their arms as and when they saw fit...There is a certain fascination about this medieval freedom to commit violence which resembles the fascination with the Hollywood depiction of violence in epics and space operas (153).

While Crouch restricts the analogy between medieval and modern blood-lust to cinematic examples, *Medieval Times* capitalizes on the spectacle inherent in live performance to frame its tournament as uniquely thrilling. The show relies on the spectacle of bodies in peril, and the program contains even more detailed information about the weapons used in the tournament than it does about the characters of the conflict.

Thus, both *Medieval Times*, as a representation of a medieval tournament, and thirteenth-century tournaments themselves, as representations of wartime violence, rely on spectatorship to create meaning. Fradenburg argues that, as they increased in

popularity, medieval tournaments became more invested in “ritualization, artificiality, and theatricality” (192). She links the changing nature of the tournament to the growing importance of tournament spectators. Early tournaments took place across large open areas which made it impossible for any spectator to see an event in its entirety. Eventually, with the rising popularity of jousts as discrete events disconnected from larger-scale combat, placement of spectator stands became a central concern. The development from tournament to joust thus necessitated the spectators’ gaze. Similarly, entertaining the spectator is paramount at *Medieval Times*, as, of course, the nameless knights of the nine North American castles have nothing to gain personally from winning a pre-choreographed fight. Audience members are participants in the tournament as well as tourists of history, loudly and enthusiastically cheering on the knight whom they have been told to support. Similarly, Crouch characterizes medieval audiences as “quite as vocal an audience as in any modern sporting event...They would shriek when a knight went down in a welter of blood in a dangerous fall...urging men and horses on” (56). This level of spectator participation is so important to *Medieval Times* that it is choreographed. A particular audience member’s seat assignment creates both heroes and villains for her, and she is instructed by her waiter when she should yell and wave her colored banner in support of her knight. In short, she is responsible for an important element within *Medieval Times*’ performance of the medieval.

While the audience’s gaze is vital to *Medieval Times*, however, the visitor’s role within this tourist attraction is much more controlled than that of the medieval tournament spectator. Crouch argues that medieval audiences “would sit for hours in their sheltered seats and reminisce about past encounters; in many ways they were the memory of the tournament, and possessing its memory, they were necessarily its arbiters” (56). At *Medieval Times*, this process of memory creation is reversed. Creators choreograph how

Medieval Times will be remembered and generate repeat business by constructing nostalgia for the performance itself. The last page of the souvenir program, for example, encourages visitors to “be our royal guest[s] once again...and witness another remarkable spectacle! A tournament of daring and skill awaits you! Your patronage will always be appreciated!” Indeed, patronage is key to both experiencing and remembering *Medieval Times*, and access to the company’s reminders of itself are determined by how much a guest has paid for her ticket. Those who have chosen to upgrade to a “royalty package” are provided with a souvenir DVD, promising highlights of the evening’s festivities. The DVD awaits the guest’s arrival at her seat, however, destroying the illusion that it is a recording of the particular tournament she had paid to see live. Rather, the DVD preserves clips of an ideal *Medieval Times* tournament, eliminating the risks inherent in live performance, just as *Medieval Times* itself preserves a customized and controlled version of the Middle Ages.

The DVD juxtaposes these clips with sound bites from the creative team, all of which attempt to blur performance and lived experience in order to generate repeat visits. Although the very existence of the DVD seems to argue otherwise, Cordner argues in it that “you can see our show over and over again and each time you experience it you’ll experience something new. The only place in the world you can *live* that experience is at *Medieval Times*.” Cordner emphasizes the value of repeated visits to the show, and implies that is *Medieval Times*’ performance of history, rather than the medieval history itself, that the spectators “live” when they visit the castle. This slippage between history and performance is emblematic of the *Medieval Times* aesthetic, which casts reenactment as history. Phelan argues that because performance by definition cannot be repeated, documentation like the *Medieval Times* DVD serves “only a[s] a spur to memory, and encouragement of memory to become present” (146). The complicating factor of a

Medieval Times souvenir, however, is that what it “makes present” is not the medieval past itself, but rather *Medieval Times*’ reenactment of that past. The DVD is an artifact of an imagined history. Urban design theorist Michael Sorkin writes similarly of a souvenir recording of a Disneyworld attraction:

As the tram rolls through the Animatronic Temple of Doom, a hundred video-cams whirringly record the ‘event’ for later consumption at home. That tape is an astonishing artifact, unprecedented in human history. If post modern culture can be said to be about the weaving of ever more elaborate fabrics of simulation, about successive displacements of ‘authentic’ signifiers, then the Japanese family sitting in front of their Sony back in Nagasaki, watching their home videos of the Animatronic re-creation of the creative geography of a Hollywood ‘original,’ all recorded in a simulacrum of Hollywood in central Florida, must be said to have achieved a truly weird apotheosis of raw referentiality (229).

Sorkin’s poststructuralist critique of Disneyland, (a space which will be discussed later in this chapter), as performance that destroys any need for an “original” lays bare *Medieval Times*’ particular anxiety about authenticity. Faced with its own destruction of the period it is meant to signify, the company must promote itself as the origin of its own medieval tournament, and market artifacts of performance and simulation, rather than of history. Performance, both of the trained actor/combatants in the tournament and of the spectators who have been instructed to cheer for them, thus sustains *Medieval Times*’ re-construction of the Middle Ages.

A MEDIEVAL/RENAISSANCE CONVERSATION AT THE FAIRE

Performance is similarly integral to the Irwindale, California Renaissance Pleasure Faire, but structures of representation at the Faire place visitors at the intersection of two time periods rather than grounding them in a specific version of the Middle Ages. The program for the 2010 Faire, for example, opens with greeting from Queen Elizabeth to her “Loving People:” “It is with a happy heart and an eye for

adventure that we find ourselves here in Port Depford.” Although the Faire’s informational and promotional materials avoid specificity, they indicate that the Faire takes place during Elizabeth I’s reign (1558-1603). The Faire does not publish a history of itself nor the details of its founding as a medieval fair. In particular, although the Faire celebrates food, dress, social structures, and cultural/political institutions which the contemporary imagination codes as “medieval”—including a jousting tournament—these events and traditions are not identified as products of the Middle Ages. In practice, however, the Renaissance Faire allows tourists to experience familiar constructions of the early modern and the medieval simultaneously. Indeed, as this section will argue, the Faire space disrupts linear historical narratives to stage a conversation between contemporary fantasies of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance.

The Southern California Faire was the first of over 220 fairs in the United States,⁵⁰ and its origins belie its inherent medievalism. In 1963, schoolteacher Phyllis Patterson envisioned a medieval fair as a space in which students could learn about medieval history by using their own bodies, rather than secondary texts, as research material. Her methods are in fact those of affective medievalism, which suggests the body as a site of touch between the present and the medieval past. As *Renaissance Magazine* columnist Ben Simons writes, she “chose to stage a history of drama as a performance project...she envisioned an interactive environment where everyone, from the theatre players to the vendors and visitors, were engaged in a lively exchange” (35). Patterson’s strategy reflects Symes’ later argument that medieval performance facilitated the processes by which medieval “groups and individuals conveyed information, asserted opinion, negotiated conflicts, and exercised agency during a period when theatre was

⁵⁰ As reported by SCRIBE, the online self-described Renaissance Faire Information network. Some of these fairs are listed as medieval fairs.

open to all” (3). Thus, Patterson’s pedagogy staged an understanding of the Middle Ages as a backdrop for embodied learning. In pitching her idea to potential sponsors, however, Patterson realized that her vision of the medieval was in conflict with a prevalent construction of the period as socially regressive. One potential sponsor was quick to refuse, claiming with a puzzling amount of assurance, “I don’t want anything to do with the Middle Ages; there were no civil rights back then” (35). In order to allay accusations of cultural conservatism, Patterson changed the name of her project to the Renaissance Faire, correctly guessing that the early modern period would be more socially palatable. The change, however, was in name only. Patterson’s Faire was still thoroughly medieval and prominently featured, for example, the aforementioned jousting tournament.⁵¹ Jousting at the Renaissance Faire is a reference to the popular culture allure of tournaments in spaces like *Medieval Times*, but also serves as a reminder of the Faire’s medieval aesthetic.

The current incarnation of Patterson’s Faire takes place on a 20 acre lot which visitors approach after exiting the 210 freeway in Los Angeles county and driving down a long and twisting dirt road. Wooden signs pointing the direction to the grounds are mixed with posters advertising Bud Light and Guinness beer, marking the Faire as a touristic space that uses “predictable forms of experiences” (Craik 115) to make its version of the past a recognizable and relatable spectacle. Indeed, one 10-year Faire attendee remarked she returns to the Faire every year because it provides “a chance to pretend to exist as someone else from another time and place without having to fully give up all of what makes modern America so great...[like] washing hands and ATMs” (Fieldnotes 8 May,

⁵¹ While jousts still occurred during the Renaissance, the event was largely ceremonial and stripped of most of its martial significance. As Fradenburg argues, tournament jousting allowed a ruler like Elizabeth to “stage [her]self as the source of peace and plenty” (218). Indeed, Elizabeth’s knights often carried olive branches, linking their efforts to peace and harmony, rather than to violence or displays of military power. Renaissance Faire jousts, on the other hand, are heavily invested in violent spectacle and mock warfare.

2010). Like *Medieval Times*, then, the Renaissance Faire caters to contemporary need as well as to historical fantasy, allowing guests the comforts of home against a historical backdrop. Once parked in the dusty lot, usually full of patrons making last minute adjustments to their costumes, visitors approach what appears to be a giant pirate ship which functions as the entrance to the Faire space. After passing through this evocative threshold, they encounter hundreds of costumed Faire staff renting and selling costumes, hawking refreshments and souvenirs of varying degrees of historical accuracy, or simply milling around the grounds and interacting with guests. The space also boasts twelve designated performance stages, offering entertainments ranging from adaptations of Shakespeare to Middle Eastern belly dancing. One of the main attractions is the Queen's procession, in which Elizabeth greets her subjects accompanied by the Earl of Essex and a royal retinue.

Using the same anachronistic historiography as *Henry V*, which inserted Renaissance figures like Elizabeth and Essex into medieval stories, the Renaissance Faire places these historical figures in the same space as the jousting tournament. It is in fact possible to, as I did, attend Elizabeth's royal procession and then cross the Faire space to the jousting arena, thereby moving backwards in time from the sixteenth to the twelfth century. Crossing this indefinite threshold between time periods also changes the way in which visitors behave. Without direction to do so, spectators at the procession lined up neatly along the Faire's main dirt road, bowing reverently to Elizabeth as she passed. As I looked around, I noticed that fellow visitors seemed to stand a bit straighter while watching the procession, and, for a few moments, the loud shouts and laughter which generally characterize the Faire's soundscape disappeared. Most spectators' attention was focused forward or toward the approaching queen. The overwhelming atmosphere of the procession was more akin to a state function than to a celebratory faire.

Diametrically opposed to the procession, the joust facilitates total immersion in a medieval event. Like guests at *Medieval Times*, visitors at the Faire's joust are aligned with a knight based upon seating area, and a staff member costumed as a peasant explains the rules of the game and the reason for the day's particular conflict. S/he instructs spectators to cheer for "their" knight and to boo and hiss at his opponent, encouraging them to practice by staging competitions to see which seating area can cheer the loudest. The degree of rowdiness at the Faire's outdoor joust far surpasses that of *Medieval Times*, due in part to the greater availability of alcoholic beverages at the Faire, as well as the jovial atmosphere created by the space's juxtaposition of time periods. Faire spectators, many of whom are already wearing costumes, play a double role at the joust as visitors to Port Depford and as deeply loyal medieval subjects. As at any sporting event, the enthusiasm is highly contagious, and audience members become vocal medieval spectators as the contenders take the field. Korol-Evans argues that visitor participation in these events marks "how performers and patrons...experience...the state created by the overlapping of the actuality of twenty-first-century America and the historical record of sixteenth-century England" (1). Korol-Evans's construction, however, obscures the medieval nature of such participation. While the visitor behavior which the Faire cast teaches and encourages at the joust does reflect a carnivalesque immersion in the Faire's performance of history, it is also a direct translation of spectator behavior at medieval jousts, as described in the previous section of this chapter.

Although this contrasting behavior at the joust and at Elizabeth's procession is not officially marked or legislated at the Faire, the difference in atmosphere at the two performance events is palpable. Of course, the behavior I observed at the procession does not reflect what we know of spectators at Renaissance public performances. Renaissance historian Martin White, for example, describes spectators at the Globe as anything but

reverent. Globe audiences could expect “fireworks during and after performances...a large portion of the audience standing, mobile and no doubt vocal; an evident willingness for audiences and actors to interact; a heterogeneous audience...[and] a thriving trade in prostitution and pickpocketing” (129). Thus, spectator behavior at the procession reflects an idealization of the Renaissance as a contrast to the Middle Ages, rather than a performance of Renaissance spectatorship itself. This oversimplified distinction between the medieval and the early modern is another result of the aforementioned construction of the Middle Ages as the unruly childhood of civilization. Huizinga, for example, describes the Middle Ages as more simplistic than later periods: “the distance between sadness and joy, between good and bad fortune, seemed to be much greater than for us; every experience had that degree of distinctness and absoluteness that joy and sadness still have in the mind of a child (1). Again, Huizinga’s historiography has been discredited, but the Faire’s contrast between the performance of spectatorship at the procession and the joust demonstrates a similar understanding of the medieval. As discussed above, Patterson’s sponsors also saw the medieval as the antithesis of the Renaissance, funding a celebration of the civilized early modern rather than the socially backwards medieval. The Renaissance Faire’s construction of the early modern is thus dependent on what guests perceive to be the aesthetic and cultural differences between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The co-existence of contemporary notions of the medieval and the Renaissance allows the Faire to function as a hybrid fantasy space. One long-time fairgoer who works as an elementary school teacher argued that “the faire is a different experience for different people. It is a great way to make history come alive without feeling like you have to follow someone else's lesson plan” (Fieldnotes 8 May, 2010). The Faire’s deviation from a formal “lesson plan” of history thus allows guests to feel that they have

access to any number of experiences while they “escape from modern life” (field notes 8 May, 2010). Referencing Victor Turner’s work on liminality and performance, Korol-Evans argues that “the culture of the contemporary American Renaissance Festival provides... an ability to invert social order and create from it something new” (7). She goes on to discuss the Faire space as one in which the “destruction of the old” creates “the new” (7). The Faire’s ever-present historical pastiche, however, actually suggests that it is the persistence of the old — the bleeding through of one time period into another, —that both creates and sustains the space’s ethos. A guest who stumbles from a mead-soaked round of cheering at the joust to stand in line for Elizabeth’s procession feels a distinct change in atmosphere and (often) adjusts her behavior accordingly. The contrast which that guest feels between these performances represents the effect that her perceptions of the medieval have on her imagination of the Renaissance, and vice versa. The Faire is thus a distinctive place in which modern ideas of medieval and Renaissance social interactions occur simultaneously

In a further historiographic juxtaposition, Patterson’s inclusion of the medieval within the Renaissance also reflects sixteenth-century constructions of the Middle Ages. Renaissance historian Louis B. Wright argues that by the sixteenth century, the Middle Ages was already seen as a far-off fantasy setting, and Elizabethan readers turned to medieval chivalric romances for stories of adventure (375). Similarly, Utz argues that some Renaissance writers incorporated medieval elements into their work in a way that foreshadowed nineteenth-century authors like Sir Walter Scott and Alfred Lord Tennyson (35). There is also evidence that Robin Hood, in his iteration as medieval nobleman-turned-outlaw, was also a popular subject for inexpensive sixteenth-century publications targeted at lower class audiences and usually full of exotic adventure stories. For Renaissance readers and writers, the medieval period functioned as a kind of historical

tourist destination, a setting for adventure and romance far removed from their everyday lives. Similarly, the Renaissance Faire allows twenty-first-century visitors to embody this sixteenth-century desire to both “tour” and touch a fantasy version of the Middle Ages.

As they are today, fairs were popular entertainments in the sixteenth-century, and have become famous for providing spaces in which “popular and elite cultures merged” (Resende 84). While the Southern California Faire’s admission fee may limit the economic variety of its visitors, the Faire preserves this sixteenth-century sense of juxtaposition by serving as a crossroads between time periods. In the design of the original Faire, Patterson “wanted to have as few distractions as possible which would take people out of an immersion in the time period” (qtd in Simons 35). In the Faire’s current incarnation this “time period” has been confused, as the space actively encourages comparison between the practices and traditions of the thirteenth, twelfth, and twenty-first centuries. Still, this unique merging of time periods creates an immersive fantasy space for contemporary visitors, allowing them to explore their own and the Faire’s notions of what it means to be both Renaissance and medieval. Patterson’s embodied pedagogy created the unwritten laws that govern faire behaviors, mandating deference to the Queen’s litter and loud cheering at the joust. The space’s unmarked containment of the medieval within the Renaissance is emblematic of its ongoing conversation between sixteenth- and twelfth-century values, which is in turn staged for twenty-first century visitors.

FANTASYLAND’S MEDIEVAL OUT OF TIME

Like the Renaissance Faire, Disneyland also facilitates immersion in a version of history suited to the tastes and expectations of the twenty-first century. Of the spaces discussed in this chapter, however, Disneyland is the most reliant on fantasy and fairytales. Specifically, Disneyland stages affective medievalism by containing idealized

versions of past, present, and future in every visit. The park is a carefully controlled amalgam of landscapes that range from the American West in Frontierland to a celebration of invention and entrepreneurship in Tomorrowland and the uncannily familiar territory of children's cartoons in Toontown. The pastiche created by these varied "lands" substitutes for the reality of visitors' daily lives. Indeed, in 1963, Walt Disney convinced the Anaheim City Council to pass an ordinance "prohibiting the construction of tall buildings" around the park, so that there would be no non-Disney structures visible to remind visitors of reality (Bryman 113). One of Disneyland's most iconic images is Sleeping Beauty's Castle in Fantasyland. The building, familiar to park visitors from Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), is a replica of the Bavarian Neuschwanstein castle, itself built in 1859 as a replica of three medieval castles which previously stood on the castle's hilltop location. Disney's building, thus a recreation of nineteenth-century medieval revival, bears the coat of arms which Walt Disney created for his family after the success of his corporate empire. The drawbridge of the castle is one of the major gateways into the park from the central thoroughfare of Main Street, meaning that many visitors to Disneyland have to travel through Disney's layered recreation of the Middle Ages in order to reach other locations like Tomorrowland and Adventureland. Directly across from the castle in Fantasyland lies a replica of the sword in the stone which features prominently into both the medieval and the Disney version of the King Arthur legends.

Indeed, along with its medieval replica-cum-tourist attraction, Fantasyland uses Arthurian imagery to stage a Middle Ages grounded in the ideals of the Disney corporation. Until recently, for example, a daily performance was held around the sword in the stone with the aim of choosing a child to be the "ruler" of Disneyland for the day. After a series of adults had unsuccessfully attempted to move the sword, which is held in

its plaster “stone” with strong magnets, an actor playing Merlin would call a child from the audience who would miraculously be able to pull the sword from the stone. Aronstein and Coiner note that this child was “always a Disney-cute blonde boy” (219), and thus representative of Disney’s idealized (white male) guest. While it occurred, this performance was emblematic of the control Disney continues to wield over guest experiences of the past within the park. The Arthurian performance piece exemplifies Disney’s strategic normalization of the medieval into an idealized story which, like *Medieval Times* and the Renaissance Faire, incorporates guest participation into a specific version of the past.

Indeed, Disneyland presents medieval history as a place its guests can occupy physically. Numerous scholars including historian Judith A. Adams have characterized the participatory nature of the park as one of the major reasons for its success:

One of the park’s primary attractions is that it allows visitors to walk right into and experience the historical environments and fantasy worlds they passively watch on the television screen in their living rooms. They can immerse themselves and participate in the worlds that tantalize them nightly but from which the television screen separates and limits them to the status of observers (96).

Fantasyland in particular is engineered to make its visitors feel physically connected to the fairytale past, and an element of role-playing is often central to a guest’s experience of the area. As one visitor told me, in Fantasyland, “like when you were a kid, you can pretend. Nobody cares if you’re cheesy...you can be really cheesy” (Fieldnotes, 29 June, 2011). The “cheesiness” which he describes results from immersion within Disney’s version of the past, rather from than the detachment that is possible within spaces like the Renaissance Faire which continually reference periods outside of the Middle Ages. Every moment in Disneyland has been carefully engineered to facilitate this sense of

immersion, as well as to prevent deviation from the Disney's version of history.

Sleeping Beauty's Fantasyland castle in particular facilitates this immersion within Disney's historical aesthetic and typifies the park's version of the Middle Ages. Like the building itself, the company's version of the Sleeping Beauty story from which the castle derives has complex medieval and post-medieval origins. As folklorist Jan M. Ziolkowski argues, Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* is largely based on the story contained in the Grimm Brothers' early nineteenth-century collection of fairytales. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were themselves scholars of folklore and fairytales, and "most of their research was rooted in the languages, literatures, and religious beliefs of the Middle Ages" (Ziolkowski 23). As such, their collected tales, like the work of their fellow German Romanticists, are largely drawn from medieval literature, and there is an assumption that the "once upon a time" of the tales is roughly congruent with the Middle Ages. For the Grimm brothers and their contemporaries, the medieval was above all an object of nostalgia. In their construction of a nationalist narrative, Romantics like the Grimms cast the medieval past as primitive, simplistic, and often idyllic, envisioning the period as the childhood of a developing nation-state. As mentioned earlier, scholars including Huizinga perpetuated this characterization of the Middle Ages as a period of "naïve imagination" (9) through the early twentieth century.

Indeed, Fantasyland's version of the nineteenth-century/medieval story of Sleeping Beauty stages an escapist fantasy which uses what Huizinga might call "an aura of adventure and passion" (15) to draw in visitors. Music from Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* play as guests enter the castle. The wooden stairs and handrails as well as the walls themselves are smoothed with age and the hands of the millions of people who have touched them. A series of brightly colored dioramas behind glass tell Disney's version of the story. Guests make their way through the twists and turns of the castle's narrow

corridors, following the narrative of the dioramas along the way. The miniaturized figures serve as markers of a story presumably well known to its audiences, who are unable to touch or otherwise interact with the medieval tale. Indeed, because the layout of the castle follows the Sleeping Beauty narrative, the building itself becomes the story, casting guests as travelers through the medieval tale. Music and voiceovers from the film along with a number of moments meant to startle or surprise allow visitors to feel as if they are experiencing the Sleeping Beauty story, even though they have no power to interact directly with it.

The relative darkness of the castle is resolved as guests see Sleeping Beauty dance with the prince who saved her. Sunlight streams in through one of the only working doorways in the castle, and illuminates a storybook open to an illustration of the fairytale's ultimately gender conservative ending. Just as the structure itself has been dark and foreboding, the story's resolution brings restorative light. One guest, who noted that she has always thought of Fantasyland as "really medieval," noted that the castle was an example of the park's investment in "castles, maidens, knights, um, all that kind of stuff, chivalry, pageantry, and the...you know, being royal, and special. I don't think about peasants [in Fantasyland]...I only think of the good stuff when I'm here" (Fieldnotes, 30 June, 2011). As much as it is a marker for all that is identifiably medieval in the park, then, Sleeping Beauty's castle is also a reminder of the simplified version of history which the park presents. Just as the evil queen is trapped behind glass in the castle, unable to impinge upon a guest's visit, nothing in Fantasyland represents historical hardship. The feeling of "being special" which this guest describes thus results from a feeling of welcome in a space which has been scrubbed clean and engineered as "the happiest place on earth." It then seems no accident that the castle, free of any association with, for example, feudalistic practices which created a massive divide between rich and

poor, has become so iconic that its image appears in most versions of the Disneyland logo.

While Aronstein and Conier describe Sleeping Beauty's castle as representative of "the Middle Ages as they *should have* been" (217, emphasis mine), the attraction also houses Disney's version of the Middle Ages as they *will continue* to be. The popular appeal of the castle guarantees the future desirability of this idealized medieval period and imagines generations of Disney consumers. The same guest who described Fantasyland as the home of knights and pageantry, for example, gestured toward the castle when she mentioned the "princesses" that were a large part of the park's allure for her family: "we came this year because our daughter is turning three on Sunday, and she loves...the princesses." For this guest, the castle is the home of these princesses, and thus the center of the Disneyland legacy which she wishes to pass to her daughter: "I like the fairytale stuff...I remember it the best from when I was a kid, when I came here" (Fieldnotes 30 June, 2011). These generations of nostalgic visitors are presumably what Walt Disney envisioned when he designed the park. The plaque which hung over Disneyland on its opening day in 1955, for example, read:

To all who come to this happy place: Welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past, and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the hard facts that have created America—in the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world (qtd in Aronstein and Conier, 216).

The dedication induces nostalgia, creating images of an older generation sharing fairytales with a younger in a place created by American ideals.

The dedication's containment of both past and future touristic experience also reflects Rackin's notion of the "eternal present," or the non-linear construction of time which Bildhauer argues characterizes the Middle Ages in most contemporary films. In the

Disney version of this historiography, contemporary ideas and values substitute for those of both past and future. Thus, the “eternal present” of Disneyland is that of the American Utopia. As Bryman argues, “the Utopian past and the Utopian future come to symbolize a Utopian present.” (141). The version of the past which Disneyland presents is scrubbed clean of any conflict, including those of class, race, or gender. The park idealizes gendered medieval fairytales in which princesses were enviable creatures who sang to birds, rather than objects of sexual barter or violence in a feudalistic empire. As a guest travels through Sleeping Beauty’s castle, this nostalgia bridges childhood memories both with a medieval structure and with a presently occurring tourist event, thus facilitating affective touch between time periods. The effect is a sense of timelessness which Ziolkowski argues is integral to fairytales: “if stories are the lifeblood of cultures and individuals, then fairytales are a kind of plasma, the shedding of all that is dispensable and the isolation of that is most basic and sustaining in narrative”(10). Disneyland’s appeal to nostalgia, particularly within Fantasyland, gives this same sense of importance to the park’s fairytales. These stories feel safe, familiar, and ready-made to be passed down through generations of Disneyland guests who sense that their relevance is not based on time period, but on constrictions of national and cultural identity.

Indeed, Fantasyland is an example of Disney’s efforts to re-frame medieval European stories in recognizably American idioms. Some scholars see this project as a failure, arguing that the limited connection which Americans feel with foreign narratives makes Fantasyland less attractive to guests than other parts of Disneyland. Adams’ work typifies these arguments:

[Fantasyland] may be unable to engage its guests because the presented myths are not American in origin or spirit...the dominant symbol, Sleeping Beauty’s castle, has no firm place in American culture. The fairytales are familiar, but not derived from nor do they reflect the American experience (99).

Adams' comment, fails, however, to account for the degree to which Fantasyland Americanizes its version of fairytales, staging what Aronstein and Coiner call a "uniquely American take on the medieval past" (213) which reflects the influence of the American Dream narrative. In particular, Aronstein and Coiner argue that Disney's medieval attractions suggest that anyone can become a princess or, in the case of the sword in the stone performance, a legendary medieval king. Further, Fantasyland, like the American Dream narrative, idealizes economic success. After all, it is not just any child who can become King Arthur, but a child whose parents are able to pay Disney's steep admission price. In addition, although the sword in the stone performance no longer occurs, the ideal of "Disney-cute" is still tied to images of middle class whiteness. Thus, by inserting the values of Middle Class America into the European Middle Ages, Disneyland creates the past in the image of the present. By actively cultivating nostalgia like that described by the guests to whom I spoke, Disney also ensures that its version of the past will be available to future generations.

As at the Renaissance Faire, one of the most visible ways in which Fantasyland makes these fairytales immediate and relevant is by encouraging guests to costume themselves as their favorite characters. Just outside Sleeping Beauty's castle is the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique, a full service salon in which young girls can, with the help of makeup, glitter, hairstyle, and a costume, "become" their favorite Disney princesses. Options range from a \$44.95 package which includes a simple hair and makeup session to a \$220 makeover that including a full costume and photo session. Two of the three available hairstyles reflect a twenty-first-century twist, incorporating colorful extensions or "diva style" curls. Although these options are advertised as opportunities for young girls to display their individual styles, they are also exemplify Disney's attempts to curb

plurality by limiting guests' choices to those which have been officially approved. In his exploration of themeing at Disneyland, Bryman writes of the "control motif" that extends to everything in the park from the paths a guest may travel to the narratives contained in each "land." In Frontierland, for example, "one finds essentially a paean to the taming of the American frontier....here we find narratives of how the West was won...[I]n its representation of conquest over the Indians, it is also a narrative about control over peoples" (106). Just as Frontierland creates and sustains a nationalist western narrative, Fantasyland stages the Disney corporation's "taming" of the Middle Ages into the setting for fairytale stories of princesses. Further, attractions like the Boutique tame and contain these princesses. Young girls may dress up and participate in the Middle Ages, but if they use the Boutique to access the medieval (as the majority of guests who roam the park in costume appear to have done), they do so according to Disney's guidelines.

Engagement with the park's fairytales at the Boutique also reinforces the gender normativity which is present in most Disney films and integral to the company's version of the Middle Ages. There is a single option available for boys who want an embodied exploration of history—the \$15 "Cool Knight" package which includes a hairstyle, a plastic shield, and a wooden sword. After numerous conversations with Boutique staff, it became clear that the attraction is ill-equipped to accommodate requests for non-normative costuming. When I asked what would happen if a young boy were to opt for a princess costume, for example, Boutique staff continually referred back to the hairstyle/shield/sword available to boys (Fieldnotes, 29 June, 2011). The implications of the Boutique's packages are startling: a costume is not necessary to transform a young boy into a knight but, in order to become a princess, a young girl must sit through a lengthy and expensive salon session. The princess options focus on commodification and outward appearance, creating a Disney princess from a costume and copious amounts of glitter,

while young boys become brave knights simply by picking up swords. The Boutique's gender disciplining implies that the Middle Ages were a period in which femininity was outwardly constructed, while masculinity resided within. This juxtaposition of gendered American Dream narratives and medieval fairytale tropes marks another moment in which time periods touch within Fantasyland, allowing broad stereotypes of medieval gender roles to influence contemporary tourist experiences.

The embodied experience of the Boutique is one of the numerous ways in which Disneyland, like *Medieval Times*, is invested in creating nostalgic memories for its guests. Because Disneyland is designed to foster guests' memories of their own visits to the park alongside their hopes for their children's future visits, a trip to Disneyland allows the past, present, and future of each guest to exist simultaneously. This sense was particularly present when I spoke with an elderly woman sitting on a bench in Fantasyland. When I asked the reason for her visit, she responded, "because I've been coming here since I was twelve years old. I remember the entrance. And the flowers" (Fieldnotes, 29 June 2011). For this guest, the sensory experience of the park (the sight of the main gate, the smell of the flowers) allowed her childhood to become present. Similarly, the previously quoted guest who spoke of her own childhood memories of Fantasyland commented that she came to the park to share her past experiences with her young daughter. The Boutique, a relatively new attraction, allows this guest's daughter an even deeper experience of being a princess than her mother had. Sociologist Gary S. Cross argues that Disneyland strategically positions itself as a bridge between generations: "rides and other attractions [do] not get 'old' because...adults 'pass' on to the next generation these same sites and experiences, which, for the very young, [are] truly new" (642). This method of passing memories between generations demonstrates an investment in the continual availability of both past and future.

Disney-style nostalgia proscribes a narrative of the ideal American family whose members grew up going to Disneyland and who have the economic means and leisure time to ensure that their children experience the park as well. Fantasyland, one of the oldest “lands” at Disneyland, and the area that is most closely tied to Disney’s films is, appropriately, often the seat of these nostalgic remembrances. The elderly guest I spoke to commented that, for her, Fantasyland represents “knights, shining armor, [and] what I used to read as a girl. You know, every young girl has a fantasy when they’re 12 years old about a male knight” (Fieldnotes 29 June, 2011). For her, Fantasyland is the embodiment of the fantasies which she used to read about. Disney’s fantasy space of course also replicates the gender politics of these childhood fantasies. Thus, while guests tour fairytales in a replica of a medieval castle, they also experience personalized versions of non-linear historiography. Fantasyland frames the past, present, and future of each guest within a Disney-centric utopia.

MEDIEVALIST PLURALITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The variety of medieval fantasy presented in these tourist spaces reflects the plurality which characterizes contemporary constructions of the Middle Ages. Disneyland’s fairytales for example, represent a different history than does *Medieval Times*’ investment in violent tournament spectacle. Of course, like the theatrical performances discussed in previous chapters, these tourist sites selectively present versions of the Middle Ages that align with particular political, cultural, and social agendas. As Eco argues, “the Middle Ages have always been messed up in order to meet the vital requirements of different periods, it was impossible for them to always be messed about in the same ways” (212). It is this processes of selectively “messing up,” i.e. of picking and choosing which elements of history to include in a particular version of the Middle Ages, that defines affective medievalism. While the slippage between

periods at the Southern California Renaissance Faire allows multiple constructions of history to exist within the same space, Disneyland guides guests through an carefully cleansed utopia of medieval fairytales.

This same sense of plurality extends to the ways in which each of these spaces facilitates critical engagement with their distinctive versions of history. The natures of these engagements vary based on the values and aesthetics of each space. Both the Renaissance Faire and *Medieval Times* encourage, and oftentimes seem to require, intellectual debate about the differences between contemporary society and a specific version of the medieval. These spaces offer continual interruptions of their Middle Ages with reminders of the present day. The festival nature of the Renaissance Faire and the communal nature of spectatorship at *Medieval Times* encourage evaluation of events and experiences as they unfold. I observed numerous discussions in Renaissance Faire “garb” rental stalls, for example, which wove questions of authenticity with concerns about aesthetic—i.e. since a dyed linen bodice is more authentic for a medieval costume, would a visitor’s preference for a more lavish brocade garment be “out of character?” (Fieldnotes, 8 May, 2010). In scenarios like this one, the essential nature of the Faire itself and its relationship with history is up for debate. For the visitor who chooses the brocade bodice over the linen, the Faire creates a Middle Ages in which clothing options reflect twenty-first century tastes. Although they are rarely marked as historiographical inquiries, questions like these lead to discussions of the fluidity of medieval history in contemporary consciousness, and to reevaluations of what counts as authentic.

This opportunity for active intellectual engagement—and in some cases debate—marks these tourist attractions as public spaces. A key feature of a “public” in Habermas’ seminal definition is “its function as a critical judge” (2) While Habermas’ definition is

rooted in the workings of a particular economic class, his link between public space and open debate is fundamental to the affective medievalism of the spaces discussed in this chapter. In the above example from the Renaissance Faire, a visitor's desire to perform led directly to public discourse. The question of whether a particular bodice is an appropriate representation of the Middle Ages presupposes that the guest wearing it has chosen to engage both physically and publicly in the space's construction of medieval history. Questions about the relationship between the present and a space's representation of the past are instances of Habermasian discursive engagement. Another Faire guest commented, for example, that "[the faire] is dehydratingly hot and this [bodice] is breathtakingly tight. I actually have bruises on my ribs from wearing it" (Fieldnotes, 8 May, 2010). This same guest noted that, although her costume allows her to feel a physical connection to history, she "can't imagine being expected to wear stuff like this everyday." Here again, the Faire opens discourse between a particular image of medieval history and contemporary notions of comfort and style.

Medieval Times functions similarly as a discursive space, offering opportunities for engagement with contemporary constructions of the Middle Ages, as well as with our presumed distance from them. *Medieval Times*' expectation that guests eat their meals sans silverware, for instance, inevitably opens discussion among patrons about how foreign they feel the practice to be. When I received my vegetarian meal (a portabella mushroom cap filled with wild rice) with utensils, my group exploded in discussion of the absurdity of a "medieval vegetarian" and how different our attitudes toward food are today than they would have been in the thirteenth century. Of course, economic circumstances meant that many medieval people, particularly peasants, ate a *de facto*

vegetarian diet.⁵² Our ill-informed construction of history represents a moment in which the workings of medievalism are immediately apparent. The contemporary perception of the Middle Ages, aided by the omnipresence of giant turkey legs at Renaissance Faire and Fantasyland, is that the Middle Ages were a veritable festival of carnivorism. While our discussion of medieval eating habits was not groundbreakingly intellectual, our concern with medieval social practices and their distance from our own was indeed a moment of historiographical engagement. Further, as it arose from my inability to behave as a medieval tournament spectator, the discussion also reflected *Medieval Times*' investment in performance. Appropriately, this link between performance and discourse is grounded in medieval theatrical practice. As Symes argues, performance in medieval marketplaces facilitated public debate over religious and political issues (130). The combination of intellectual and physical engagement with medieval practice thus marks our discussion as a medievalist engagement with history.

Although Disneyland also creates a public, the park is less invested than *Medieval Times* or the Renaissance Faire in providing discursive space. Disney strives to legitimate its Middle Ages by limiting opportunities within the park for guests to deviate from the park's vision of history. As Aronstein and Conier argue, "Disneyland not only assumes that we know these [medieval] narratives, but also that we consent to them" (219).

⁵² As historian P.R. Schofield argues, "Diet did not create social difference in this period but it was evidence of social difference and, in demographic terms, it helped perpetuate that difference. The majority of the population throughout the period [high and late Middle Ages] consumed a diet that was principally cereal based; elites, however, consumed diets that were relatively, and often extensively, rich in protein" (244). Religion also determined eating habits in the Middle Ages: "the different monastic Orders had varying models for diet. Based on what, in origin in the Rule of St. Benedict, had been a vegetarian model...other Orders had different expectations. The spiritual renewal of the Cistercians of the twelfth century seems to have been marked by rigor in diet" (Woogar 194-5). Heretic sects like the Cathars were also marked by their refusal to eat meat. For more detailed dietary studies, see especially *Food in Medieval England* (2006, ed. C.M. Woolgar, D. Serjeantson, and T. Waldron), which also contains Scofield's article, "Medieval Diet and Demography."

Indeed, discursive engagement at Disneyland often consists of willfully ignoring anything that lies outside of Distory. The guest who commented that “I don’t think about peasants [at Disneyland]...I only think of the good stuff when I’m here” is thus performing a recognition of the ways the park shapes her thinking about the medieval. Clearly, she is aware of medieval peasants and their distinction from the “good stuff” which the park presents. When she made the comment, she was indeed, at least for a moment, thinking about elements outside of Disney’s version of the Middle Ages. Her attitude toward these peasants, however, reveals that she understands that to evoke them within Disneyland is somehow to be subversive. The revisionist nature of Distory does present numerous historiographical issues, but guests like this woman have internalized the sense of control which Disney exerts over history, and actively avoid unpleasantness whenever possible. Because of its market visibility, Disney has largely choreographed the expectations which its guests bring with them. For many visitors, Fantasyland is a reinforcement of childhood images rather than a new take on medieval stories.

Thus, although Disneyland allows guests to tour history, as do *Medieval Times* and the Renaissance Faire, the park complicates Habermas’ discursive public sphere. Indeed, the park stages a more contemporary understanding of the public as contextual. Sociologist and American Studies scholar Michael Warner argues that contemporary society consists of any number of separate publics: “to address a public or to think of oneself as belonging to a public is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit a certain kind of social world, to have at one’s disposal certain media or genres, [and] to be motivated by a certain normative horizon” (10).⁵³ Publics, then, can arise and dissolve largely based on context, for “the existence of a public is contingent on its members’ activity” (Warner

⁵³ Symes argues similarly that medieval town criers had the ability to create temporary publics by relating news to groups on people in the streets: “Having a loud voice is itself and instrument of power...The crier called the community into being” (143)

88). It is evident, from the park's careful construction of Americanized, sanitized versions of the Middle Ages that the Disney corporation had a specific audience in mind while creating the park. The Disneyland public indeed arises from the moment of contact between twentieth- and twenty-first-century Americans and the medieval past. Rather than providing a space for discourse and debate, Disney creates a public of "Disneyland guests" by addressing them—i.e. by imagining and constructing their tastes, desires, fantasies, memories, and hopes for the future. Disneyland's particular affective medievalism thus imagines and choreographs particular ways in which park guests will attempt to touch the medieval, and what elements of the medieval will be available for these moments of contact. The use of single point perspective in the design of the park's Main Street, for example draws guests' collective gaze to predetermined locations, one of which is the medieval castle that towers over Fantasyland.

Disneyland's construction of the "Disneyland guests" public also proscribes belief in a particular construction of the Middle Ages. As Warner argues, "public discourse says not only 'Let a public exist' but 'Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world this way'" (114). The park's insistence on an eminently palatable medieval period, populated by singing dwarves rather than angry peasants, belies the park's knowledge and rejection of the other versions of the Middle Ages which exist in contemporary discourse. The extreme themeing of the park serves as a constant reminder of guests' positions as members of Disney's public. As Warner notes, "public discourse craves attention like a child. Texts clamor at us. Images solicit our gaze. Look here! Listen! Hey! ...Our willingness to process a passing appeal determines which publics we belong to and performs their extension" (89). Indeed, it is not only Disney that calls its public into being, but also guests' willingness to pay \$80 to enter the park. The financial investments which guests make often motivate them to participate in the park's narratives, considering

them to be of a certain value. The ticket price also guarantees that the public which Disneyland calls into being is a relatively stable one, with statistically predictable tastes and behavior patterns.

The varying nature of the public at *Medieval Times*, Disneyland and the Renaissance Faire contributes to the plurality of these spaces. Not only does each present a Middle Ages that has been carefully tailored to the tastes, values, and memories of a particular audience, but each also provides specific parameters for engagement with these versions of history. Although these intellectual guidelines are unwritten, guests at each of the spaces discussed in this chapter tend to perform in prescribed ways. Thus, while the allure of *Medieval Times* and the Renaissance Faire lies in the opportunity to discover the ways in which contemporary life differs from the Middle Ages, Disneyland normalizes visitor belief in both the desirability and the authority of its version of history. To visit any of these spaces is thus to perform as a member of a particularly constructed public.

CONCLUSION: CURIOUSLY HAUNTED SPACES

As tourist spaces, Disneyland, the Renaissance Faire, and *Medieval Times* place visitors into physical contact with re-constructions of medieval fantasy. Similarly, Kennedy describes “cultural tourism” as a form of recreation in which travelers spend significant leisure time and money on “cultural activities” such as plays and historical reenactments (176). He argues, for example, that visitors to nationally known Shakespeare festivals believe that they are gaining cultural capital while escaping their ordinary lives. Significantly for a discussion of tourism and medievalism, Kennedy refers to these cultural tourists as “minor historians” who form their own narratives of the past based on their experiences at tourist sites. *Medieval Times*, Disneyland, and Renaissance Fairs rely to varying degrees on this notion of the minor historian. Guests’ personal narratives are integral to each of these sites, even if those narratives are largely based in a

site's construction of nostalgia, as at *Medieval Times* and Disneyland. As I have argued, a guest's individualized experience necessarily involves her personal relationship to the site's Middle Ages. At Disneyland, for example, guests live within in the Fantasyland version of "castles, maidens, knights... chivalry, [and] pageantry;" at *Medieval Times*, they come away with souvenir crowns which mark them as either on the winning or loosing side of the night's combat. The structure of these narratives is inherently more flexible at the Southern California Renaissance Faire, because so much of a guest's interaction with history there happens on an informal level. A guest who spends her day following the queen's progress or taking high tea with the court, for example will come away with a very different sense of history than one who spends her time in the guild tents or drinking large quantities of mead in the infamous Faire pub crawl.

Largely because of the nostalgia which sites like Disneyland and *Medieval Times* construct, the narratives these "minor historians" construct are also tied to an appreciation or memory of place. Watson argues that "touring the medieval...involves not only an engagement with the material of the epoch itself, but with *medievalism* as a distinct cultural dynamic" (243, emphasis original). Writing about tourism at actual medieval buildings in Western Europe, he connects the experience of visiting the material remains of the Middle Ages with our memories of the Middle Ages we have encountered in movies, video games, and the like. A tourist of the sites of which Watson writes thus functions duly as a minor historian of medievalism as well as of medieval artifacts. Tourists at Disneyland, the Renaissance Faire, and *Medieval Times*, however, generally only come into contact with affective medievalism—i.e. reconstructions of the medieval past directed at specific audiences and created to evoke particular responses. The closest that any of these sites come to medieval artifacts are either the replicas of medieval tournament weapons for sale at *Medieval Times* or Sleeping Beauty's castle. Of course,

both of these are examples of replication rather than original structures or objects. The physical spaces of these sites thus contain not the “authentic” medieval, but centuries of medieval reproduction. In touring them, guests do not come into contact with history, but with numerous layers of historical re-imagining. The spaces themselves mark the historiographical heritage of the Middle Ages.

These spaces are therefore haunted not only by the Middle Ages themselves, but by a strategic re-writing of history as well as by the thousands (or hundreds of thousands) of other guests who have interacted with the space as tourists. Carlson argues that “theatre spaces, like dramatic texts and acting bodies, are deeply involved with the preservation and configuration of cultural memory, and so they are almost invariably haunted in one way or another” (131-2). The same can be said for these tourist sites, which I have argued to be akin to performance spaces in their call for embodied engagement with the past. Although it is impossible to argue, for example, that *Medieval Times* is not haunted by medieval tournaments themselves, what is more apparent in the space is the preservation of a fairytale tournament in which evil is always vanquished and good always triumphs. Similarly, the Renaissance Faire is undeniably haunted by medieval jousting, but more so by the construction of the Middle Ages as a rowdy, disorderly time which functions conveniently as a precursor to the stateliness of the Renaissance. Guests encounter these narratives from the moment they imagine visits to these spaces, and in turn their memories of the spaces are haunted by contemporary constructions of medieval history.

As this chapter has implied, fabrication of historical narratives within medievalist tourist spaces is a particularly American phenomenon. Eco suggests that the “fabrication of the real fake” in spaces like Fantasyland “suggests a national inferiority complex, based on the anxiety that America has somehow ‘missed out’ on the cultural treasures and

benefits of the European past” (229). American tourists cannot visit the “heritage sites” which Watson describes without paying for international travel. Rather than an inferiority complex, however, the spaces in this chapter offer unique moments of contact between time periods, allowing contemporary American society to converse with Middle Ages in a space which is neither wholly American nor wholly medieval. These spaces are doubly haunted by idealizations of democracy and feudalism, Americana and Arthuriana. The dualism inherent in these tourist attractions allows reproductions and signifiers to substitute for authentic periods and places. These carefully engineered and narrativized versions of medieval history re-locate the European past into a more easily accessible fantasy space.

Conclusion: Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog: The Future of the Middle Ages

The third hit on a Google search for fourteenth-century poet Geoffrey Chaucer brings up the site houseoffame.blogspot.com, a blog in which a visitor can read the poet's proclamation of his legendary hatred of rival writer John Gower: "Ich hereof appeale myn erstwhile freende and companioun Johannes Gower that he ys a wanker." A search through the site produces first-hand accounts of trips to Las Vegas with medieval king Richard II, Chaucer's struggles to convince his son "Litel Lowys" that verse poetry is superior to modern-day "hip & hoppe," and early thinking about a collection of stories which the poet determines to call the *Canterbury Tales* ("Ich haue devised an excellent plan for a worke of grete literarye merit, chock-fulle of sentence and solaas"). The site, known by its popular title, "Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog," is maintained by literary scholar Brantley Bryant as a loose chronicle of the medieval poet's professional and artistic adventures, beginning around 1386. Strikingly, the blog posts are penned in a first-person approximation of Chaucer's Middle English. Bryant did not reveal himself as the blog's author until 2010, by which time the "Chaucer blog" had gained considerable notoriety and scholarly attention. Rather than using the site to post academic explorations into the life of the poet, Bryant, a grad student at the time of the blog's creation, performed *as* Chaucer. He created a version of the poet with deep artistic insecurities, but who is nevertheless an "interactive and sociable figure" (Bryant 19). In 2010, the blog's popularity culminated in the publication of a book, *Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog: Medieval Studies and New Media*, which collects a number of Bryant's favorite posts from the blog's history and essays about medievalism on the Web.

Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog is part of the long-standing web presence of the

Middle Ages. Literary Scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that pages providing information on the Middle Ages flourished in the early days of the Internet in the 1990s, followed by a plethora of personal blogs about medieval topics beginning in 2002 (31-33). Cohen characterizes these blogs in particular as a new, “inherently gregarious” form of academic inquiry: “they do not offer the blind peer-review that sanctions publication in a prestigious journal...instead they provide a forum in which research and argument can be honed through swift, trenchant feedback...the reach of which can be vast” (29-30). In addition to academic ideas, however, many medieval-themed blogs began blending the writers’ personal lives with their musings on the Middle Ages. Medievalist Stephanie Trigg, for example, blogged about her battle with breast cancer alongside academic musings and updates on her search for research funding. In an October, 2006 post, she weaves commentary about the movie *Braveheart* into the narrative of the moments before she was anesthetized for surgery (stephanietrigg.blogspot.com). Although these personal-slash-academic blogs are in no way exclusive to medievalists, their presence is indicative of the ever-present linkage between the medieval and the contemporary which this dissertation has explored.

Writing as Chaucer, however, Bryant took the idea of “blogging the Middle Ages” to an even deeper affective level. His digital personification of the medieval figure performs a very similar kind of medievalism to the plays and tourist spaces in this dissertation. As Bryant argues in an introductory essay to the book version of *Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog*, “the blog was meant to offer a Chaucer without a canonical frame, to blend specialist medieval scholarship with pop culture, and to throw the medieval and the contemporary together in a way that would inextricably mix them” (20). Bryant’s work constructs Chaucer as a real person, distinct from the literary reputation which literary scholar Bonnie Wheeler has argued assures that he “never goes out of style” (11).

The blog presents a figure participating in two distinct periods simultaneously: that of the medieval writer and that of the modern day scholar.

This historiographical juxtaposition was clear from the blog's beginnings. Answering reader's question in March of 2006 about a possible friendship between Chaucer and the anonymous medieval *Pearl*-poet, for example, Bryant narrates a clandestine homosexual affair between the two. The post about the affair ends with an anguished Chaucer, forced to abandon his love for the *Pearl*-poet to salvage his marriage, crying "I WOLDE I KNEWE HOW OF THEE I MIGHT BE QUITTEN!" Coming just four months after the theatrical release of Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (in which Jake Gyllenhaal as Jack Twist utters the modern english equivalent of the same line to his own secret homosexual lover), Bryant's invented lament fused the medieval poet with twenty-first-century popular culture. Further, the post anachronistically acknowledged post-medieval academic inquiries about the identity of the *Pearl*-poet and suspicions that the historical Chaucer may have traveled with him. Like the performances discussed in this dissertation which place the medieval into conversation with specific post-medieval moments (i.e. Hytner's use of the 2003 British/American invasion of Iraq), Bryant's post relies on a particular modern context to comment on both historical and contemporary sexuality.

This type of temporal juxtaposition is foundational to *Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog*. An April 1, 2006 post, for instance, complains of Litel Lowys:

He spendeth alle of hys tyme in hys chaumbre wyth his Exeboxe CCCLX playnge games of muchel violence. And whenne he ys nat killynge thynges on a screne, he listeneth to thys maner of musique called rap or sometymes hip & hoppe. And he careth nat for Boethius...lette alone the astrolabe.

Although the comment appears to characterize the medieval pursuits (reading Boethius,

exploring the heavens with the astrolabe) as more worthy than those which Litle Lowys prefers, in the next sentence Bryant's Chaucer decides to write "some verses of thys rap musique" in order to "gladden myn litel sone" and to allow his verses to reach the younger generation. Thus, there is no easy distinction between the modern and the medieval in terms of relative value in the blog. Both Boethius and rap music exist for Bryant's Chaucer as viable methods of communication, even if the latter baffles Chaucer at first.

Like Trigg's juxtaposition of health and funding concerns, Bryant's performance of Chaucer allows him to merge the personal with the medieval. The Chaucer of *Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog*, whom Bryant named "LeVostreGC" ("your Geoffrey Chaucer"), is a poet who has not yet written his master work, and who is continually learning and adapting to the hybrid modern/medieval world around him. When the blog started, LeVostreGC's position mirrored that of Bryant himself, who began the blog as a graduate student and continued to write during the dissertation process and the indeterminacy of the academic job search. LeVostreGC's blog thus performed the liminality which Bryant felt in his own life. Bryant's creation of a distinctly characterized Chaucer also distinguishes his blog from those of other medievalists, and aligns it with the live performances discussed throughout this dissertation. Bryant's deliberate and specific characterization of LeVostreGC was drawn largely from the personality of the General Prologue narrator in *The Canterbury Tales*. As Bryant describes him, LeVostreGC is

a wide-eyed, nonjudgemental spirit, a good-natured soul low on cynicism...the Chaucer persona is also overworked and frequently unsure about his poetic potential...His references to his weight...were intended to establish Chaucer as a modest, unthreatening, and inadvertently ridiculous figure (19).

Like actors in history plays, Bryant thus functions as a "hyper historian," interpreting the

past by inhabiting it. The nature of this inhabitation, however, is digital rather than physical. Bryant has never appeared in public as Chaucer, preferring to write in the poet's voice rather than to embody him physically. Bryant also maintains a Facebook page and a Twitter account for LeVostreGC, Chaucer Doth Tweet (@LeVostreGC), in which he similarly uses a digital persona to perform the collapse of the medieval into the modern through with observations such as "A drama that yt wolde muchel plese me to see: 'Ye are Everyman, Charlye Browne.'" As they grow in popularity, these digital performances contribute to readers' notions of Chaucer and his work.

Bryant's cyber-performance of Chaucer paradoxically highlights the presence of physical bodies—Bryant's and those of other bloggers, as well as Chaucer's. Bryant's assertion in March, 2006, for instance, that "Ich Geoffrey Chaucer in the presence of the Internette knowlechede thes wordes and typede then wyth myn owene fingres," creates a juxtaposition between Bryant's "fingres" and Chaucer's fourteenth-century body. The Internet itself acts as an intermediary between modern and medieval bodies, however, meaning that Bryant's Web-based performance partially side-stepped many of the issues of race/gender and representation which other performances in this dissertation explored. Since Bryant wrote anonymously for the first four years of the blog's existence, his own particular body is less implicated in his performance of Chaucer than, for example, Adrian Noble's was when he played Henry V.⁵⁴ Perhaps, then, the anonymity of the Internet allows for a further step toward allowing diverse voices to occupy and/or perform the Middle Ages. In a further move toward embodied affective medievalism, Bryant's performance, like those of the actors/staff members at Disneyland and the Renaissance Faire, has inspired others to embody medieval characters or personas.

⁵⁴ It should be noted here that Bryant is a white male, and thus would probably not have encountered the kinds of race-based criticism that Noble did had he chosen to perform Chaucer live.

Indeed, Bryant argues that he was “deeply encouraged, and inspired to keep writing, by the various medieval bloggers who... responded (in various characters’ voices)” (18). Bryant’s blog has created an easily accessible version of the Middle Ages, and thus facilitated a space which others can inhabit and populate with their own explorations of the medieval.

Although the Middle Ages are not new to the Web, Bryant’s performance of Chaucer in digital spaces like Twitter and houseoffame.com are examples of a relatively recent connection between affective medievalism and cyberspace. As the world at large grows increasingly dependent on web-based technology, so too, it would seem, do those interested in exploring the Middle Ages. Haydock has called movie medievalism “history in a hurry,” further noting that “such haste makes for an interesting melange, which by turns fetishizes the alterity of the Middle Ages as a temporal Other while compulsively retooling imagined continuities to fit the rapidly changing priorities of the contemporary world” (5). One of those “priorities” is the digital world. As scholars, writers, and performing artists continue to re-imagine the Middle Ages in the ever-shifting image of the twenty-first century, Web presence becomes increasingly important. Blogs like Bryant’s as well as the plethora of other medievalist blogs, Twitter pages, and Facebook profiles of medieval figures offer wider potential access than do theatrical productions or amusement parks. The ways in which people gather information about history are changing rapidly. Bryant’s blog demonstrates that performances of affective medievalism, with their focus on making connections across time, can indeed adapt to the growing prominence of online spaces.

Whatever the medium, performance allows affective medievalism to make connections between bodies across centuries. Just as Bryant became an avatar for a fourteenth-century poet, actors in affective medievalist plays exist in the gap between

medieval events and contemporary productions. The productions and tourist spaces in this dissertation are strong evidence that “the Middle Ages...are not a dead, passive object...but alive, responsive, and capable of affecting the living” (Bildhauer 7). When we use performance to gain greater understanding of the Middle Ages, we also learn about our own values, concerns, and aesthetics. The medieval becomes a constructed space that responds to our own desires while remaining othered from them. All of the performances discussed in this dissertation are, to varying degrees, interested in what Dinshaw argues medievalism itself is interested in: “making relations with the past, relations that form parts of our subjectivities and communities...making affective connections, that is, across time.” (11-12). We have come to define ourselves and the world around us as distinct from the Middle Ages and, simultaneously, as a continuation of them. Our identity as a modern society is thus based to a large degree on our understanding of the medieval past. Performance allows this history, or at least our imagined version of this history, to feel recognizable and immediate. We become able to inhabit a period in history which we are continually invited to re-define.

Our fantasies of medieval history are strangely comforting, as Bryant acknowledges in a June, 2010 post responding to what is presumably a child’s question about whether or not the medieval Robin Hood was a real person. Bryant’s description of the ways in which we continue to use the Middle Ages makes his reply worth quoting at length:

Aye, Virginia, ther ys a Robin Hood. Robin Hood existeth as seurelye as green hattes, stylishe sworde-pleye, and roguish good lookes existen, and ye know that thei abounden and yive to yower lyf yts gretest plesaunce and joie. By Seynt Loy! How grym wolde the worlde be yif ther were no Robin Hood...Ther wolde be no resistaunce to grasping landholderes then, no consistentlye rhyming balades, no romaunce to reade on a coold night or to pass tyme duringe the daye...he ever-lastinge awesomenesse of cuttinge downe a chandelier onto bumbling minions

while banteringe wyth a romantic interest wolde be extinguished. Nat believe yn Robin Hood! Ye maye as wel nat believe in King Arthur!

Although comic, Bryant's response highlights both the pleasure and presence of the Middle Ages. We believe in Robin Hood and King Arthur because they serve particular purposes in defining both historical and contemporary thought. Affective medievalism allows the Middle Ages themselves to function similarly, and brings the medieval into conversation with any number of post-medieval contexts. Combining this queered brand of history with performance allows us to explore history further, finding versions of ourselves in the medieval past.

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Vita

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This dissertation was typed by the author.