

## NEWBERRY INC. 1699 AND AUDIENCE EMPOWERMENT

### The Problem: Gatekeeping

Who gets to be a “medievalist”? This might come across as an odd question for many professional medievalists, especially if they’re in a graduate program. I assume that their answer would be the same as mine was while I was working towards my PhD: someone who has completed (or at least pursued) advanced study of the Middle Ages at a university in a humanities discipline of some kind. It seemed like a logical answer at the time; after all, every person I had ever known who called themselves a “medievalist” either had a PhD already or, like me, was on their way to getting one. In fact, I didn’t even think I’d earned the right to refer to myself as “a medievalist” until I got into my doctoral program; before that, I was just a “history major who liked medieval history.”

I don’t think I’m the only one who reads some kind of professionalization into the word “medievalist.” It seems to me that plenty of people outside the field think so, as well. So, too, does the Oxford English Dictionary, which has this as the primary definition of the word: “An expert in or student of medieval history, culture, etc.” Right after that, though, we find something a bit different: “Also: a person who practises or is sympathetic to medievalism in art, religion, etc.” Hmm. This definition seems to suggest that someone *without* an advanced degree, that is, someone who just “likes medieval things,” could also call themselves a “medievalist.” Do you agree? Which of these definitions do you think is the *better* definition?

If someone were to do a survey of just this question, my guess is that a majority of respondents would go with the first option in the OED. And if you asked that question just to professional medievalists, I think that majority would be even bigger. In fact, it seems to me that people in the field have an even more stringent definition of that term than the OED does. Based on my experience, I think the field’s working definition of a “medievalist” looks like this: “An expert in or student of medieval history, culture, etc. that is formally affiliated with an institution of higher learning.” While I doubt that many (if any) professional medievalists would admit to thinking that, the huge numbers of former PhDs in medieval studies working outside a uni-

versity who report feeling isolated or shut out from the field by their former mentors and colleagues is proof enough that it's plenty common.<sup>1</sup> And that's what I want to talk about in this last analytic chapter. The idea that only a trained expert in a medieval topic who's working in (or, like me at the time of this writing, adjacent to) academia gets to be a medievalist comes from our final, and perhaps most challenging, structural roadblock: Gatekeeping.

In this chapter, we'll talk about how to get around this most difficult obstacle for effective public engagement. For starters, we'll go into some more detail about the dangerous way in which Gatekeeping subtly encourages medievalists to keep non-specialists from fully engaging the field. Next, I'll explain how medieval intellectuals managed to avoid this roadblock by actively encouraging non-experts to do the sort of intellectual work the pros did. Finally, I'll tell you about how I finally left Gatekeeping aside after unwittingly helping to develop the most virally-engaging digital resource in the history of the Newberry Library.

It is in no way an exaggeration to say that Gatekeeping is absolutely *poisonous* to effective public engagement. After all, it's hard to make a positive connection with an audience if a door always gets slammed in that audience's face. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that gaining expertise in medieval studies is a bad thing; I think it's essential that people take the time to learn languages, engage with scholarship, and do archival research so they can produce new knowledge about the Middle Ages. All that expert knowledge becomes the foundation for any successful public engagement we as a field can possibly do. Having said that, if we give the impression (through our words and/or our actions) that only the experts doing this work can count as medievalists, it becomes much, *much* harder for any of that public engagement to work. Even if we understand our work as a public service, develop and value creative ways to share our expertise, and go through all the hard work of developing a receptive audience, Gatekeeping has the power to shut it all down. The reason why is simple: if you want an audience to really engage with and support your group, at some point, *they need to feel like they're a part of that group*. That is, the people doing all the public engagement (professional medievalists) have to make their target audiences feel welcomed, valued, and appreciated within the field. Gatekeeping doesn't want to allow any of that; it prefers to keep any potential outside stakeholders just as they currently are: passive, outside observers who simply appreciate the field from afar.

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1 Cacciapuoti and Keohane-Burbidge, eds., *Independent Scholars Meet the World*.

It wasn't always this way, of course. Back in the nineteenth century you would have found a lot of medievalists according to the second definition from OED: these were people without PhDs who wrote books about medieval topics, composed poetry and novels inspired by medieval themes, went to go see medieval manuscripts in academic libraries, incorporated medieval architecture into their houses, and so on.<sup>2</sup> In other words, there once were lots of people without advanced humanities degrees who were willing to devote their time, money, and energy to engaging deeply with medieval content. In fact, they got so excited about it that it freaked professional scholars out, driving them to create the "scientific" field of academic medieval studies as a way separate the "real" medievalists from the mere amateurs.<sup>3</sup> But even then, non-academic medievalists didn't go away overnight; as Patrick Geary noted over a decade ago, in its earliest days the Medieval Academy of America (founded in 1925) included "great philologists" (i.e., the pros) alongside "architects, businessmen, and educated amateurs."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, by 2009, those non-expert medievalists in the Academy had all but vanished, and the situation seems even worse now. For that, we mainly have Gatekeeping to blame. But that's not the worst of it; I hold Gatekeeping responsible for a host of other problems plaguing the field, including (but not limited to) the crushing sense of imposter syndrome afflicting so many graduate students;<sup>5</sup> its consistent focus on Europe;<sup>6</sup> the persistently privileged, white, and male nature of the field and its published work;<sup>7</sup> and the profound sense of abandonment and isolation that comes when medievalists can't get a permanent position in academia.<sup>8</sup> So, if we want to save the field, Gatekeeping has to go. We have to find a way to maintain the high standards that lead to reliable and useful knowledge-making about the Middle Ages—that is to say, *not* what white supremacists are doing—at the same time as we make space for non-experts to do the same. Even within academia, this is not an entirely new idea. Indeed, there already is an entire subfield of history—public history—that is devoted to bringing people without PhDs into the work of making history, by giving them the necessary skills, resources,

2 D'Arcens, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*.

3 Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism*.

4 Geary, "What Happened to Latin?" 872.

5 Feenstra et al, "Contextualizing the Imposter 'Syndrome.'"

6 Lomuto, ed., "The Medieval Undone."

7 Ramos, "Confronting Whiteness."

8 Cacciopuoti and Keohane-Burbidge, "Introduction," 17.

and, most importantly, a sense of co-ownership in the process.<sup>9</sup> To this point, though, public history hasn't had much room for fields like medieval studies, in large part because the field is still predominantly an American one, where medieval history is in no way "local." Nevertheless, there have already been calls for professional medievalists to validate and learn from amateurs,<sup>10</sup> but creating that space within medieval studies remains a really tough task, which is why I think this structural roadblock is going to be the most difficult one for us to overcome. But, trust me, it can be done. In fact, it already *has* been done, all the way back in medieval Europe.

### **The Medieval Solution: Audience Empowerment**

The antidote to this structural roadblock is something I like to call Audience Empowerment, which I define as inviting non-expert audiences to *participate* in expert work and providing them with the necessary training or tools to do so successfully. We don't really have anything like this in medieval studies today, but it was all over elite intellectual culture in the Middle Ages. Certainly, professional medieval intellectuals also knew all about Gatekeeping, and were very happy to practice it, especially when it came to anything having to do with the church and its doctrine, reading the Bible, or fraternizing with non-Christian cultures.

And yet, there's plenty of evidence to show that, when it got right down to it, medieval intellectuals understood that they *needed* the help of non-experts if they were going to actually make a difference with their expertise. The church, after all, was not technically "of the world" anyway, so if they were going to make any impact in it (as their intellectual culture demanded that they do), they would have to have the support and assistance of laypeople to do it.<sup>11</sup> And we've seen a lot of that evidence already in this book. To give just a few examples, Peter Damian tried to make nobles like Adelaide of Turin and Godfrey of Tuscany feel like they were serving God just as much as he was; Hildegard needed people of every social station to take up monastic virtues to get the world into its proper state; and Henry Suso understood that he needed the validation and perspective of his many different "spiritual children" to feel like he was doing his job.

But it's important to note that in these collaborations, medieval intellectuals didn't think of these lay participants as just "the help." Instead, non-

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**9** Boyle, "Envisioning New Economic Models."

**10** Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*

**11** Howe, "The Nobility's Reform."

professionals could be full-fledged *participants* and even *collaborators* in the kind of work that elite intellectuals were doing. Alongside giving monetary and political support, non-experts could also do scaled-down versions of the same things the pros did, such as explain basic doctrines, actively participate in the liturgy, or encourage others to live an upright life.<sup>12</sup> But perhaps most importantly, whenever non-experts did those types of things well, professional intellectuals wanted them to know that they were not just pale imitations of the “real” experts. Peter Damian, for example, once told a layman who read a sermon on Damian’s behalf that “it is understood that any Christian is, through the grace of Christ, also a priest, and so is fully worthy of announcing his mighty works to the world.” (Ep. 145, 3:528).

This is what it looks like when an expert completely validates the work a non-expert does to support their field. Damian wasn’t suggesting here that Cencius could administer sacraments or anything like that, but he was clear that “any Christian” was fully capable of helping intellectuals further the divine mission of the church. Even if others didn’t put it in quite those terms, there is plenty of evidence Damian wasn’t the only medieval intellectual who felt that way. Audience Empowerment explains why Peter Damian seemed confident his correspondents would be able to use the spiritual resources he sent them, why Hildegard encouraged nobles and laypeople to practice the monastic virtues, and why Henry Suso wrote in German and cared so much about the validation and interest he received from his non-expert audiences. In short, intellectuals realized that they could sit in a quiet cell like Sad Ovid and write the most mind-blowing, brilliant study on divine truths of all time, but without non-experts out there learning those truths and putting them into practice, it wouldn’t make a lick of difference. The field of medieval studies today needs the same mentality.

In this final analytical chapter, we’ll take a closer look at this vitally important medieval solution. But it’s going to be a bit different this time. I could line up more medieval intellectuals talking about how valuable the work of their non-expert collaborators was, but I don’t think that gets to the heart of the matter in the best way. If we really want to get a handle on Audience Empowerment, we should be looking at the uninitiated audiences that medieval intellectuals were empowering. In the next sections, that’s exactly what we’ll do, thanks to a unique manuscript witness from the late fifteenth century, which will give us a better sense of how audiences outside

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12 Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*.

the intellectual elite were trained to participate in that intellectual culture, and, more importantly, how they made that training work for them.

## The Model: The Owner of Newberry Inc. 1699

Our model for this chapter is a bit more complicated than the previous ones. This time, our model comes from a book: a late medieval hybrid book (that is, one that includes both printed and manuscript material) that now resides at the Newberry, where it's catalogued as Inc. 1699.<sup>13</sup> Or, rather, our model is the individual who made this book (or had it made for them) in the last decade or so of the fifteenth century. Compared to the authors in the other chapters, there's a lot that I don't know about this person. I couldn't tell you for certain what their name was, where they lived, what they did for a living, when they were born and died, or anything like that. As you'll see, I'm pretty sure that they were German and definitely not a member of the intellectual elite, but that's about it. And yet, despite all this uncertainty, I'm positive that we couldn't ask for a better model to understand Audience Empowerment.

We know that by the time we get to the fifteenth century, elite intellectuals like Damian, Hildegard, and Suso had been actively engaging non-expert audiences for centuries. But for a long time, we couldn't find much hard evidence for any participation by these "ordinary" Christians; all we really had to go on were the texts produced by the elite intellectuals themselves. That started to change in the twelfth century, when we begin to see more manuscripts being made specifically for laypeople's use, including some in the vernacular. Elite intellectuals were behind a lot of these manuscripts, especially the ones that helped laypeople do spiritual work like chanting the Psalter or praying the monastic hours. In the early days, the majority of these manuscripts were commissioned by wealthy noble patrons, but things really started to open up in the fourteenth century, when the increasing availability of paper as a writing support, the rising number of professional scribes working for ecclesiastical and secular institutions who had time for private commissions, and the growing levels of vernacular literacy through-

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**13** Thomas of Kempen, *Ein ware nachuolung Cristi* (Augsburg: Anton Sorg, 1486), Chicago, The Newberry Library, Inc. 1699, fols. 198r–230v. My evidence for this chapter comes from both the printed and manuscript portions of this book, so you'll find two different citation methods. References to the printed book point to the original foliation in Roman numerals (e.g., fol. XVIII), while manuscript citations use the modern foliation in Arabic numerals (e.g., fol. 223v).

out Europe made it possible for individuals of modest income and social status to acquire and use books.<sup>14</sup>

By the fifteenth century, then, we finally have widespread, visible evidence for what uninitiated laypeople actually got out of all the public engagement elite intellectuals had been sharing with them for the previous millennium. The agency of these ordinary laypeople shines all the way through these manuscripts, whether they commissioned them from a professional scribe, acquired them second-hand, or made them themselves.<sup>15</sup> So, even though we don't know many biographical details about the owner of Inc. 1699, their book can tell us a lot about 1) what sorts of things a layperson without advanced training took from elite intellectual culture and 2) how they put what they learned to use for their own spiritual benefit.

At the time it was made, there wouldn't have been anything especially remarkable about Inc. 1699. Hybrid books like this were quite common around the end of the fifteenth century, and could be found in the collections of wealthy, elite patrons and intellectuals as well as laypeople of middling means and status.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the contents of the volume—the first German edition of Thomas of Kempen's wildly popular *Imitatio Christi* and a manuscript miscellany of commentaries, tracts, prayers, and poetry in the vernacular—fit with what we would expect from a compilation of late medieval devotional literature. This makes it an even *better* source for Audience Empowerment, because it means that the approaches and goals we find in here would have been pretty common throughout medieval Europe.

So what do we know about our anonymous model? By using the evidence in the book, there are some things we can be pretty confident (if not completely sure) about. For starters, we can guess that they didn't belong to the intellectual elite, since the entire volume (both printed and manuscript) is entirely in German. At the same time, this owner wasn't completely uneducated; they had obviously learned to read and write in the vernacular, maybe because it was necessary for their job.<sup>17</sup> We can also safely assume they weren't super-wealthy; the modest quality of the book's paper, ink, binding and the general absence of decoration suggest the owner saved whatever costs they could to afford to buy the book.<sup>18</sup> Finally, we can safely

14 Cf. Kwakkel, "A New Type of Book," and Parkes, "The Literacy of the Laity."

15 Johnston and Van Dussen, eds., *The Medieval Manuscript Book*.

16 McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order*, 48–52.

17 Parkes, "The Literacy of the Laity," 557–60.

18 Fletcher, "Customising Mindset," 43–46.

guess that the owner lived in some kind of medieval city—most likely Augsburg—where you would be more likely to find literate laypeople who were interested in (and capable of) owning books.<sup>19</sup>

But the most important thing Inc. 1699 gives us the confidence to say is this: its owner was an *active* reader. There is all manner of physical evidence throughout the book that it didn't spend its life closed on a shelf or locked in a trunk. Marginal notations, a manicule, and pastedowns show how the owner directly engaged with all the texts inside. Smudges, stains, tears, and thumbprints are signs that the owner worked carefully through the entire volume, rather than focusing on a few sections. Finally, faint reddish stains and a few spots of dried wax drippings are clues that the owner used this book while eating or working, day and night. Based on all this evidence, we can say for certain that Inc. 1699 belonged to a person who was willing to spend their money, time, and resources to enthusiastically and regularly participate in medieval intellectual culture. In other words, the owner of Inc. 1699 is a perfect representative of *exactly* the sort of lay audience medieval intellectuals had been interested in reaching since at least the eleventh century.

### Elite Intellectual Culture in Inc. 1699

Let's start by looking at what the content of the devotional miscellany can tell us about how well Inc. 1699's owner knew what was going on in elite intellectual culture. Altogether, the manuscript includes eleven separate texts and/or coherent groups of texts, all of which appear to have been chosen carefully and deliberately for this particular manuscript (Table 1).<sup>20</sup>

As we look over this list, we can already see some clear connections to elite intellectual culture. One of the first things that jumps out is that a lot of names here would have been very familiar to, say, professors of theology at the time: Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, and Augustine of Hippo. Though we know that some of these are misattributions, Inc. 1699's owner didn't; as far as they were concerned, their book contained legitimate works by some of medieval intellectual culture's heaviest hitters. Another striking observation is the impressive diversity of genres—commentary, small tract, prayers, poetry, hagiography, and even a plain old list of facts—which shows that the owner was interested in a wide range of intellectual work, ranging from basic things like litur-

<sup>19</sup> Fletcher, "Customising Mindset," 54–55.

<sup>20</sup> Fletcher, "Customising Mindset," 43.

Table 1. Contents of the devotional manuscript miscellany in Chicago, The Newberry Library, Inc. 1699, fols. 198r–230v.

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Commentary on the <i>Salve Regina</i>                                                                         | fols. 198r–201r |
| Pseudo-Thomas Aquinas, <i>De divinis moribus</i> (excerpt in German)                                          | fols. 210r–218v |
| Prayers to the Five Wounds of Christ                                                                          | fols. 218v–220r |
| Poem on Dying Well                                                                                            | fols. 221r–222v |
| Versified Quotations from Church Fathers (authors unknown, Albert the Great, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux) | fol. 223r–223v  |
| A “Mirror” on the Virtues                                                                                     | fols. 223v–224r |
| St. Bernard’s Eight Psalm Verses                                                                              | fols. 224r–226r |
| Secular <i>Priamel</i> n                                                                                      | fols. 226v–229v |
| Numerological Table of Life Expectancies                                                                      | fol. 229v       |
| Spiritual <i>Priamel</i> n                                                                                    | fol. 230r–230v  |

gical practice (the *Salve regina* commentary) all the way up to scholastic theology (*De divinis moribus*). Just based on these quick observations, then, I think we can safely say that a non-expert layperson like the owner of Inc. 1699 was interested in pretty much any content they could get from professional religious thinkers.

But, having said that, we shouldn’t assume that this was just a random collection. All but one of its texts (and we’ll get to that one in a bit) was copied out by a professional scribe who was working from at least one exemplar, which suggests that each of them was *deliberately* chosen.<sup>21</sup> That was probably a harder chore than we might think; by the late fifteenth century, there was a staggering amount of devotional and theological material available to non-expert lay readers in all kinds of formats and genres, from written texts and oral traditions to physical practices and visual art. Given what we know about medieval manuscripts, it’s safe to assume that the owner themselves would have been heavily involved in deciding what to include.<sup>22</sup> And rather than put all their eggs in one basket, so to speak, the owner of Inc. 1699, as many lay readers and bookmakers did, chose to make themselves a miscellaneous compilation of shorter texts that came from different genres but could be combined into a cohesive work that was uniquely meaningful to them.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Johnston, *Scribes and Readers*.

<sup>22</sup> Johnston and Van Dussen, “Introduction.”

<sup>23</sup> Hanna, “Vernacularity and Miscelleneity,” 49.

When we put all that together with the physical evidence of use in the book that I mentioned earlier, we're left with a really important takeaway: Inc. 1699 wasn't just a book, it was a *tool*. Its untrained lay owner had invested money and time in acquiring it so they could use it to do something that would be spiritually beneficial for them. Remember how we talked above about intellectuals making a difference in people's lives? Well, dear reader, here's the proof: Inc. 1699 can help us understand how someone without any expert-level knowledge used the work of elite medieval intellectuals to guide some aspect of their life.

### Putting Intellectual Culture to Work in Inc. 1699

It sure would have been great if the owner of Inc. 1699 had left a detailed note somewhere telling us exactly why they wanted to have all these different texts in their manuscript. But, since they didn't, we'll have to figure out what this manuscript did for them another way. Our first clue about this is actually in the *other* book in Inc. 1699: the first printed edition of Thomas of Kempen's *Imitatio Christi*. This devotional work was already a runaway success in 1486, helping readers across Latin Christendom achieve "the conversion of one's life and a complete destruction of the desire for pleasurable things that make one a true Religious" (fol. XVIIIv).<sup>24</sup> The secret sauce for the *Imitatio's* success was its lack of detail. The four relatively short books in the work all contain useful tips on how to successfully pursue the "inner life," but are also purposefully vague about how exactly to do it. So, for example, Thomas encouraged his readers to "Never be idle; either write or read, pray or do some useful work for the benefit of others," but didn't give any suggestions about what things to read, what prayers to pray, or what works one might do (fol. XXIIv). This ended up being a good thing, because it meant that individual readers were able to fill in those details with whatever made the most sense for their particular interests. In a way, you might say that the *Imitatio* invited its readers to make the text work for them. I think this is exactly what manuscript in Inc. 1699 was supposed to do. Every one of those texts was there to help the owner do something that made it easier for them to follow the "inner life" amidst the hustle and bustle of urban life.<sup>25</sup>

It can be a tricky thing to try to make meaning out of a miscellany, especially if you don't have specific notes from the compiler. Luckily for us, I think there is something in this manuscript that can help us out: a collec-

<sup>24</sup> Neddermeyer, "*Radix studii et speculum vitae*."

<sup>25</sup> Fletcher, "Customising Mindset," 54–59.

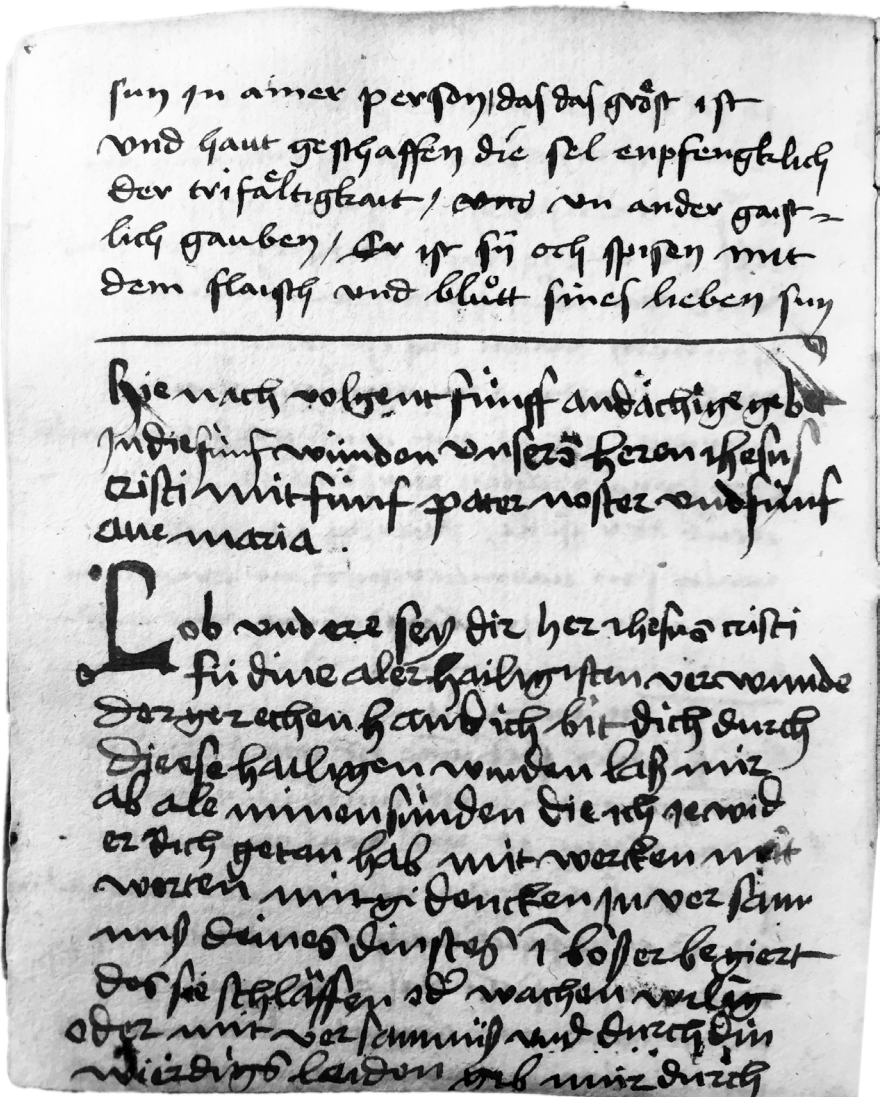


Figure 4. Beginning of the devotion on the five wounds of Christ. Chicago, The Newberry Library, Inc. 1699, fol. 218v. Photograph by author. Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

tion of “five devout prayers” (*fünf andächtige gebet*) to the Five Wounds of Christ that’s copied on a few folios in the middle of the manuscript (fols. 218v–220r) (Fig. 4). The reason this text jumps out at me is how, well, *messy* it looks. Compared to the steady, consistent hand in all the other manuscript texts, this devotion was copied out by someone who let their lines wander

up and down, smudged a bunch of words at the end of lines, and left almost no margins. This text, in short, was definitely *not* copied by a professional scribe, and for us, that's *great* news. It gets even better when you factor in the location. Folios 218v–220r round out the first quire of the manuscript, which contains the *Salve regina* commentary and the *De divinis moribus*. After the professional scribe had finished copying these texts, about one and a half folios remained blank. This naturally created an exciting opportunity for the book's owner, who could fill that space with anything that they wanted.<sup>26</sup> Messy as it is, it seems to me that the devotion to the five wounds was copied in a fifteenth-century hand, which means there's a very good possibility that this text was put there by the original owner of Inc. 1699 themselves. If that's true, then this scruffy little devotion can tell us a lot about what sorts of spiritual activities the owner felt would help them live the "inner life." In other words, the "five good prayers" are like a key to help us decode the purpose of the rest of the manuscript, which can help us see how an ordinary layperson made elite intellectual culture work for them. In what follows, we'll use it to isolate a few general rules that determined how the owner of Inc. 1699 selected the most useful texts from the mountain of available religious material in the fifteenth century.

### Rule 1: Keep it Short

The first principle is obvious just by looking at the text: it's pretty short, taking up just a little more than one full folio of a manuscript that was already pretty small to begin with. This makes a lot of sense for a non-expert reader, who wouldn't have had the time to carefully work through a long, dense treatment of anything. The owner seemed to take that approach to heart, making this already-brief text even smaller, so to speak, by subdividing it into five subsections that include a prayer to each of the five wounds Christ received at the crucifixion: the right hand, left hand, right foot, left foot, and side wound (respectively). But the owner didn't stop there. Even those subdivided prayers could be broken down still further into three distinct sections: an introduction, the prayer itself, and a cue to recite "five Lord's Prayers and five Hail Marys" (fol. 218v). In short (sorry), what we have here is the kind of text that a busy layperson in a medieval city could use to master a set of prayers that was easy to use and easy to memorize. When it came to non-experts, in other words, it seems that shorter was better.

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**26** Knight, "Organizing Manuscript and Print," 90.

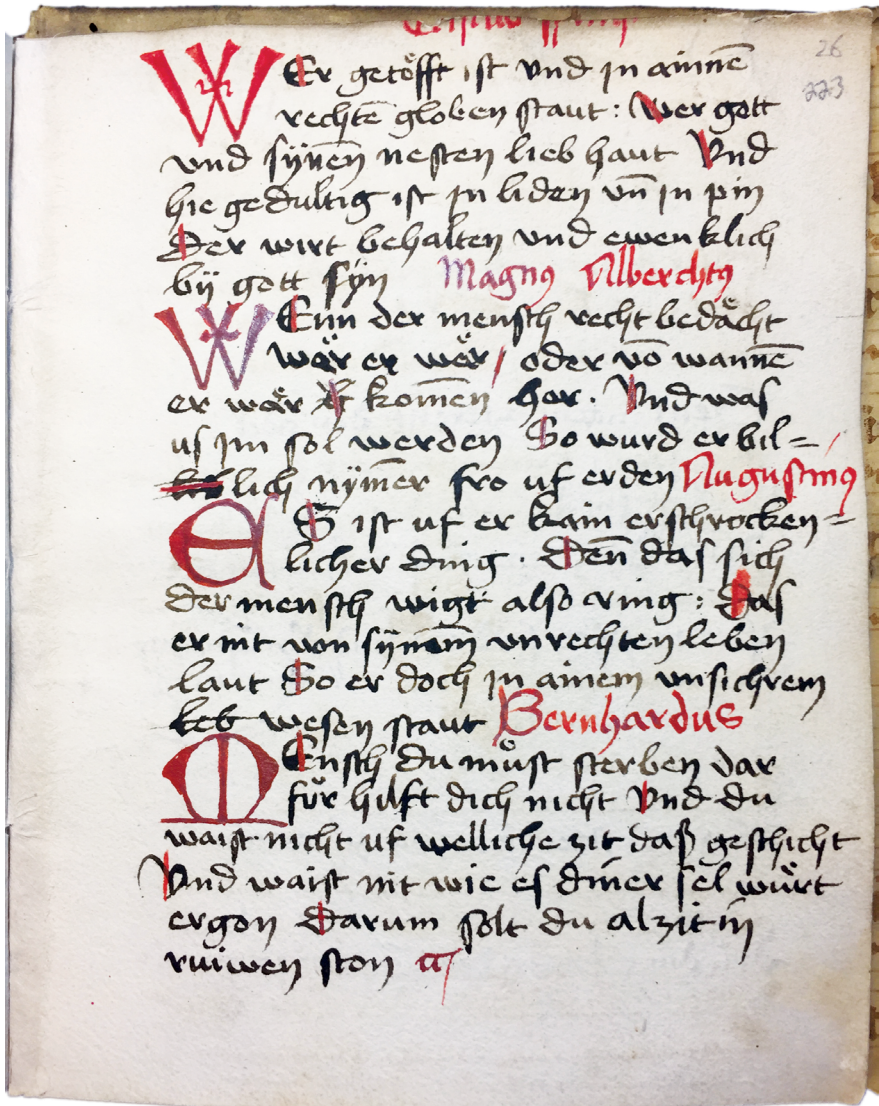


Figure 5. Versified, translated, and adapted quotations from elite religious thinkers. Chicago, The Newberry Library, Inc. 1699, fol. 223r.

Photograph by author. Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

That rule holds up in the rest of the manuscript, as well. Not a single one of the other texts could be called “long” in any real sense. Some of them, like the “mirror meant for rich and poor, great and small, noble-born, young and old,” are little more than a series of short lists describing various virtues, such as “Six virtues adorn a nobleman with the fear of God: Mercy, Humility,

Honesty, Love of Righteousness, Clemency” (fol. 223v). Knowing what virtues to look for in various members of society was pretty useful for someone trying to lead an “inner life,” and these texts laid all that out in a format that you could memorize quickly. Most of the other texts have a bit more flesh on their bones, but the same idea of condensing a lot of information into bite-sized packages shows up everywhere. Just before those short lists, for example, comes a pretty impressive feat of brevity: a four-pack of quotations from some truly prodigious medieval theologians—Albert the Great, Augustine of Hippo, and Bernard of Clairvaux (and a fourth name, almost certainly another elite intellectual, that’s been trimmed off) (fol. 223r).

The three thinkers named here (Fig. 5) are some of the most prolific authors of the entire Middle Ages, especially when you factor in the number of works (like in this manuscript) that were attributed to them. It could take a lot of work to wade through all that writing, but this page offered the owner easier access to their wisdom by focusing on some key ideas that were condensed and re-imagined as five- to six-line poems. Even the two longest texts in the manuscript, the *Salve Regina* commentary and the *De divinis moribus* translation, try to keep things short by breaking the text down into smaller sections organized by individual words or phrases in the commentary or straight-up chapters (*capiteln*) in the tract. We even see that subdivision idea play out in much shorter texts, like the account of Bernard’s eight Psalm verses, which is broken down into eight sections (one for each verse) that are, stop me if you’ve heard this before, subdivided into eight sections with rubrics marking the particular Psalm verse (e.g., *das ander verß*) followed by a corresponding prayer on that verse (*Das gebet uf den andern verß*) (fol. 224v).

## Rule 2: Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

The *Imitatio* was pretty clear about one thing: if you want to live the “inner life,” you better figure out how to avoid the secular world as much as you can. Filled with all sorts of distractions, temptations, and annoyances, staying too involved with anything on this earth was a surefire way to put yourself in spiritual danger.<sup>27</sup> And the best way to avoid that, it seems, is to remember that the world is a very, very, *very* bad place. Each of the “five good prayers” definitely got that memo, hammering home the sad state of the reader’s earthly existence and encouraging them to reach for heaven instead. The first prayer to the right hand, for example, asks God to “for-

<sup>27</sup> Thomas of Kempsey, *The Imitation of Christ*, 73.

give me all of the sins I have ever committed against you in deed, word, and thought, and make it so that I, who otherwise wish to be asleep in sin, will wake to become united to your service" (fol. 218v). The prayer to the wound on the right foot emphasizes the end times, asking "that you will, in your divine will, wish to protect me, your unworthy servant, day and night; and that you will mercifully heal all the unworthiness in my body and soul; and... take my soul to you on the Day of Judgment and lead me into Your eternal joy" (fol. 219v).

Not surprisingly, we find that same idea popping up all the time in practically every other text in Inc. 1699. For instance, the versified quotation from Albert the Great says, "If a man rightly considers who he is, or where he comes from and will return to, and what will become of him, he would never be happy on Earth" (fol. 223r). Taking this idea to the next level is a "good poem on the death and dying of Man" that immediately follows the Five Wounds prayers (fol. 221r). Fitting seamlessly into the long tradition of popular devotional literature on dying well, this poem helps the owner look to eternal life by doubling down on the frightening and disgusting fall-enness of anything in the earthly one, through the words of a damned soul directed to the living. "For now," the damned soul laments, "God wants to destroy your body like mine, so that you are no longer a person, but become food for frogs, snakes, and worms; the same thing will happen to all of you, so I want to remind you that the pain of hell should lead you to look to God" (fol. 222v). The very last text in the manuscript, a religious *Priamel* (a type of poem in the vernacular), takes a less-graphic approach to the same idea, but still may as well be a condensed version of the entire *Imitatio*: "Keep the love of God in your heart completely," it says, "and in the depths of your soul sweetly / and with all of your might resolutely / serve Him with full effort truly. / Proclaim the Word of God loudly / *Languish through this world fully*" (fol. 230v, my emphasis).

### Rule 3: Use Your Skills

Since the *Imitatio* is light on details, the manuscript texts take the opposite approach, by giving specific instructions for what the reader should do when using them. The prayers to the Five Wounds are, as we saw, extremely practical; part of the reason they're subdivided so much is so that the owner can learn how to do them easily. But it's also important to note how much action there is even in such a brief text. The best evidence for that is the "five Pater Nosters and five Ave Marias" that were mentioned in the text's title, which, as we've seen, are duly present at the end of each individual prayer

with the phrase *Pater Noster Ave Maria*. The full texts of those prayers aren't written out here, but that's not really a surprise; by the end of the fifteenth century (and probably well before), any devout, practicing member of the Latin Church should have been able to say both of them from memory without much trouble. This is a big deal, because it means that the owner would need to pull something else out of their devotional toolbox, as it were, to get the most spiritual benefit out of this text. These "five good prayers," then, weren't just an opportunity to learn some new devotional material, they were also an opportunity to practice other devotional skills that would help them meet their spiritual goals. It was, in other words, a chance to learn something new while improving something familiar.

Most of the other texts in the manuscript also encourage the owner to sharpen their skills while learning new material. The description of Bernard's eight psalm verses, for example, takes a similar approach as the Five Wounds prayers by appending a prayer to each of the eight verses. However, instead of basic liturgy, these prayers help the owner sharpen their mastery of the Bible itself, because they re-use the very words of the just-quoted Psalm. Take, for example, the fourth verse (Psalm 38:5) "O Lord, grant that I may know the number of my days and how many there are, so that I know what is wanting for me" is followed by this prayer: "Almighty God of gods, be merciful to me, a sinner, and *show me the number of my days and how many there are so that I might know what is wanting for me*" (fol. 225r, my emphasis).

An even more interesting example of adding practical actions to devotional texts is found right at the start, in the *Salve regina* commentary. The *Salve regina* was probably the most popular Marian antiphon by the later Middle Ages, and was often sung at the last monastic hour of the day, Compline.<sup>28</sup> Now, for a song that is supposed to be sung right before bedtime, there sure is a lot of action going on in this commentary. Here's how it begins: "As soon as you have said 'Salve, we greet you,'" it advises, "*immediately leap backwards* into the humility of the great worthiness of the Mother of God and say, 'O you most holy Lady of all the saints, have mercy on me'" (fol. 198r, my emphasis). Instructions like this show up all throughout this text, which makes it clear that actual physical participation is essential for understanding what the commentary says about the antiphon's words. One of my favourite examples of this comes in a later section that talks about the phrase "we cry to you" (*Schrjend wûr*), because the commentary liter-

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**28** *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 631.

ally puts a scream (*Eÿa*) into the speaker's mouth, inviting them to really perform this verse (fol. 207v). In that, the text is quite different from other vernacular commentaries on the poem, which tend to simply translate and briefly comment on what the Latin text means.<sup>29</sup> But here, in Inc. 1699, it's the action that counted, because this is what would build up the owner's devotional skills in the way that they wanted.

So, in the end, how did the owner of Inc. 1699 make elite intellectual culture work for them? I think it's pretty clear that they went into the whole process knowing exactly *how* they were going to learn most effectively—through short, easily digestible texts in a variety of formats that had a clear, practical orientation—and that knowledge helped them decide which parts of elite intellectual culture they wanted to use. At the end of all that, what they came up with was a manuscript that included a variety of texts representing the higher-level, more interpretive side of intellectual culture (the commentary and small tract) and the more practical, skills-based forms of devotion that were more appropriate for ordinary laypeople. That, to me, tells us that the owner already had a pretty good sense of what sort of “beneficial activities” worked best for them, but they were also willing to push themselves a bit to learn even more about how the various liturgical and artistic devotional practices could help them follow the “inner life.” Based on the fact that this book survived in such good condition and shows so many signs of physical use, I think we can say that this practical devotional collection functioned in exactly the way it was supposed to. In fact, it worked so well that the owner felt empowered to add a text of their very own, one that fit it perfectly with everything that made this devotional collection a success.

I can't say this for certain, of course, but I think professional medieval intellectuals would have been really happy with how the manuscript in Inc. 1699 turned out. In it, they would have seen the work of someone who, while not an expert themselves, had confidently and effectively taken elements from elite intellectual culture and creatively re-combined them into a book that helped them make progress towards salvation. In other words, the pros would have seen proof that everything they were trying to teach amateur audiences like Inc. 1699's owners was actually getting through to them. On that note—and this is really important—I want to emphasize that manuscripts like Inc. 1699 would not have been possible *without the full participation* of those elite, professional-level intellectuals. They knew that giving unadulterated specialist content in Latin to non-experts was not a recipe

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29 De Boor, “Ein spät-mittelhochdeutsch Glossengedicht über das *Salve Regina*.”

for success, so they had to do the difficult work of condensing, excerpting, editing, translating, and adapting that material so that uninitiated laypeople could work with it. For a good example of that, we need look no further than our old pal Henry Suso, who incorporated translated excerpts of the Thomas Aquinas's emphatically-elite *Summa theologiae* into his *Little Book of Wisdom*, one of the "good books" in *The Exemplar*.<sup>30</sup> In other words, having put in the effort to make this content accessible, those same elites handed it off to their non-expert audiences and let them make it into something that was their very own, just like the owner of Inc. 1699 did. In the end, both sides got what they wanted, which is the beauty of Audience Empowerment.

### How to Let Go

For me, vernacular devotional manuscripts like Inc. 1699 are just the sort of billboard material that medievalists today need to see. It's a reminder of what is possible if we could, like our medieval predecessors, make Audience Empowerment a real priority for the field. This might sound like a scary thought. Because, when you get right down to it, Audience Empowerment is really about letting go (even a little bit) of your authority as an expert *and* the control you have over what happens to your work when it gets into the hands of non-experts. Especially in an age where some *extremely* non-expert groups have found ways to use medieval culture that support violent racist ideologies, it might seem like too much to ask to open the door to the field and let the non-experts in.

If that's the way you're feeling right now, I totally get that. Audience Empowerment requires a level of vulnerability that most academics simply don't feel comfortable with. But, if I may say so, I think a lot of that fear and doubt is really coming from Gatekeeping, which still keeps alive the elitist worries of the nineteenth century, fooling us into thinking that welcoming non-experts into the field is a sign of weakness or some sort of drag on the field. If you can step away from that, as I did when I got to the Newberry, I think you'll find the prospect of opening up the field to be not so scary after all. There's one particular experience of mine that stands out, and it started a few months into my postdoc in 2016, at a meeting to discuss launching an online portal for all the digital content related to the project. The Newberry's Communications department, directed at that time by my colleague Alex Teller, wanted to have at least some digital projects ready to go at the launch, in order to build interest for the exhibition to come. The Digital Ini-

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30 Retucci, "Heinrich Seuse, Thomas Von Aquin und die 'Summa Theologiae Deutsch.'"

tiatives and Services Department (DIS) was also there, and they specifically requested something that included crowdsourced transcriptions, since their experience had taught them that audiences usually responded enthusiastically to those types of resources.

I wasn't immediately convinced by this idea; Gatekeeping still had a pretty good hold on me, so I doubted that non-experts would be able to do anything with the early modern manuscripts that featured in the project. Nevertheless, I somewhat begrudgingly suggested that we could build a transcription resource around three English manuscripts that would be in the upcoming gallery exhibition: an eighteenth-century commonplace book, a manuscript copy of Cotton Mather's *Cases Concerning Witchcraft*, and, most intriguing of all, an enigmatic book then catalogued as *The Book of Magical Charms*, an anonymous (at the time) seventeenth-century manuscript that contained a variety of spells, charms, incantations, and mystical religious material of one kind or another.<sup>31</sup> Together with DIS, I helped develop a website called *Transcribing Faith*, a transcription tool that would give users the chance to transcribe and comment on these early modern sources. Through all that, I still wasn't all that excited about the source, until I wrote the introduction for the main page. There, inspired by conversations with DIS, I used some language that my graduate student self would have been surprised to hear me say: "Help us unlock the mysteries of these texts." After the portal was up and running, I had turned my attention to other things, but Alex had noticed that *Transcribing Faith* was getting some buzz from a couple of websites (*Atlas Obscura* and *Smithsonian.com*). I took part in a couple interviews in the last weeks of my Mellon fellowship that were fun, but I still wasn't thinking all that much about our little transcription resource. It was cool that some people were interested, but I just didn't think that, when it was all said and done, anybody other than experts and students in early modern history would pay much attention to it. I was wrong.

Only a few days after my fellowship ended in June, I received a text from Alex that stopped me in my tracks: *Transcribing Faith* had utterly and completely blown up, going viral in a way that no Newberry digital resource ever had. Just as DIS had predicted, a flood of people, plenty of whom didn't have advanced degrees, had rushed to the site to do just what I had asked them to do in the introduction: help us out. Within a span of just a few weeks, thousands of people from around the world—including highly-trained scholars alongside music teachers, business professionals, undergraduate students,

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31 Kepplinger, "Rational Magic."

doctors, philosophers, practicing Wiccans, and general magic enthusiasts—had transcribed and corrected everything on the website. But that wasn't all, these same audiences were discussing, joking about, and promoting the resource and their experience with it on Reddit, Facebook, and other social media platforms. Not only that, within the site itself we found people comparing notes about their experiences, mentioning other manuscripts they'd seen elsewhere, and bouncing ideas off one another. It was a whole community of mostly amateur palaeographers and early modern enthusiasts that sprang up right before our eyes.

But wait, there's more! This enthusiastic community, quite against my expectations, really *did* help us learn more about our collections. Their work helped bring the book to the attention of librarians at the Middle Temple Library in London, who were able to determine that the seventeenth-century intellectual and lawyer Robert Ashley was the author and copier of our manuscript.<sup>32</sup> More than this, the non-professional users were excitedly sharing information with one another in the comments on the transcription tool, creating communities of amateur palaeographers that understood that they were working together to help the Newberry understand its own collections, which, in the end, is exactly what happened. Thanks to their efforts, we even had digital, word-searchable transcriptions of three more Newberry manuscripts for future scholars and Newberry patrons. Make no mistake, *Transcribing Faith* was a bigger success than any of us could have imagined, and while there were a lot of reasons why, in the end, the biggest one was exactly what DIS had said at the first meeting: people were excited that a prominent academic(-ish) institution was actually asking for their help. And boy, did they deliver.

I think we can see the same spirit behind the creation of the manuscript in Inc. 1699 and the other late medieval vernacular devotional manuscripts like it. They were, just like *Transcribing Faith* more than five centuries later, visible proof of the excitement, the interest, and the willingness of people outside of the academic elite to learn about and responsibly and accurately contribute to intellectual culture. I find that to be a very comforting thing when I think about the possibilities Audience Empowerment could bring to our field, especially when you consider how popular the Middle Ages are outside of academia. I've seen with my own eyes how non-medievalists of all kinds suddenly feel excitement, curiosity, and wonder when they encounter medieval manuscripts at the Newberry; how they can ask good questions

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**32** Satterley, "Robert Ashley and the Authorship of Newberry MS 5017."

and make connections between the past and present in exhibition tours; and how they spend their time, money, and effort to visit medieval places, work with medieval objects, and share their knowledge of medieval culture after they take my classes. In other words, the interest outside of academia in doing the work of understanding and talking about the Middle Ages—which, by the way, is *exactly what a medievalist does*—is very real, and is standing right there at the gate. All we need to do is open it.

