Konrad Eisenbichler, ed. *Renaissance Medievalisms*. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2009. Pp. 360. ISBN 978-0-7727-2045-0 (paperback). \$37.

Renaissance Medievalisms is an engaging and thoroughly refreshing look at the relationship between two periods that have consistently been placed in opposition to one another, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Consisting of a series of essays with a superbly crafted introduction by Konrad Eisenbichler, this recent publication of the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies (CRRS) at the University of Toronto suggests most strongly that the Renaissance did not simply erase and replace the Middle Ages, relegating them to a distant past. Rather, Eisenbichler, Professor of Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto and a past two-term director of CRRS, concludes in his introduction that the Renaissance was acutely aware of the Middle Ages as “something that was ‘other’ and, therefore, as something that could be adopted, adapted, and used to one’s advantage.” Eisenbichler provides a concise and compelling treatment of the concept of rebirth and the pivotal role it plays both in creating the tension between “then” and “now” and in shaping the dialogue between the so-called “backward” past and the “modern” present.

The studies that follow continue the discussion and explore the ongoing presence of that “backward” past in shaping the more “modern” present of the Renaissance. As Eisenbichler points out, the premise of the book is that there was obviously some continuity from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. At the same time he and the contributors to the volume recognize that the world did change dramatically in the four hundred years between 1300 and 1700. These two perspectives are present throughout the work, resulting in a softening of the traditional perception that the Renaissance represents a break with its immediate past while at the same time signalling a movement towards a more manageable theory of a slowly developing continuum in European culture.

The essays are grouped into three categories: those that consider the Renaissance awareness of the Middle Ages as part of an unconscious development, those that examine how the Renaissance consciously adapts the Middle Ages for contemporary purposes, and those that explore the ways in which the relationship between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance form the basis for exciting and new perspectives.

The first group of essays starts with Paul Grendler’s examination of sixteenth-century universities which themselves represent a continuation of one of the most pivotal aspects of medieval scholarship. In their essay “What counted as ‘Antiquity’ in the Renaissance?” Alexander Nagel and Christopher Woods then look at the continuum evident in the evolution of Renaissance art. In particular they consider the great interest expressed by Renaissance artists in Byzantine icons and mosaic and cosmatesque work. James Nelson Novoa discusses Leone Ebreo’s neoplatonist work *Dialoghi d’Amore*, suggesting that the *dialoghi* are as much a product of the Middle Ages as they are of the author’s own time. Donald Beecher’s essay on the fables of Bidpai explores how Renaissance writers of narrative fantasy easily absorbed the medieval creative imagination and, in particular, medieval Arabic sources. Gary Waller closes this section with his essay on medieval Marian culture,

concluding, as does Beecher, that the Middle Ages continued to inform much of the literature of the Renaissance.

The next group of essays considers conscious adaptations of medieval culture, starting with Natalie Rothmans's exploration of Giovanni Battista Salvago's *Africa overo Barbaria* as an example of how the medieval European myths might be manipulated for self-aggrandizement. Lidia Radi's "Joan of Arc and the Crusade" looks at how the medieval heroine Joan of Arc and the crusades were used to present the French king Francis I with a model of kingship to which he ought to aspire. Brian Goudy similarly explores how playwright John Bale used a fictionalized medieval past to present Henrician Reformation as predestined. Philippa Sheppard's "Carnivalising Apocalyptic History" considers Shakespeare's manipulation of the figure of Joan of Arc in *Henry VI* and how such manipulation enhances the political message of the play. Lidia Vecchi then looks at the prevalence of "complaint literature" in English Renaissance literature as an example of the enduring nature of a medieval literary form.

The final section of the book starts with Michael Edwards' essay on medieval philosophy in the late Renaissance. Edwards concludes that the notion of a wide gulf between medieval and Renaissance philosophy simply does not hold up to scrutiny and points instead to a continuum in which Renaissance philosophers simply brought a new perspective to older thinking. Richard Raiswell's "Medieval Geography in the Age of Exploration" makes Edwards' point even more concrete by noting that the geographers and explorers of the Renaissance were basing their conceptions of the cosmos on the works of medieval cartographers, prophets, and legends. Of note is the fact that even after the journeys to the Americas were widely publicized, much of the literary and cartographical production did not immediately incorporate this new view of the world but remained firmly fixed in the *mappa mundi* tradition. Hans Peter Broedel in "Now I will believe that there are Unicorns" equally notes that in the case of zoological studies, the Renaissance, even in the wake of the discoveries, clung to the medieval bestiaries and credence in fantastic and fabulous animals, a trend that persisted until as late as the seventeenth century. The belief in the existence of other worlds beyond the terrestrial sphere, considered next in Gabrielle Sugar's fine article "Medieval Universes and Early Modern Worlds," similarly shows how the Renaissance used the Middle Ages as the basis for new and exciting perspectives such as those being presented by astronomers like Copernicus and Kepler. Finally, Vittoria Feola's article on Elisa Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum britannicum* demonstrates that the three ways of discoursing with the past were not mutually exclusive. As Feola notes, in Ashmole's work examples abound of a continuum, a conscious borrowing and reworking of the Middle Ages in a Renaissance project.

With *Renaissance Medievalisms* Konrad Eisenbichler has gathered together some of the brightest minds in the field to create a cohesive body of work that constitutes a unified theory of the relationship between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. It thus represents a substantial and valuable contribution to the study of both periods.

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