

### **“NOSTALGIA,” ABSTRACTS:**

#### **Aidan Conti: “*Arthur's Black Knight: Nostalgia and the Limits of the Modern Medieval Imaginary*”**

In "Nostalgia and its Discontents", a summary presentation of her more extensive work, Svetlana Boym reminds readers that "The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future" (2007, 8). If nostalgia, as Boym suggests, lies at the 'core of the modern condition', then our longing for modernity's alterities, namely antiquity and the Middle Ages, offer temporalities that illuminate our own self-definitions. Whereas antiquity can be cast as the space of 'universal', or at least Western, ideals (which were in turn 'reborn' in the modern world), the Middle Ages present a distinct problem. The period witnesses the birth of present-day politics and their distinctive cultures, but also seems so foreign that it is imagined as outside of the antiquity-modernity trajectory. This dichotomy (of sameness and difference) lies at the heart of tensions about the representation and re-imagining of the period, all the more poignant given the seemingly insatiable longing for the Middle Ages in popular culture. With this nostalgia in mind, as evidenced by popular cultural productions as well as professional academic testimonies, this paper will examine contemporary re-imaginings of stories-Cymbeline, Lear, and particularly Arthur-that can trace their narrative beginnings to Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century 'best-selling' History of the Kings of Britain (*Historia Regum Britanniae*). Understanding Geoffrey's work as a fiction that performs as truth, I will look at how receptions of modern performances of these stories frequently apply ideas of fidelity and historical accuracy to fictions that have no original.

Within such discourses on adaptation, the representation of race serves as a poignant touchstone to reveal how morally loaded discussions of fidelity and accuracy belie a nostalgia for a specific medieval imaginary. In rather blunt terms, the modern imagination readily admits some 'medieval' figures as people of color, but others remain resistant to such adaptive strategies. This resistance, which invokes the pejorative charge of anachronism while touting authenticity and historical accuracy, however, imposes a modern understanding of race on a medieval alterity to construct a racially simplified past. The Middle Ages themselves were able to imagine a 'black' knight of the round table as seen in the thirteenth-century tale (and manuscript images) of Sir Moriaen among others. In this light, an authentic, accurate and chronologically suitable reading of the Middle Ages necessitates for a far more fluid understanding of race in our representations of the period than modern imagination tends to allow. Moreover, our nostalgia for an accuracy constructed by modernity's norms becomes a method by which the past is appropriated to a cultural hegemony and by which others find themselves removed from this heritage. As a result, I will argue that a multi-racial medieval imaginary is not only more authentic to medieval understanding-as part of an appropriate paradigmatic, rather than iconic, representation of the millennium-but also necessary in order to de-colonize the Middle Ages from dominant reconstructions forced on it. This freeing of the future Middle Ages stems not from an imperative for correctness (political or historical), but rather from the promise offered to the present by a multiplicity of hermeneutic stances towards a seemingly familiar but curiously incomprehensible past.

#### **Jennifer Ladino: “*Looking Backward in the Anthropocene: Nostalgia, Counter-nostalgia, and Solastalgia*”**

Natural environments have long been popular objects of nostalgic sentiment in American literature and culture. In this era of accelerating environmental change and

irreversible losses, nostalgia and other backward-looking affects demand renewed attention. The designation of a new geologic epoch, the Anthropocene, challenges scholars of nostalgia to rethink its functionality across times, scales, genres, and environments. Professor Ladino will begin by outlining the concept of “counter-nostalgia,” which she defines in her first book, *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (University of Virginia, 2012) as “nostalgia with a critical edge”; counter-nostalgic texts deploy nostalgia ambivalently and subversively, in order to contest dominant (usually conservative) nostalgic narratives. Ladino will gesture toward new applications of this concept in our current geologic epoch, including recent texts that deploy counter-nostalgia for politically and environmentally progressive purposes.

The Anthropocene encourages new forms of nostalgia and counter-nostalgia, including new incarnations of what Renato Rosalto calls “imperialist nostalgia” as well as what Noah Heringman (2014) identifies as “evolutionary nostalgia”: a longing for pre-modern humanity, exemplified by cultural trends like the Paleo diet and barefoot running. The Anthropocene precipitates other loss-related affects as well. Ladino will conclude her comments with a brief case study of an especially pertinent Anthropocene affect: *solastalgia*—which philosopher Glenn Albrecht first defined in 2005 as nostalgia for a home you have not left but which is changing around you. Ladino suggests *solastalgia* will become more prevalent, and will warrant more attention, in the Anthropocene and may be a useful wake-up call for the more privileged inhabitants of today’s world.

**Janne Stigen Drangsholt (Institutt for Kultur- og Språkvitenskap, University of Stavanger):**

**”Loss and Landscape: The Presence of Place in Alice Oswald”**

In *The Last of England*, Randall Stevenson points to how the mid-century renunciation of empire in England was followed by changes that need to be understood primarily in terms of loss. Each of these losses was conceived as marking the last of a certain kind of England, he claims, and while another England gradually emerged, this was viewed as a place less unified by tradition and more open in outlook, lifestyle, and culture (cf. Stevenson 2004, 1-10). Such a sense of loss also seems to characterise the perception of landscape, which had traditionally comprised “the mainstay of poetic imagination”, but which now also seemed in danger of disappearing, as signalled in Philip Larkin's poem “Going, Going”, where he laments an “England gone, / The shadows, the meadows, the lanes” (qtd. in Stevenson 2004, 3). In this paper, I want to suggest how contemporary poetry places itself in terms of this sense of loss and landscape by referring to recently published poems by Alice Oswald, focussing on the relationship between nature and the human being, past and present, and body and dwelling.

**Jógvan Helge Gardar (LLE, University of Bergen)**

**“The Republic Recreated”**

Tacitus' longing for a republican past often materialises when power changes hands during the Principate. The new, invented traditions of the Imperial Era could, when exposed as mere inventions, ready the ground for a stronger wish to return to some *truer* state. This restorative brand of nostalgia (as it appears in the *Annals*) may reveal to us the shifts in values and morals caused by the consolidation of power under Augustus.

**Rolf Scott (Social Anthropology, University of Bergen)**

**“Nostalgia as a Dynamic of a Western Individualistic Cosmology”**

I suggest that certain culture-cosmological formations enhance nostalgia. As such, this

paper will discuss how nostalgia could develop within Christian neo-platonic individualism. This “genesis form” that structured existence, was a process where the self became constituting as a point-sphere whose purpose was to transcend towards a point-global God. Ultimately this led to a self-centered individualistic, ephemeral, global reality, where time found form as a static moment in time, and the photographic, became the technology that democratized nostalgia.

**Mark Ledbetter (IF, University of Bergen)**

**“Nostalgia as Wound”**

Nostalgia is motivated by desire and longing, and nostalgia is antiphonal. It listens for the heart’s desire and responds with a fullness that satiates. If memory is all of who I am in its desperate, uncoordinated, and full, yet complex dimensions, nostalgia is the constant chord, the recognizable rhythm or expression. In and of itself, nostalgia is not a bad thing. I can no more be “not nostalgic” than I can be “not human.”