Medievalist Aesthetics and Marketing Strategies

Some Thoughts on Cover Design from the 1980s to the Present

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1. A Public Introduction to Medieval(ist) Aesthetics

Were you to conduct a spontaneous survey in the streets and ask people what their associations are when they hear the term medieval or Middle Ages, the answers would probably include some of the following: dark, dirty, Black Death, witch trials, crusades, knights, and castles. Medievalists may write against this image of the medieval period but the associations of a dark, dirty and violent period prevail in the public mind. This leads to the question, why everything remotely medieval[1] holds such a fascination for people from all walks of life and age groups[2]. This somewhat unholy fascination with the medieval is probably rooted in the other extreme of its perception, that of idealisation: If you just ask enough people, some will come up with ideas of an easier, less complicated form of lifestyle, of courtly romances and minnesong, beautifully illustrated manuscripts, impressive Gothic cathedrals and intricately embroidered dresses that are not only on display but also available for dressing up (cf. Brown 2023, online) at various medieval sites.

Because of the remains of the medieval period readily available on most people's doorstep in Europe and mostly easily accessible through exhibitions, guided and self-guided tours the time period between Antiquity and Modernity is readily on everybody's mind. Its material culture and remains, from architectural features,

1 Velten has argued that the medieval period in the perception of a wider audience has the tendency to draw in other historical periods as well so that medievalism actually consists of more than just the time period that is deemed medieval in a more fact-based approach. Cf. Velten 2018: 9–20, especially hypothesis 2: »Das ‚gefrässige Mittelalter': die Kolonisierung des Vergangenen und Mythischen«, p.17.

2 Young has drawn attention to the whiteness of medievalism by stating that »popular cultural re-imaginings of the European Middle Ages almost exclusively feature characters who are white.« (Young 2017, online). She also argues in her book that »[F]antasy has the reputation for being an eurocentric genre, that is, one which is by, for, and about White people« (Young 2016: 1), which is even more true for medievalist Fantasy, although new tendencies such as the cast of The Rings of Power point to changing tides.

book culture, textile remains, to weaponry etc. and therefore its ideas about design and aesthetics are not only highly visible but also valued by many which leads to reproductions and inspirations for what might be called medievalist merchandise ranging from tea towels to facsimile editions, from bookends with Gothic elements to shields with crests for kids to play with.

This ready availability of the medieval period as a whole also means that forms of knowledge about its culture, history and other elements are believed to be just as readily available, which results in attributions such as mentioned above. The public opinion of the medieval period oscillates between demonisation and idealisation, very much depending on which exhibition, film or book one has seen or read last about a topic gauged as medieval.

2. The Medieval Period as Popular Culture

The above mentioned ready availability of the medieval period through various forms of reception, ranging from visiting historical sites to engaging in computer games, its openness to different topics and periods as well, its remoteness in terms of cultural grounds and practices and therefore its interpretability has resulted in the tendency that especially the medieval period means different things for different ethnical, political and cultural groups. As it is readily accessible via a range of different means the medieval period has lent itself to an ongoing hype which has further spiralled the idea of what is actually medieval. As the period itself is perceived as so vast and diverse, without a clear start or end, adjoining periods get more and more subsumed in the public opinion of what is actually considered medieval (cf. Velten 2018: 17) which means that topics, settings, persons or events with which to generate content that may no longer be genuinely medieval, will not be exhausted anytime soon.

The immense presence of the medieval in popular culture has various impacts on research and teaching in a university context and brings its own benefits and challenges. It also proves that a period where people perceive the possibility of their own interpretations, the experience of familiar strangeness and stark contrasts in its general perception, offers a huge marketing potential for all things medieval(ist).

3. Sales Strategies

The question then, is how to sell the medieval period to the broader public in various forms? As the period comes with a perceived clear cut aesthetic tradition, it is easy to use this as a foundation and tweak it according to the needs of the product. Once the branding as medieval is established, more of the same can easily be produced, which

allows for a high recognition value of the product. Although medievalist aesthetics seems to be easily recognisable by the broader public, it appears that currently there are several forms of perceived medievalist aesthetics on the market. The aesthetically pleasing, colourful and bright medievalist designs are sharply contrasted by dark, dirty and aesthetically apparently cruder designs while everything in between these two extremes also exists and is used to literally illustrate and highlight specific characteristics of a product. Often a few design elements suffice to brand a product as belonging to the medievalist hype.

In terms of book marketing, the following paper is concerned with hard-copy books, electronic versions shall not be in the focus of this paper, particularly because the novels discussed here were published before eBooks were available. Although the second media revolution is well under way, the printed book is by no means dead or a fossilized relict. Quite on the contrary, books deemed as beautiful are easily sold and book artists and publishing houses alike even produced editions de luxe of well-loved classics or books that have become iconic within the last few years[3].

On these grounds in the following cover designs shall be examined which range from the early 1980s to the present. After discussing the genre distinctions of Fantasy and historical novels, methods and types of 'medievalisation' as well as medievalist aesthetics, the final key case study will address cover designs for the trilogy *Down the Long Wind* by Gillian Bradshaw, first published between 1980 and 1982. This paper is concerned with how designs reflect on the development of the medievalist hype, the growing and changing knowledge about the medieval period, and its fluctuation between idealisation and demonisation of the period. It further highlights aesthetic traditions within the reception of the medieval period from Romanticism on and tries to come to terms with the genre of Fantasy encroaching on and using elements of the historical novel set in the medieval period.

Although books with a medievalist topic, including thus historical novels as well as Fantasy, are part of the medievalist hype sketched above, marketing is still part of the sales strategies of the big publishing houses, even for big names such as Ken Follett and his *Knightsbridge-series*. The German *Börsenblatt*, interviewing Marco Schneiders, head of the publishing house Bastei Lübbe, points to this fact when talking about the success of the prequel of *The Pillars of the Earth*:

> Was auffällt, ist, dass das Äußere des Prequels sich deutlich von den bisherigen Bänden unterscheidet. Warum? [Verlagsleiter Marco] Schneiders [vom Bastei Lübbe Verlag] antwortet: ‚Wir haben uns bewusst von der bisher typischen und ge-

3 One recent example is Mina Lima, a design studio collaborating with Harper Collins to produce high-quality and aesthetically sophisticated editions of classics of children's literature such as *Peter Pan* or *The Wizard of Oz* but also of the Harry Potter series. Already printed books may even be customized, for example by fore-edge painting such as by Maisie Matilda.

> wohnten Farbwelt (Beige) verabschiedet. Es wurde Zeit für einen neuen Auftritt – und wir wollten auch mit der Gestaltung in Schwarz allen Follett-Fans verdeutlichen, dass sie dieses Buch bisher garantiert noch nicht in ihrem Bücherregal haben. (Glatthor 2020, online)
> It is remarkable that the design of the prequel differs greatly from the other volumes. Why? [Publishing house manager Marco] Schneider [from Bastei Lübbe publishing house] answers: 'We deliberately departed from the up to now typical and usual colour coding (beige). It was time for a new look – and we also wanted to show all the Follett-fans by the design that they for sure do not yet own this book. (Transl. M.S.)

Instead of more of the same which was employed for the other volumes of the *Knightsbridge-saga*, the German publishing house – as well as the English – has made the decision to forgo the well-established design and thus the recognition-value, and create an innovative design which illustrates that the brand Follett-Knightsbridge is well known and customers need no longer be lead by a familiar design. Quite on the contrary, the newness of the product demands a new book jacket in order to avoid confusion. This illustrates how important marketing considerations for the cover design still are and what aims and expectations are connected with the respective design.

4. Historical Novels and Fantasy as Medievalist Genres: Overlaps and Boundaries

Ken Follett's *Knightsbridge-saga* is branded as a historical novel and contains no or very little fantastical elements. Yet the genres of historical novel and Fantasy hold the biggest share within the medievalist hype and therefore a distinction between the two genres is necessary to make while it also seems clear that there are overlapping characteristics.

The *Handbuch der literarischen Gattungen* explains that the historical novels deals with »authentische historische Ereignisse, Orte, Personen und Verhältnisse in unterschiedlichen Graden der Fiktionalisierung« (›authentic historical events, places, persons and circumstances in different degrees of fictionalisation‹ Transl. M.S.) (Lampart 2009: 360). It further points to the fact that the question of what is actually fact and what is fiction is what constitutes the genre (cf. ibid.). This field of controversy between fact and fiction opens up numerous possibilities to gauge what is real and what is invented by the author. Depending on the matter of the novel, this assessment done by the reader gets more complicated and complex. The Arthurian legends provide an excellent example of this because the debate on whether there was a historical inspiration to the fictional King Arthur of Camelot, *primus inter pares*

of the illustrious Knights of the Round Table, is basically ongoing since the monks of Glastonbury allegedly found the grave of the legendary king in 1191. Typically for historical novels may also be the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, to speak with Bloch: Characters that do not share the same lifetime or have for sure never met, can be brought together (cf. ibid.: 362). Armitt provides a definition of the Fantasy genre that not only encompasses literary texts but also visual and/or audio forms of art. She states:

> All these texts and narratives deal in juxtaposition of competing worlds, wherein one world, purportedly representing 'reality', is left behind in preference for another which is unknown and 'foreign' in the sense of being strange, fabulous or grotesque. The laws of physics, logic, time, physiognomy, life and death and/or geography are usually subverted in preference for a narrative vision which is improbable, impossible, or beyond belief. (Armitt 2020: 3)

Armitt also emphasises the fact that Fantasy lends itself to forming »sub-genres [… such as] the fairy story, quest myth, fable, epic Fantasy […]« (ibid.) which fosters the kind of overlap between the genres, which is not restricted to the historical novel and Fantasy. The strange, fabulous or grotesque world, which lies at the heart of Armitt's definition is generated by the »marvellous« (ibid.: 5), a term hailing from Todorov and being used in discussing medieval literature as well.

Mendlesohn and James also provide a definition of Fantasy that allows an application across various artforms. They emphasis that Fantasy is based on the presence of the »Unmöglichen und Unerklärlichen« (›impossible and inexplicable‹ Transl. M.S.) (Mendlesohn and James 2017: 11) which elegantly excludes Science Fiction, which often blurs the lines of the genre. Furthermore they also point at the aspect of audience and sales and thus state that »[v]iele Leute glauben, dass man Fantasy an ihren Titelbildern erkennen kann. Ein Drache oder Zauberer ist für gewöhnlich ein brauchbares Indiz; aber genauso ein halbnackter, das Schwert schwingender Barbar (ob nun männlich oder weiblich).« (ibid.: 13–14.) »Many people believe that you can recognize Fantasy by its cover images. A dragon or wizard is usually a useful indicator; but so is a half-naked, sword-wielding barbarian (whether male or female).« (Transl. M.S.) Their rather laconic approach proves, despite its ironic undertones, that cover design is important in order to identify the genre correctly which has been able to resist clear-cut definitions quite successfully. Therefore in the following, a short overview of means and method to 'medievalise' or 'fantasise' a cover will be introduced.

Both the historical novel and the genre of Fantasy may, depending on the particular work in question, be subsumed under the umbrella term of speculative fiction. Readers of both genres, who follow Hartley's dictum: »The past is a foreign land, they do things differently there«, easily see that the fantastic world that is stressed in the

above introduced definitions is evident in both genres. But similarities extend beyond that, depending on the way the story is presented, the protagonists as fictional or historical characters, and of course the actual content: If Martin Luther's experience with the thunderstorm of Stotternheim in July 1505 is told with actual fire-breathing dragons coming from an underworld while a fairy version of St Anna interferes and rescues the reformer, then for all its historicity this event belongs in the realms of Fantasy. Therefore, boundaries between the two genres are fluid and each novel needs to be carefully evaluated with regards to assignment of genre. For Arthurian fiction such as Bradshaw's trilogy *Down the Long Wind* the decision is notoriously difficult to make and might be impossible in the end. In the following, her work will be treated as Fantasy, although her strange and fabulous world only plays a minor role within the narrative.

5. Types of 'Medievalisation' Employed within the Framework of Cover Design

It has been established that in order to market a product appropriately and to reach the relevant target group(s) it needs to be recognisable as belonging to the broad and relatively vague attribution of medieval(ist). So, the question is how to design a product, specifically a book cover, that it is gauged as medieval by a broader audience who might or might not have further knowledge and experience of medievalist content. Three main devices are available for the design of a book cover, which also needs to treat the thin line of making it clear to which genre the product belongs: colour-coding, font, and, most importantly, motif. These shall be explored in the following.

5.1 Colour-Coding

As the interview with Marco Schneiders already hinted at, specific colours seem to exist that are connected with the medieval period – beige and nuances between eggshell and brown suggest the great age of the writing material and if a structure within the colour is added, it might hint at parchment or very old and crinkly paper.

Another popular colour for medievalist designs in general is red. The colour, depending on the shade, may remind the audience of dried blood which evokes the dark Middle Ages with the violent confrontations of various kinds. Furthermore it might be assumed that the broader public is still aware of red as a royal colour symbolising rule and power and thus pointing to the hierarchically structured society of the medieval period[4].

4 Examples for red as a colour of power, kingship but also violence are numerous in medieval texts and illustrations and may easily be traced back to Roman traditions. But also in the

Yellow and blue are also used, the first often substituted by gold. Blue, however, is used less frequently, maybe because of blue also being rare and precious in the medieval period and therefore, for medievalist designs less frequently available. If blue is used, it can denote the big distance, both in terms of time and culture, between our own time and the medieval period – a striking example is here the design of the covers of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Avalon-saga*[5]. Gold, with its easy connection to preciousness and therefore power[6], is often employed for the lettering of title and/or name of the author. Typically, it is only used sparsely to highlight specific elements within the cover design such as artefacts that would characteristically be made of the precious metal, for example a crown or coins.

White appears less frequently, although silver can be popular within the Fantasy genre, for example a cover of a German hardcover edition of Walter Moers' *Rumo oder die Wunder im Dunkeln* is mainly designed in silver. Black, however, has especially become popular in the last few years as the Fantasy genre received more and more attention by customers. In terms of associations it opens up limitless possibilities, from the dark and dirty Middle Ages where death and obscurity reign supreme. Connections with the Black Death, decay and mysteries in the dark are easily established already on the cover[7].

Green may be used in order to evoke associations of the perceived closeness to (and the constant fight against) nature of the medieval period. Especially books that deal with natural remedies of the medieval period, for example on Hildegard von Bingen, may employ this colour while works of fiction, no matter whether a historical novel or a work of the Fantasy genre, use green in order to illustrate landscape

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Celtic tradition, red is a colour carrying a range of meanings: When King Pwyll for example meets the King of the Otherworld in the First Branch of the Mabinogion, the audience is first informed of supernatural proceedings by the colouring of the hunting dogs, which are white with bright red ears.

5 Blue, in the medieval manuscript tradition the most expensive colour because it was gained from Lapislazuli, is often associated with the cloak of the Virgin Mary. In Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, a Blue Knight, Sir Persant, hails from India, associating the colour blue with the Far East as an exotic land of marvellous riches. He is furthermore the most powerful of the four brothers (the Black Knight, the Red Knight and the Green Knight, who is not to be confused with Gawain's opponent in the below mentioned *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) since he brings the biggest retinue with him. Cf. Malory VII.12.

6 Cf. the Middle High German connection in the word *rîch*, denoting both political power and material wealth.

7 While contemporary audiences generally associate white with cleanness and innocence and black with dirtiness and sin, medieval audiences would not necessarily make such connections: In Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, the ideal knight Sir Galahad is associated with a white shield with a blood-red cross, which was indeed painted with the blood of Joseph of Arimathea, but in one adventure of Sir Bors within the Sangrail-stories he sees a black bird which is later identified with the Holy Church (Malory XVI.7 and XVI.13).

and untamed nature, especially forests as important settings[8]. If the forest is not green but of an unusual or even unnatural colour, this also may serve as an indicator of genre on the cover – the absence of green where it is to be expected can also be used within the cover design.

Particularly within the Fantasy genre, the colours may vary and evoke different associations of the target audience. Purple and pink, far from colours of the church, are therefore used as well and may, especially in connection with elements of the genre of romance, hint at mystery and romantic entanglements, for example in *Witches of Wick* by Annie Waye. Covers signalling a book from the Fantasy genre are often kept in one or two main colours, which might be used in different hues to generate depth and shades (cf. Epubli, online).

As became clear, medieval symbolism of colours plays only a marginal role in today's perception. The mainly tetradic colour scheme of red, blue, gold and black may appear in stark nuances as well as subdued tinges – depending on the intensity it may hint at the lively and colourful medieval period with a wide range of emotions and therefore approachability or associations are fabricated of an era buried in the shadows of the past which is forever lost to the present. The differentiation of warm and cold colours only plays a minor role but may be employed in order to evoke the rather cosy Middle Ages depicted prominently in William Morris' *News from Nowhere* or to encode the culturally and emotionally distant medieval period.

All in all, this use of colours seems rather traditional, not necessarily because the content of the books are rather traditional but because easy and fitting associations have to be made by the first glimpse of the cover, which then stimulates further decisions such as reading the blurb, opening the book etc. Colour-Coding is therefore an important element of the cover design and needs to be carefully considered, as potential customers only spend a few seconds examining the cover before they either move to the next title or engage further with the product.

5.2 Font

With regards to fonts, clearly some forms are identified by the broader public as medieval. This can be easily illustrated when looking at advertisement for medievalist events such as re-enactments, medieval markets etc. Certain features in a font are perceived as decidedly medieval even without any prior knowledge of medieval

8 The colour green plays a major role in the Middle English verse romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the antagonist of Gawain sports this colour in all sorts of equipment. This unusual colouring has given rise to much debate, ranging from identifying the Green Knight with the Green Man, often seen depicted in bosses in churches, or an incarnation of an old deity of nature and vegetation. It has also been suggested that the colour green is a misunderstanding, cf. Nickel, Helmut: »Why was the Green Knight Green?« In: Arthurian Interpretations 2/2 (1988), pp. 58–64.

fonts[9]. The first and probably most important criterion is that of blackletter, which is interpreted as genuinely medieval. Fonts with all caps or rather majuscules, in some instances with serifs evoke the impression of age, handwriting, and calligraphy, which have the tendency to be connected with medieval book art. When looking at relevant webpages, for example onlineprinters.de/magazin/mittelalter-schrift/, it is easy to identify these characteristics: Three of the fonts listed there, namely Morris Roman, Vinque, and Hadley, point directly to William Morris and art nouveau. No matter how medieval the fonts may appear, they need to fulfil two more functions for a book cover: readability for a contemporary audience and a long range effect – blackletter and serifs provide these only partly and are therefore only employed to such an extent that the association with the medieval period can be made by customers. If this association can be fabricated by other means, these will have preference over a barely readable, although genuine medieval, font.

The Fantasy genre also resorts to fonts with a medieval tinge in order to stress the links to the past of the tale, the secrecy and mystery surrounding the content of the book or highlighting the preciousness of the book. This may be emphasised by using gold or silver for the writing suggesting quality and valuableness.

5.3 Motif

The last and most important point when examining cover design is naturally the motif: What is depicted and in which manner? At least five important sources for motifs can be identified: a) architecture or architectural elements, b) roles generally associated with a medieval setting: kings, knights errant, damsels (in distress), vagabonds, sorcerers, minstrels etc. c) elements of a fantastical medieval period such as dragons or other fantastical beasts, fays etc. d) objects that bear a close association with the medieval period such as a sword, shield or crown, and lastly e) symbols decoding medievalist content such as the cross of the crusaders, (pseudo-)runes, crests of arms, real or fictional, etc.

Most of the above-mentioned elements can be placed in the foreground of the cover. The background may be filled with a depiction of a medievalist landscape with forests and castles with high turrets, a part of a medieval *mappa mundi* etc. but may also be kept in monochrome colours. The design of the background often sets the mood for the whole cover: A monochrome black cover as in the paperback edition of Susanna *Clarke's Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* evokes different expectations in the potential audience than a medievalist, more or less idyllic landscape inspired by a depiction in a Book of Hours.

9 A well-arranged overview of medieval and early modern fonts is provided by the HAB Wolfenbüttel in cooperation with the Bodleian, Oxford (cf. Wendel 2019, online).

Books subsumed under the genre of Fantasy may use the same five sources mentioned above yet certain principles of design vary: The fantastical element usually plays a bigger part in the motif so that improbable or unlikely depictions are chosen such as the faun upon a pillar on the cover of Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* or the slightly unnatural and uncanny raven with the blood-red eye on James Brodgen's *The Plague Stones*. It seems that cover designs of Fantasy novels do not shy away from using photographs and altering them according to the demands of the book (cf. Epubli, online) such as on the cover of *The Secret Book of Flora Lea* by Patti Callahan Henry (Bas Bleu publishing house).

Furthermore, the choice of motif depends on more practical reasons such as copyright, licences and costs for the design. Also, the marketing strategy, as already mentioned above, needs to be taken in consideration, which may determine the look of the book but also that of the whole series or even the whole publishing house, especially if it is a smaller publishing house specialised in one genre and with fewer titles. Then the association with a specific design may be useful as recognition value.

With this short glimpse at the rules of cover design it also becomes obvious that the visual representation needs to adhere to notions that are already well-established as medievalist so that the audience can easily identify the genre and potential content of the book. At the same time, the concept of more of the same cannot be used excessively since the cover should also suggest that this book is new, innovative and can thus hold the attention of the potential customer.

6. Functions of the Cover

As already mentioned, the cover of the book is one of the most important element when it comes to marketing strategies. In a bookshop but also with online vendors the cover or images thereof are the point of first contact with potential buyers. Therefore the cover needs to fulfil a range of different functions. In general a cover needs to be designed in such a way that it generates attention already from a long(er) distance. This is usually achieved by the colours used in the design, which are visible even before the motif or the title can be read by a potential customer. Elements recognisable from a distance need first to generate attention to such a degree that the potential customers are induced to come closer to the product in order to see other elements of the cover design. Second, these elements also need to already allow a rough estimation of the genre of the book. If the cover suggests a romantic novel but turns out to be a thriller, customers may feel deceived and disappointed in their expectations and would not engage further with the product. This results in covers of one genre looking vaguely similar and therefore familiar to the audience. Book series also sport a high recognition value through their covers by employing the same colours and overall style, especially with regards to layout, in order to sig-

nal their belonging into a certain series. Decisions to abandon these well-established characteristics, as discussed above, are not made lightly and usually generate attention from (social) media and customers alike.

Once the primary function of catching the attention of the potential customer is achieved, the cover needs to hold that attention long enough so that the blurb on the back of the book is read or even the first page. In order to do so, details of the cover now come into focus, especially the title and the motif. These should allow for a specific genre estimation and hints at the content of the book. Details of the design are more important at this stage, for example what kind of font is used for the title and name of the author. The style of the cover may link it to already existing books from the same genre or to certain historical periods in which this style was employed. Further details in the motif such as clothing of the characters depicted, time of the day within the landscape etc. ideally are attuned to the content of the book and further set the mood for the story. If the book is set within a series, it might recall important elements from the previous volume in the motif and thus make potential readers remember the story. Lastly, the cover should follow certain aesthetic principles. This does not necessarily mean that the cover has to be pleasant or even beautiful to the observer, but its design should be coherent in itself and harmonious with regards to the content of the book and potentially within the series. Covers of collectors' editions or editions deluxe may be their own works of art and become iconic such as the editions by Allen & Unwin (or Ballantine for the American market) of Tolkien's works.

All in all, the cover of a book, contrary to the saying 'do not judge a book by its cover', is a kind of entry point for potential readers and therefore an important design element within the marketing strategies of publishing houses. Two main principles govern the design of the cover, which are innovation generating customers' attention and conservatism making connections to already established titles on the market. Especially with regard to the last principle, it is important to know what kind of aesthetics, designs and concepts are already ingrained in the public mind as medieval(ist), from which periods they stem and what their view on the medieval period is.

7. Overview of Medievalist Aesthetics

Our contemporary aesthetic image of the medieval period is fuelled mainly by images created from the romantic period onwards. In English, the word medieval first appears at the beginning of the 19th century (cf. Oxford Dictionary 2023, online), but the term Middle Ages, denoting the period between Antiquity and Modernity, is already used in the early 17th century (cf. Oxford Dictionary 2023, online), illustrating that as soon as the awareness of a change of era had sunken in, scholars started

to think about the past era – first and foremost to point to the differences in order to distinguish their own times and contrast them in a positive way with the dark and dirty Middle Ages. This negative view proved to be rather long-lived and still provides us today with blatantly negative opinions, which I described above as demonisation, of the medieval period. This adverse perspective on the medieval period changed with the romantic movement, encompassing literature and art especially.

7.1 Romantic Period

The *Handbuch Romantik* characterises the focus of Romanticism on the medieval period as »Mittelalterenthusiasmus« (›enthusiasm for the medieval‹ Transl. M.S.) (Schwering 2003: 547) but also warns that this enthusiasm stems from different sources (cf. ibid.) that are not necessarily influenced by an genuine academic or amateur interest in the period as such. Among these are curiosity with regards to a literary epoch which has at that point in time been marginalised, the idea of a form of unity of poetic expressions through the ages, or a critical attitude towards the French Revolution. The romantics turn the medieval period from a dark and barbarous era into a Golden Age, which figures as a predecessor of the romantic period itself. Schlegel even goes so far as to merge the medieval period with his own times (ibid.: 548) and thus stresses its relevance for himself and his contemporaries. Especially in the early romantic period, the focus was particularly on aesthetic principles and the arts of the (late) medieval (cf. ibid.: 549). Later, virtues perceived as (high) medieval such as freedom, mores, honour, chivalry, and, resulting, fame were used within national politics referring to the Napoleonic Wars (ibid.: 551). With regards to Fantasy and its roots in the European arts of the Romantic period, Mendlesohn and James remark upon the huge impact of the

> visionären Künstler […] William Blake, der Maler der Schauerromantik wie Johann Heinrich Füssli […]; und viele Cover lassen sich weniger durch den eigentlichen Bildinhalt zuordnen als vielmehr durch die Schattierungen von Hell und Dunkel und den üppigen Einsatz von Farbe, den die Künstler aus dieser Tradition übernommen haben (Mendlesohn and James 2017: 14).
> visionary artist [….] William Blake, Johann Heinrich Füsli, the painter of Gothic Romanticism, […] and many cover designs can be allocated primarily because of the hues of bright and dark and the sumptuous use of colour (instead of the actual visual content) the artists have adopted from this tradition (Transl. M.S.)

7.2 Pre-Raphaelites and Arts and Crafts Movement

When characterising the Pre-Raphaelites, Barringer has the following to say:

> Pre-Raphaelitism was characterized by innovative stylistic choices and by insurgent aesthetic, social, political, and religious thinking. Even today, its works – brilliantly colored, shocking in content, transgressive against established canons of good taste – sound a note of dissidence. The movement made its mark through its revolutionary approach to history painting (Barringer 2018: 35).

It brings about a revival of »medieval art forms« in the style of the »Gothic Revival« (ibid.: 37) and extends through Europe (cf. ibid.: 38). Cumming and Kaplan setting out to define the Arts and Crafts Movement sketch it as a counter initiative to »the harshness of late nineteenth-century industrialism« in order to »foster spiritual harmony through the work-process and to change that very process and its products« by the »creation of handmade goods« (Cumming/Kaplan 1991:9). This lead to »a revival of the medieval Gothic« (ibid.: 11), which was not only perceived as the visual symbol of »the order and stability of the Christian faith« (ibid.) but also as a period of artistic freedom and an appreciation of handmade goods, especially art. These are reflected in the works of William Morris »whose ideas exerted the longest and most powerful influence« (ibid.: 14) of all the members of the movement. Motifs for the decoration of Morris' Red House in Kent already hint at source material for much later book covers because they included »flower, tree, animal and bird motifs« as well as »scenes from medieval romances […] with its medieval Gothic spirit and strong colours« (ibid.: 16). Designs by the Kelmscott Press but also the Century Guild are forerunners for later medievalist aesthetics and designs, not only on book jackets but on the various medievalist merchandise mentioned above (cf. the chapter on William Morris by Velten in this volume).

Both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts Movement carry an aesthetic as well as philosophical or even political impetus. L'art pour l'art is something to be rejected – their works are intended to improve the life of the creator as well as that of the buyer. Morris had lifelong problems with conciliating the fact that his expensive designs could only be afforded by wealthy buyers while at heart he was a Socialist.

7.3 From the End of the 19th Century to the End of the 20th Century

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century basically sees a continuation of principles established during Romanticism and the Arts and Crafts movement: Art nouveau and some elements of art déco. Art nouveau with its fondness of floral motifs and organic alignment reproduces important elements of the Arts and Crafts movement while art déco is influenced and expressed by different

tendencies and especially in its approach towards art (l'art pour l'art) it opens up a chasm to the more philosophical and political approaches which are an integral part of the Arts and Crafts movement. Art déco with its fondness of valuable materials, organic forms, and colourful designs may in parts be traced back to the art nouveau.

In terms of medievalism and medievalist aesthetics the illustrations of Thomas *Malory's Le Morte Darthur* by Aubrey Beardsley (published in 1894)[10] pick up and continue the designs of William Morris and his Kelmscott press (1891–1898). The more elaborate and ornamental style of Morris is already somewhat tuned down in some of Beardsley's zinc-etchings and even more reduced in Marcellino's designs which will considered in extenso in the following.

Probably one of the most formative influences on 20th century medievalism is J.R.R. Tolkien – not only through his vivid writing, detailing landscape and architectural features, clothing and accessories but also through his illustrations which were published from 1979 onwards. Tolkien's formative years were spent around and in Birmingham and his aesthetics are »rooted in the city's manufacturing history« while the »artisan community appealed to him« (Garth 2022: 176). William Morris as one of the central figures of the Arts and Crafts movement was a big influence on Tolkien in

> his writings […], decorative artwork and calligraphy. The associated Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood inspired Tolkien's early ideal of creative community, which he saw as part of his youthful friendship circle the […] T.C.B.S. The Arts and Crafts ethos shaped the ideal of creativity at the heart of his legendarium and also, arguably, his idea of Middle-earth architecture. (ibid.: 177–8).

When following these lines of traditions, it also becomes clear that medievalist aesthetics up to rather recently are concerned with the beautiful and pleasant; this becomes obvious for example when looking at the illustrations of Alan Lee and John Howe which have seeped into the public mind when visualising Tolkien's work. The dark image of the medieval period pervasive in the public mind and sketched above was also depicted but generally, the knight in shining armour on a flawlessly white horse featured more prominently in medievalist depictions than the dirty and diseased peasant.

7.4 Post-Modern

With the screening of the monumental *Lord of the Rings* trilogy at the beginning of the new millennium, medievalist aesthetics within a mainstream context underwent a change that is still very visible more than two decades later. While Romanticism, the

10 I am indebted to Nathanael Busch for pointing this remarkable artist out to me.

Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement as well as much of the late 19th and 20th century reception of medievalist aesthetics have emphasised the beautiful and pleasing, medievalist aesthetics have now turned to a more realistic and gritty approach. The knight errant on his quest, easily identifiable in Aragorn or Frodo from *Lord of the Rings,* does not need to appear in shining armour and voluptuous hair on screen but the actors Mortensen and Wood make it clear that questing is hard business and gets you a dirty face, ragged clothes and greasy hair. Fuqua's *King Arthur* of 2004 has not much in common with the once and future king of earlier generations, while discussions of the phenomenon go beyond the aesthetic aspect with which we are concerned here and

> »deconstructs conventional fantasy tropes, such as good vs. evil morality and nostalgic medievalism, often through emphasizing the brutality of the pseudo-medieval fantasy world and the toll it takes on the people living in such "historical" circumstances« (Bark Persson 2022: 69).

8. Analysis of the Covers of Gillian Bradshaw's Trilogy *Down the Long Wind*

It should now be clear that analysing a cover is a way to not only assign a book to a certain genre but also to a certain time period of publication and reception. It is determined by marketing strategies, contemporary taste and influences and furthermore, it tells us something about the intended target audiences and their knowledge and estimations about the respective genre, content, and attitudes towards the medieval period in general. Therefore the analysis of covers of medievalist novels can highlight how this particular kind of literature, firmly lodged between the genre of historical novel and Fantasy (and potentially more), developed and was received. In order to illustrate how such an analysis might prove fruitful, I have chosen the different cover designs for Gillian Bradshaw's trilogy centring on King Arthur.

8.1 Bradshaw's Writing between the Genres

Bradshaw's writing is particularly interesting for two main points. First of all, the contents of her books illustrate that she had an academic literary training which also included broad readings in medieval literature spanning not only Arthurian tales but also Celtic, more specifically Irish, texts on mythology such as the *Immram Brain maic Febail*. This is quite recognisable especially in her first novel, *Hawk of May*. Second, and closely connected to that point, is the fact that her novels are meandering between the genres of historical novel and Fantasy. Although it is debatable whether the idea of King Arthur had a historical precursor, Bradshaw's novels give

the strong notion of a historical setting. She does this not so much by juggling dates and historic events but by a realism that permeates her story-telling. It is woven into descriptions of everyday life just as much as into the depiction of an (early) medieval hierarchical society that leads the audience to believe that what she tells could have happened in this way or in a fairly similar manner. With regard to realism, her writing is somewhat similar to Follett's, who also manages to tell us quite plausibly about the development of the entirely fictional settlement of Knightsbridge. Bradshaw, however, includes elements of Fantasy in her tale that have roots in the Celto-Irish mythology and legends: Her main protagonist Gwalchmai is able to leave the 'normal' world behind and enter a realm that fulfils all the criteria displayed above, being strange and fabulous at the same time. It is never altogether clear whether this second, better world only exists in Gwalchmai's imagination and thus makes him a formidable and feared warrior or whether it really exists behind/above/beyond the mortal world to which he has a special access. The same goes for the dark powers that Gwalchmai's mother Morgas exhibits. It is never made absolutely clear if they work because she is in league with supernatural, marvellous and marvellously evil powers or if her sorcery works because it is based on a well-calculated placebo-effect.

This careful balance between the genres make Bradshaw's book covers particularly interesting. They should, according to what was argued before, also carefully balance the design elements and therefore expectations of her audience while also linking her to the tradition within which she is placed.

8.2 Timeline and Context of Bradshaw's Trilogy

When Bradshaw is writing, her fiction is on the one hand nothing new but on the other hand the medievalist hype discussed above had not yet developed to such an extent. Bradshaw's direct forerunners are Rosemary Sutcliff (*Arthurian Trilogy* 1979–1981) and Umberto Eco (*The Name of the Rose*, 1980, English 1983). Bradshaw fits neatly in between with her own trilogy *Down the Long Wind* from 1980 to 1982. Commercially successful successors of Bradshaw are Marion Zimmer Bradley (*The Mists of Avalon* from 1982), Stephen Lawhead *(The Pendragon Cycle* from 1987) or Bernard Cornwell (*The Warlord Chronicles* from 1995), to name just a few.

While Sutcliff, although very successful, offers a retelling of the Arthurian legend, heavily based on Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, for a younger audience and thus has to attune to this specific target group, Bradshaw's novels are written for a slightly older readership but also for adults. Eco's novel, however, founded the fame of its author as the epitome of a literary polyhistor. His historical crime story is a much more ambitious project but it also uses a different setting of a late medieval Italian monastery. So although Eco needs to be considered when thinking about the development of the medievalist hype, his writing differs greatly from Sutcliff's and Bradshaw's but also from later works by authors mentioned above.

Bradshaw by no means invents the story or founds a genre. Her writing is firmly based in a tradition that reaches back to the end of the 19th century when retellings of the Arthurian legend became popular as novels for boys to infuse them with 'chivalric' virtues such as Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur* which was republished in the 1950s. The immensely popular *Once and Future King* by T.H. White, partly made into a Disney movie in 1963, as well as John Cowper Powys *Porius* of 1951, which also blends historical fiction with elements from Celtic mythology, give further context to Bradshaw's writing. Other takes on the Arthurian legend by Susan Cooper (from 1965), Bernard Malamud (1952) or even C.S. Lewis (1945) blending past and present and thus 'modernising' the story can also be deemed as forerunners of Bradshaw although their approach to the content is vastly different. Yet any bibliography of Arthurian retellings makes it very clear that Bradshaw writes at the advent of a medievalist hype that produces more and more adaptions, retellings, translations and other forms of reception of the Arthurian legends in different forms of media.

Important for the analysis of the covers is therefore to keep in mind that Bradshaw, together with others, stand at the beginning of a pop cultural movement. With regard to marketing and sales strategies it is consequently important to find a way to promote the books which allows the potential readership to connect them with something already known (and commercially successful) but also stress their innovative approach to the topic: Bradshaw is not writing for boys to introduce them to medieval virtues like Lanier and others, she is not strictly retelling *Le Mort Darthur* in a version suitable for younger children like Sutcliff, she does not take a comic or optimistic approach to a deeply melancholic and tragic story like White, and she also does not take a decidedly Welsh perspective as Powys does in his take on the Arthurian legend.

8.3 Fred Marcellino (1939–2001)

The cover designs of the three novels *Hawk of May* (1980), *Kingdom of Summer* (1981), and *In Winter's Shadow* (1982) were done by Fred Marcellino[11]. At that time, Marcellino was approaching the hight of his fame as a designer of book jackets. Born in 1939, Marcellino held degrees from Cooper Union and Yale and had a Fulbright scholarship which took him to Venice. He first started his career as an interior designer but from the 1970s onwards he turned towards graphic and illustration, first working on record designs before becoming a renowned illustrator of book jackets. Marcellino's designs are not rooted in a particular style but his approach to the design was rather time-consuming and with a keen eye to detail because he made a point of reading the books he was designing the covers for. This approach was honoured by winning the

11 The following information on Fred Marcellino and his work are taken from (Estate of Fred Marcellino, online).

National Book Awards, category of jacket design in 1980, 1982, and 1983. The design for Bradshaw's covers falls within these years which highlights that the publishing house, Simon & Schuster, was invested in the project and by commissioning Marcellino as an acclaimed illustrator and designer of covers, also took great care to set up the trilogy for success.

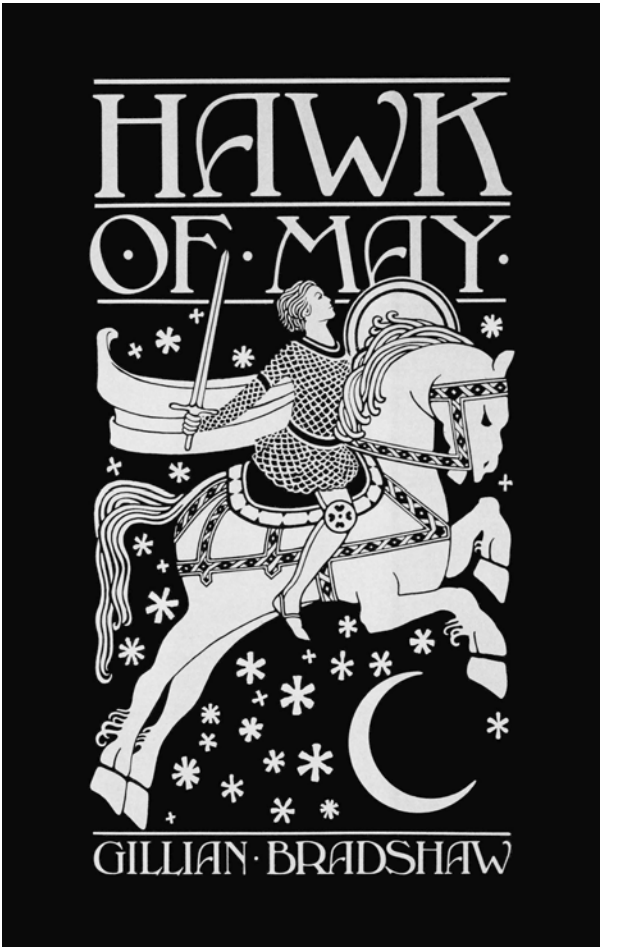
8.4 The Cover Designs by Fred Marcellino

The three different covers adhere to the same principles in terms of design, colour and even motif, which guarantees the value of recognition and the assignment to one specific book series. In terms of structural depiction the impression of the covers is that of linocut, clear alignments and stark contrasts turn the design into a cover that catches the eye of its prospective audience. When looking at all three volumes together, it also becomes apparent that the first design is by far the most playful: the lines are less rigid and more fluid, which makes the overall impression that of a dynamical, less strict composition. The other two designs show a parallel image, evoking strictness, and distance.

The motif of the horseman in canter on the first volume reminds us of the equestrian statuette of Charles the Bald but jambarts, mail shirt and shield attest that the horseman is a warrior and not a ruler – we are looking at the young Gwalchmai, protagonist of the first novel. Both horse and sword play an important role in identifying Gwalchmai throughout the series and become part of his extraordinary personality because he is indeed one of the few characters who has access to the strange and fabulous world of Celtic mythology which lends elements of the Fantasy genre to Bradshaw's trilogy.

In terms of colour, the cover provides a midnight-blue main colour, yellow-golden outlines of the motif and decorative stars in silver. Because of the dark background the motif is even more prominent; arguably choosing dark colours for all the volumes of the series might invoke the idea of the 'Dark Ages', which corresponds not only with the perceived personal living conditions but also with the scarce sources of this period, in which a potential historical Arthur would also fall. All the more prominent is the actual motif on all three covers: The characters seem to literally glow in front of the dark background and thus loom large and glamourous across time. As their attire and accessories are in stark contrast with the impermeable dark background, they also are characters which we automatically feel drawn to. The cover of *Hawk of May* employs gold and silver, which might point to the main protagonist Gwalchmai participating in two worlds, one of the preternatural and one 'realistic' – the waning moon, however, gives already an indication of loss and melancholy. Its position below the horse and its knight suggests that there is the possibility to overcome this. The abundance of stars also adds to the playfulness and positive image of the cover.

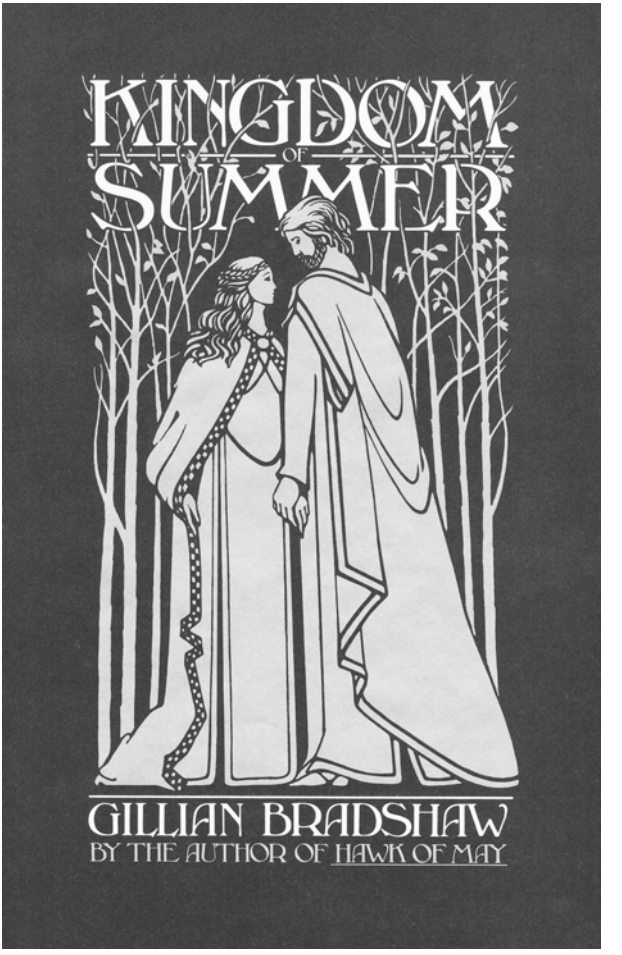
Fig. 1: Hawk of May © Fred Marcellino



The font announcing title and author has similarities of pre- and early Carolingian writing in minuscule but also of the Uncial or half-Uncial; especially the dots between words or within the letter o brings to mind dots that are used to indicate a rhyme or to emphasise spaces between words. These occur particularly in the pre- and early Carolingian minuscule. The most famous example of these two types of palaeographic writings is probably the Beowulf manuscript (Nowell Codex in Cotton MS Vitellius A XV). By using this font throughout the series for the title and the name of the author, the value of recognition as well as the identification with the medieval period are guaranteed. For the latter it is not necessary that the potential readership can identify the font or make connections to the early medieval scribal

traditions – because of the rather unusual font and the dots in between and within words the identification with the medieval period works.

Fig. 2: Kingdom of Summer © Fred Marcellino



The second volume of the series, *Kingdom of Summer*, sports two central figures on the cover, who might be lovers. The dark green shade of the background and the stylised trees imply a forest setting, which in medieval texts is often an indicator for secrets, adventures and circumstances, characters or events that do not adhere

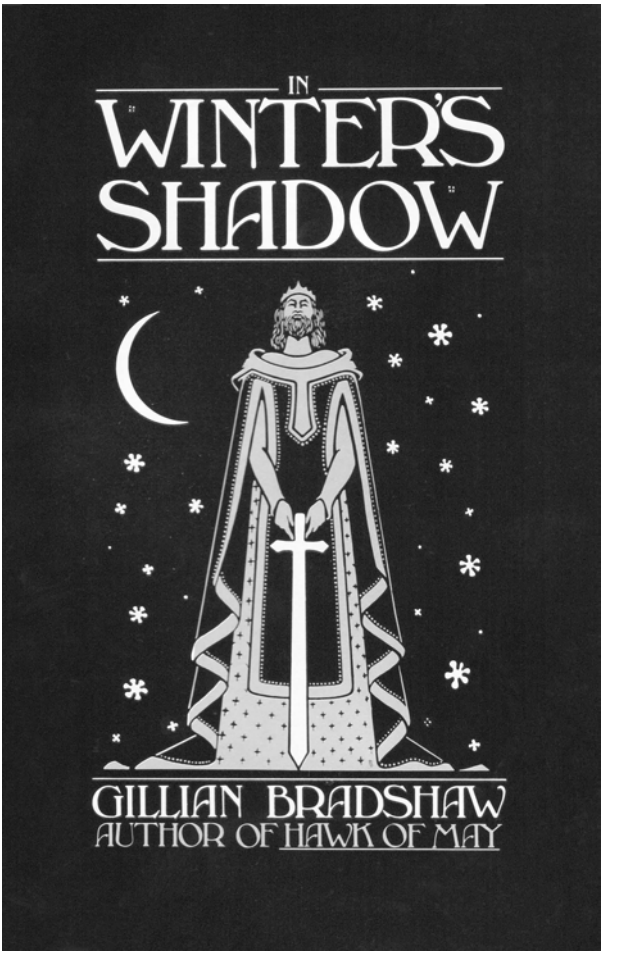
to 'civilised' and courtly proceedings[12]. Here the form chosen to depict this forest setting reminds us of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a prominent representative of the Scottish art nouveau, characterised by finesse of lines and ornamental verve (cf. Conti 2000: 59). Within Marcellino's work, a form of stylised forest is also employed for the cover of *A Few Green Leaves* by Barbara Pym, which has been designed in temporal proximity.

The motif of the two persons in close proximity, although not in an overly intimate position may refer to an older Gwalchmai and his lover Elidan holding hands in a rather subtle way. It is not entirely clear if the horseman of the first cover and the male character of the second are the same person but if that is the case, the cover elegantly illustrates the passing of time within the novels: The younger Gwalchmai on the horse carries all the momentum and enthusiasm of youth, his face is beardless and youthful and his posture full of agency. The older Gwalchmai on the second cover not only sports a beard but his whole posture is more thoughtful, less focused on action. Their clothing in long, flowing ornamented cloaks and dress evoke the medieval period while the font and the additional information on the prequel *Hawk of May* make the identification even more clear.

The last volume, *In Winter's Shadow*, depicts a static figure holding a sword on its cover. This is clearly no longer Gwalchmai because the man is wearing a crown, barely visible by his head being tilted backwards. The rich gold colour of his outlines suggest even more than the barely visible crown a regal figure – the colouring of the first volume was much lighter, still suggesting nobility but the contrast between the two shades makes it obvious that here a king is depicted. Readers being familiar with the first two volumes will easily identify this king with Arthur. His posture is dignified but also expresses a deep loneliness and resignation to fate by its static appearance and lifted head which avoids the gaze of the observer. The king also sports a beard indicating not a young and inexperienced man but a king worldly-wised and familiar with the sorrow that comes with power. His grip on the sword is not warlike but a touch that suggests great familiarity with the weapon thus pointing again to his experience with war and bloodshed but, at least in this depiction, his reluctance to make use of the deadly device. Here the association with the medieval period is easily made by the audience by one of the most iconic figures of the period being depicted and easily identified.

12 Cf. Forest and wildness discussed in Strieder, Miriam: Der Wald zwischen höfischer Prachtentfaltung und wildem Raum: Eine Spurensuche in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des Mittelalters. In: Der Deutsche Wald. Kulturgeschichte, Mythologie, Ökologie. In print.

Fig. 3: In Winter's Shadow ©Fred Marcellino



But Marcellino's design goes beyond this easy identification: The sense of tragic loss and melancholy is evoked by the stark symmetry of the solitary figure as well as by the waning moon almost on the same hight as the face of the king. The stars, already familiar through the first cover, reappear but here they do not denote the happy twinkling but emphasise the night that is about to engulf the king. For avid afficionados of Fantasy the stars may be a reminder of Tolkien's depiction of the Door of Durin or the Emblem of Gondor, both also with a dark background bringing out the contrast all the more clearly. Although all three covers designed by Marcellino are held in dark colours, only the last one is truly black thus bringing the colour-coding of the series to its gloomy climax and hinting at the downfall of the Arthurian reign.

When analysing the design devised by Marcellino it becomes clear how he employs colour-coding, design and general patterns that may already have been familiar so that his book jacket design offers something recognisable with which to root the trilogy within the genres. This is done by connections with the art nouveau as well as by evoking illustrations by Beardsley and then by Tolkien that were first published by his son Christopher in the form of a calendar at the end of the 1970s which means that they could have been familiar to Marcellino.

8.5 The Cover Designs of the German Editions (1982 to 1984)

The German editions use a similar strategy for the design of the cover and therefore for opportunities to market the books. This may not be immediately apparent when looking at the designs because they look very different from Marcellino's. They are inspired by Peter Behrens and Alfons Maria Mucha but there seems to be no contemporary artist that can directly be linked with the designs because at least some of the elements are partly too apposite regarding the content of the series: On the first cover within the central medallion we see the young Gwalchmai throwing a spear or handling a lance, a fighting technique which characterises the protagonist of the first novel. Furthermore, when looking closer, a bird of prey, potentially a hawk, and a horse may be discerned, two animals that are also closely linked with Gwalchmai, who is often called a hawk and who rides a special horse with otherworldly characteristics.

The tendrils enveloping the cover give the cover a special dynamic but may also be linked by the audience to Celtic designs within early medieval book art. The first volume of the series employs the lightest colours by far and thus the generates a positive and optimistic impression. The font for the title and the name of the author is similar to the ones on the covers of the English editions but not so clearly medieval – readability was here the prime focus, especially as the cover as such already seems to be quite full and exuberant with details.

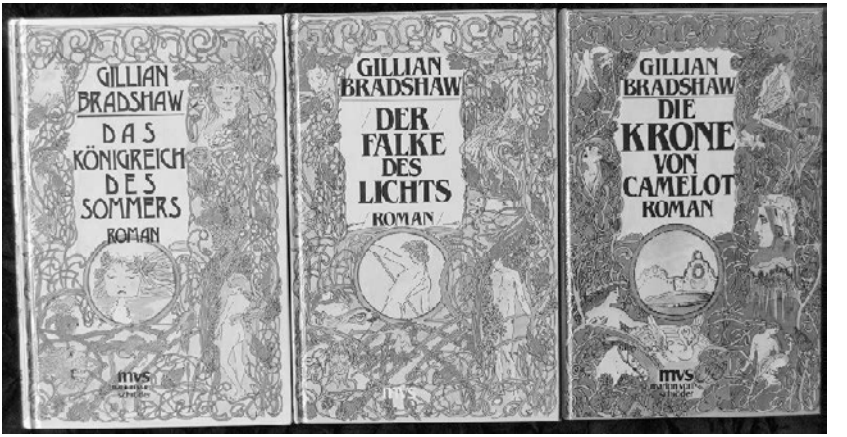
The second cover design poses several problems, first and foremost that the motif can no longer easily be connected with the content of the novel: A lion and a parrot are featured in the pattern of tendrils as well as several male and female figures, none of who can be identified with characters from the story – they are allegorical at best but also for what they actually stand cannot be gauged with certainty. Here, the central medallion offers a face of a woman instead of a sinking or rising sun over the sea. This may be Morgas, Gwalchmai's mother, or Elidan, his lover but a clear identification is impossible. As it is also not clear whether the sun is rising or setting, the mood of the medallion cannot be estimated. All in all, the pattern of tendrils has remained the same, but the colour has grown darker while the background remains light.

The same observation can be made for the last cover of the series: The colours are even more dark because the background has now been filled with a dark blue colour thus effectively changing the mood of the whole cover. The allegorical figures which are still present seem to be older, especially the royal figure on the right side invokes the impression of mourning and melancholy while other figures also portray this mood by upward to downward glances and facial expressions that convey this impression. Two figures remain puzzling, first the supposedly female figure with the sword in the upper right hand corner – it is possible that this should be read as a depiction of war – and second the female figure with the swan on the lower right hand corner. She might signify Arthur's queen but this needs to remain questionable. The central swan also does not have a direct connection with the plot of the novel; its posture may indicate even the legend of the self-scarifying pelican conveyed by the *Physiologus* but a modern and postmodern general audience would probably not be able to make this connection and a reference to the content of the whole series remains unclear. The stallion on the lower left hand corner may again be a depiction of Gwalchmai's special horse but the connection is not a necessary one. The forest on the right side of the central medallion carries reminiscences of the forests illustrated by Tolkien for the Hobbit (»Bilbo comes to the Huts of the Raftelves« and »The Elvenking's Gate«) but here an eagle-eyed closer look and intimate knowledge of these special illustrations would be necessary to identify it. Lastly the crown in the central medallion offers interesting perspectives: It is not seen as a whole but leaves parts invisible thus denying the perfection of a round object. Furthermore, it is not symmetrical but quite unconventional with its centre piece off centre in the medallion. It thus indicates a troubled kingship which rings true for the last part of the series. The association is, however, yet again so vague that a broader audience would probably only be able to connect the crown with kingship as such.

It seems that the elegance evoked by the references to art nouveau gets more and more subtle with each design and a strangely unfitting naivety creeps into the designs. This may be a reference to the decay and final downfall of the Arthurian reign as depicted in Bradshaw's telling of the Arthurian legend but it may also be grounded in reasons that can no longer be identified.

The difference to Marcellino's design with the clear alignment, stark contrasts and easily decoded symbolism is striking. Although both designs refer to already established and well-known tendencies in the arts and easily identifiable precursors, the differences are prominent and should have evoked different estimations of the series by the potential audience and their expectations regarding the novels.

Fig. 4: The Three Covers of the German Edition © photography Rainer Schiefer



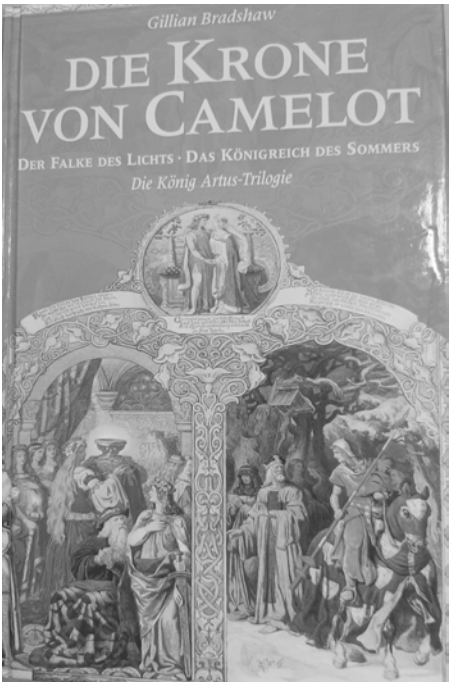
8.6 The Design of the German Collected Volume of 1999

A collected volume in German was published in 1999 by the publishing house Schröder and the cover design uses yet another approach to denote a medievalist content. This denotation is fabricated by the use of the painting *Parzival und der Gral* by Eduard Ille (1869). Ironically, neither this knight nor the Grail play any part in Bradshaw's novels. The central medallion and the right side of the cover are so generic that they may also be connected with elements of the narrative: The medallion depicts knight and lady in the context of courtly love which may be attributed to Gwalchmai and Elidan or the queen and Bedwyr but neither couple strictly adheres to a setting of courtly love. The right part of the cover shows a knight on a horse, in its original context probably Parzival on his quest for the Grail, but readers of the novels may easily identify the knight with Gwalchmai on his white stallion although the horse depicted is probably not completely white. The left hand scene, however, needs to remain mysterious for a readership of the novels: Obviously we are looking at the Grail being presented by his carrier at the castle of the Grail – in Bradshaw's trilogy, there is no scene that is comparable which would allow for a clear association.

The main colour of the cover is a warm tinge of orange, neither associations with the regal red nor with gold can be easily made, although the warm hue offers the association with gold more easily than with the powerful red. The colour is strikingly different from the dark images of Marcellino and the colour code growing more shadowy and dark of the German editions from the 1980s. Again, when considering the content of the trilogy, the colour does not necessarily fit the story – expectations of a warm and positive tale are evoked, not one of tragic loss and a bygone era. The

font for the title and the name of the author does not use any elements that would make an identification of medievalist content possible, which means that this identification rest solely with the motif.

Fig. 5: Die Krone von Camelot ©Werbeagentur Eisele & Bulach, Augsburg



Ille's style can be easily identified with the Nazarenes, originally a group of German artists, mostly from the South and Catholic, residing during the romantic period in Rome. Ille's works, however, are too late for this attribution. He addresses the upper class of Munich and the Bavarian nobility of the mid 19th century and provides them with paintings on medieval, bygone glory but also contributions to the *Münchner Bilderbogen*. His image of the Middle Ages is far removed from what Bradshaw generates in her novels – the mismatch of cover design and content can be explained by taking into consideration that the collected volume was published in 1999, almost twenty years after the original publication date: Medievalist content has become well known and popular within the mainstream culture, it has its own fanbase and therefore a cover design does not need to employ sophisticated means to facilitate sales. A generic association with the medieval period, a knight errant and an otherworldly

or preternatural mystery suffice for the audience to identify medievalist content. Furthermore, the catchwords »Krone« and »Camelot«, prominently placed in the title, make the identification of genre and content as easy as possible – Marcellino's specific hints, elegantly designed, have become superfluous.

Two years later the first part of the *Lord of the Rings* movies was screened and introduce a new form of medievalist aesthetics based on Tolkien's own designs but also on elements from films from the 1980s and 1990s. The exorbitant success of the movies, the immense merchandising and their continuation (most recently by Amazon Prime) have elevated these aesthetics to a kind of gold standard when it comes to medievalist content, which means that the covers designed by Marcellino are still considered 'fashionable' while especially the design of the collected volume feels even more alien today.

8.7 Other German Editions

In 1984 and in 1991, Rowohlt and Goldman published paperback editions of Bradshaw's novels. The designs of the covers look very different from what we have examined so far. The design is much more easily linked with the content of the books and it does not refer to medievalist currents in the arts. Both designs change the attribution of the cover in favour of children's or young adults fiction by employing colourful and clear depictions of medievalist topics. With the edition from Rowohlt, Gwalchmai is in the centre of the depiction while the background of the edition done by Goldman may hint at an illustration in a Book of Hours. Both covers use the fact that Bradshaw's trilogy was commercially successful, that further novels with medievalist content as well as movies like *Excalibur* (1981), *Ladyhawke* (1985) or *The Name of the Rose* (1986) have provided new medievalist aesthetics which were not heavily influenced by currents in the arts.

Only one year after the publication of the collected volume, Bradshaw's trilogy is again published, this time by Econ and again it has been branded as children's and young adults' literature. This becomes very apparent when looking at the cover, where a boy, serving as identification for the young readership, stretches a hand out admiringly to reach Gwalchmai's horse. In 2008 the trilogy was last published for a German market: The Aufbau publishing house worked with elements described above by using the aesthetics of faded parchment, a clearly identifiable symbol that denotes medievalist content and a familiar decorative background which vaguely evokes insular or Nordic designs – the medievalist hype is at that time so prominent that allusions with sword, ornaments and parchment suffice to be able to identify the content of the book and thus reach the respective target group.

9. A Conclusion on Medievalist Aesthetics and Marketing

Today's perspective is vastly different from when Bradshaw was writing: Medievalist aesthetics have become a mainstream design element for all kinds of media and merchandise alike. Novels, movies, and computer games have greatly influenced our perception of medievalist content – probably the most influential elements have been adaptations of Tolkien's novels and the *Game of Thrones series*, both in written and visual form. When thinking about today's medievalist aesthetics, it makes sense to conclude with Marco Schneiders again: The new aesthetics of Bastei Lübbe as well as Macmillan for the English edition with its stark colour and simple motif remind of Marcellino's work. The helmet of Sutton Hoo depicted on the cover of both editions is one of the most iconic sights of medievalist aesthetics while the background is filled with ornaments – for the English cover these remind us of the designs made popular by the Book of Kells and similar manuscripts in the insular style while the German edition features architectural elements which refer back to the building of the cathedral in the first book of the *Knightsbridge-series*.

These elements, helmet, insular ornaments, and architectural features, illustrate fittingly how in an almost unperceivable way, knowledge about the medieval period has seeped into the mind of the broader public but also how new, and partly more sophisticated, points of reference have been established, how elements, artists and oeuvres have become canonical.

In conclusion on the analysis of the different designs for book covers of one and the same text, one might reach the following verdict: Marcellino takes up the aesthetics by Tolkien and thus puts Bradshaw's writing into a certain line of tradition; her tale is nothing genuinely new but a retelling of something familiar. This is what the cover gets across especially for an audience that is already acquainted with medievalist writings. At the beginning of the 1980s neither Marcellino nor marketing experts can fully fathom that they are on the brink of a medievalist hype that will last through the next decades and will also affect other forms of media such as film and, even more prominently, computer games. At that point, Bradshaw's potential readership is limited and experiments with regards to medievalist aesthetics are not considered wise. The quite remarkable cover designs of Marcellino show that the medieval period and its reception has not yet reached the mainstream; since then much has changed and with it the medievalist aesthetics and marketing strategies.

A similar conclusion may be drawn for the German editions: It also draws on an aesthetic tradition, namely that of art nouveau – Tolkien and his particular aesthetic are not that well known and popular in the German speaking world at that time and therefore do not exhibit such a high recognition value. Therefore, the creator of Middle Earth is not necessarily a point of reference for the design of the editions of the early 1980s. After the first attempts of linking Bradshaw's novels with the art nou-

veau, publishing houses change their strategy and instead rebrand the trilogy and locate it within the genre of children's and young adults' fiction.

For a scholarly engagement with medievalist aesthetics and cover design in particular, this leads to two overall conclusions: First, do judge a book by its cover and do take the implications of that cover into consideration! Second, cover design and marketing strategies tell us something important about the public that had been characterised at the beginning of this paper: Knowledge about the medieval period, even if it is based on fictional instead of factual or even academic sources, has grown exponentially over the last decades. Forty years ago, almost no one could have identified the helmet from Sutton Hoo and connected it with the early medieval period – designs by Tolkien were already too specific for a broader readership outside the anglophone world. The cover designs discussed here prove to be a good indicator not only for the extent of the medievalist hype but also for the knowledge about the period it has disseminated within a broad readership.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: ›Cover for Hawk of May‹, designed by Fred Marcellino, 1980. In: Gilian Bradshaw: Hawk of May. New York 1980, Simon & Schuster.

Fig. 2: ›Cover for Kingdom of Summer‹, designed by Fred Marcellino, 1981. In: Gilian Bradshaw: Kingdom of Summer. New York 1981, Simon & Schuster.

Fig. 3: ›Cover for In Winter's Shadow‹, designed by Fred Marcellino, 1982. In: Gilian Bradshaw: In Winter's Shadow. New York 1983, Simon & Schuster.

Fig. 4: ›Cover designs for the German edition‹, photography by Rainer Schiefer, without date.

Fig. 5: ›Cover design for the German compiled edition, based on the painting *Parzival und der Gral* by Eduard Ille (1869)‹, designed by Werbeagentur Eisele & Bulach, Augsburg.