

DAVID MATTHEWS and MICHAEL SANDERS, eds. *Subaltern Medievalisms: Medievalism "From Below" in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Medievalism 19. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2021. Pp. 232. \$105.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2022.213

Taking Antonio Gramsci's capacious construction of the subaltern as their starting point, David Matthews and Michael Sanders present in *Subaltern Medievalisms: Medievalism "From Below" in Nineteenth-Century Britain* a series of studies of the Victorian medievalism of the rebels, the members of the lower classes, the nonconservative ordinary people who took Wat Tyler, not King Arthur, as their role model and saw the Middle Ages as a period of revolt and constant change—not reified certainty, hierarchy, and chivalry. The collection consists of an introduction and ten essays almost entirely focused on how in the nineteenth century the popular press and popular social movements such as Chartism engaged with the medieval in ways largely unstudied to date. Their materials are jointly historical and literary and are mostly based in Victorian times, using newspapers and other archival materials to demonstrate just how completely medievalism needs to acknowledge and include this kind of non-elite material. Matthews and Sanders have successfully integrated the essays with each other, for together they move, as many of the contributors state, beyond the socialism of William Morris and into the real social movements of the labor guilds, the Chartists, the working-class press, and the women's suffrage movement, using medieval references and figures as touchstones and inspiration for these modern efforts to achieve equality and independence.

In their introduction, Matthews and Sanders demonstrate how cohesive this project was in its inception and delivery. The research began as a joint effort to explore the working-class press, and fifty-two periodicals appear in the bibliography's primary sources. In their laudable efforts to attract more thinking about plebeian or blue-collar medievalism, Matthews and Sanders perhaps do not entirely map out the full extent of available scholarship, mentioning Clare Simmons's important foundational study, *Popular Medievalism in Romantic-Era Britain* (2011), only in passing. That said, these are impressive essays, and this is an excellent project. Literature, particularly poetry, preponderates in several chapters, including those by Stephen Knight on Robin Hood and his proxies in Thomas Love Peacock, Thomas Cooper, and Pierce Egan the Younger; Rosemary Mitchell on various representations of the fourteenth-century Roman revolutionary Cola di Rienzi, notably Mary Russell Mitford, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Friedrich Engels, and the painter Holman Hunt; Ingrid Hanson on constructions of the medieval in the working-class press, including Tom Maguire, Robert Blatchford, various depictions of "Merrie England," and Norse sagas; and Stuart McWilliams on nostalgia and morbidity from a theoretical perspective, and the dream visions offering *uchronia*, alternative histories, such as William Morris's *A Dream of John Ball* (1888). Stephen Basdeo focuses on the figure of Wat Tyler in poetry and drama, notably in newspapers, as the centerpiece of Chartist belief. Colin Trodd offers a meticulous examination of Ford Madox Ford's submission to an 1843 exhibition of the Fine Arts Commission, not winning any prizes, but providing a fascinating visual representation of a working-class widow appealing beyond the baron who is her supposed superior to the figures of Justice and Mercy above in the pantheon (this image also serves as the cover for the book).

Matthew Roberts begins the volume with a reconsideration of William Cobbett, an antecedent figure who wrote a pro-Catholic history of the Reformation. Roberts establishes the underlying approach of the volume in this chapter, arguing that any notion of history as an unfolding of human freedom is radically incorrect, as history so often is about rupture and error. Cobbett, he argues, was in favor of a "Christianity like his constitution: in its pristine medieval purity" (38). Matthews then takes this notion of history as rupture, not teleology, into an analysis of the field of medievalism from Alice Chandler's book *A Dream of Order* onward, using for his

examples the construction of King Alfred, and the development of the figure of Wat Tyler as the centerpiece of resistive medievalism. Mike Sanders looks more specifically at Chartism and its use of medievalism as part of a strategy of legitimization, beginning with ideas about the constitution of King Alfred, then turning to the construction of the medieval in Thomas Cooper's dream visions, the poetry of Gerald Massey, and especially the poetic sequences of W. J. Linton. Both Matthews and Sanders find frequent mention of a Norman Yoke, and their analysis often refers to early medieval England. The rest of the chapters refer more to later medieval texts, most notably Carolyn Collette's consideration of the women's suffrage movement in the first decade of the twentieth century with its dependence on late medieval saints such as Joan of Arc.

The volume is not copyedited to the standard usual in Boydell & Brewer books, with a surprising number of small errors in syntax and expression. Readers not specialists in the field of Victorian politics would have appreciated a brief paragraph about Chartism and its major elements, and possibly even a timeline of major events. Many of the essays refer, often in some detail, to a relevant Chartist event, but where one focuses on the Eglinton Tournament of 1839, another will focus on the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 or the planned demonstration at Kennington in support of the third petition in 1848. Finally, while the term is certainly striking, I am not wholly convinced that *subaltern* is the right descriptor for the working-class and radical medievalism examined here. Not all the essays are theoretically sophisticated, and the notion of the subaltern is generally not particularly present. Moreover, for most of us, Gayatri Spivak's notion that the subaltern cannot speak stands in opposition to the massive amounts of poetry, speechifying, and newspapers in circulation in support of political action that took Wat Tyler as a role model, not a dangerous lout. These are, however, minor quibbles given the important arguments here about resistive medievalism (not restorative or reflective or nostalgic). In these essays, the subaltern snaps back at what should now be called elite medievalism or canonical medievalism.

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CIAN T. MCMAHON. *The Coffin Ship: Life and Death at Sea during the Great Irish Famine*. The Glucksman Irish Diaspora Series. New York: New York University Press, 2021. Pp. 328. \$35.00 (cloth).
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Cian McMahon's aim in *The Coffin Ship: Life and Death at Sea during the Great Irish Famine* is to "resituate the sailing ship, alongside the tenement and the weekly newspaper, as a dynamic element of migration history" (2) by using emigrants' own words to convey the richness and variety of the emigration experience during the Great Irish Famine. In this, he largely succeeds. The book's five central chapters follow the arc of the emigrant voyage, from preparation to movement to arrival. His method is a composite one: rather than focusing on a small cross-section of experiences, he compiles material from fourteen libraries and archives in Australia, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, plus material in digital collections, to create a kaleidoscopic portrait of the emigrant experience. The variety of experiences he documents will challenge popular notions of famine migration and, I expect, inspire others to delve deeper into this important topic.

A major strength of the book is that McMahon allows us to hear the emigrants, and many others, speak. This is a book about how people experienced emigration, not about the