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Reflections on Editing *Exemplaria*, Part III

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Reflections on Editing *Exemplaria*, Part III

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Abstract

This is the third portion of an invited piece on the editing of the journal *Exemplaria*.

As avid readers of *Exemplaria* and as former authors and reviewers, the current editors began their training in the journal's traditions long before beginning our formal editorial transitions, between 2017 and 2020. After being invited by the past team and agreeing to serve as editors, each of us shadowed an editor and listened in on editorial conversations as we joined the team. We gained a sense not only of processes and timelines from Noah D. Guynn, Elizabeth Scala, Patty Ingham, Anke Bernau, and Andrea Denny-Brown, but also the guiding ethos of the journal: treating the review process as an opportunity for mentorship. Below we discuss the major challenges and opportunities we see for the journal.

Editing in the age of the Critical Global Premodern

We find ourselves excitedly grappling with a new opportunity: reframing the entire field in terms of critical global premodern studies. In our global turn, we have sought out and encouraged contributions on non-European literatures, European culture in global contexts, and topics of race. As importantly, we have been interested in redefining the journal's terms—medieval, early modern, theory—in much more capacious ways, as responding to the new horizons of the discipline, and as recognizing the non-equation, in particular, of the “medieval and early modern” of the journal's stated purview with medieval and early modern Europe. This recognition does not mean that we are suddenly responsible for covering the global premodern, but it does require that we situate as partial or incomplete the European cultures that remain the focus of the journal. At the same time, the global premodern turn allows exciting opportunities to rethink Europe itself, by expanding our sense of the geographical and cultural agents that have shaped its construction and emergence, and by affording a clearer mapping of European connectivity with Asia and Africa. That is, an Asia that extends beyond the Near East focus of traditional Crusades studies along overland and sea trading networks to the Pacific and an African continent whose full cultural and economic agency are now coming into view (Gomez 2018; Fauvelle 2018). Recent contributions to the journal point to the rich dividends of such new global investment. For example, Hassanaly Ladha's “From Bayt to Stanza” (2020) examines the way in which the architectural stanza of Italian poetry at the turn of the thirteenth century echoes the Arabic poetic بيت (*bayt*) (“dwelling,” also “unit of verse”) to reveal “stanzas still haunted by the Arabic episteme they translated” (17). Similarly, Sierra Lomuto (2019) investigates how Mongols were figured as “exotic allies” in colonialist fantasies of Muslim conquest and conversion in the Middle English *King of Tars* (174).

Beyond tracing forms of connection and transculturation across the three continents known to medieval Europeans, current research in the global premodern or “nonmodern” (Rabasa 2009) opens our field up to the furthest reaches of our own known globe through emerging fields like Indigenous Studies. As Brenna Duperron and Elizabeth Edwards (2021) recently wrote for an essay in our Book Review section, Indigeneity can decolonize both history and theory, because it offers “a critical inquiry into Medieval Studies,” showing how medieval studies has been involved in producing and bolstering settler-colonial ideologies” (96). At the same time, Indigeneity can reveal hidden theoretical debts to Indigenous societies, such as Mauss' notion of the gift (95-97). In these ways, the global premodern, decoloniality, and Indigeneity can expose and unsettle foundational assumptions within medieval and

early modern studies, just as the study of Orientalism and postcolonialism have done, even as these new approaches open up its archive and reinvigorate our forms of inquiry.

Defining Theory

As our forerunners discuss in the previous pages, theory is and has always been central to *Exemplaria*'s mission. It retains its status in the journal's revised subtitle, sharing space with the medieval and early modern periods that delimit *Exemplaria*'s literary historical range.

Just as medieval and early modern are unstable categories whose boundaries are continuously consolidated and redrawn as new scholarship emerges, what counts as theory is always shifting. Much of the conversation about theory and pre-modern literature has changed since *Exemplaria* was founded in 1989—and Liz and Noah rightly see the field as going through a transitional moment in the 2010s, marked by a rejection of the linguistic turn and an embrace of modes of scholarship—surface and reparative reading, digital approaches, formalism, and materialism—that are sometimes understood as anti-theory. The editors of *Exemplaria* do not see these modes as anti-theory but, rather, as having theoretical stakes, and, as a result, we have published vibrant contributions on premodern posthumanism, materialism, Actor-Network-Theory, and literary and visual forms in the last decade.

The 2000s and 2010s were also the era of historicizing theory, by scholars tracing the occluded medieval origins of founding theoretical texts (Hollywood 2002; Holsinger 2005; Cole 2014), as well as returning to more overtly acknowledged early modern points of departure (e.g. Hammill and Lupton, eds. 2012). We are not yet done with these genealogical projects, which read theory via the premodern as they also read the premodern via theory. A strikingly interdisciplinary special issue on “Medieval Barthes” (2021) takes advantage of continuing medievalist interest in Roland Barthes' work, an interest spurred by the recent publication of memoirs, previously unedited lectures, and a biography, all of which shed new light on the theorist.

Theory is especially evolving now with respect to developing work in the critical global premodern and Mediterranean studies. Scholarship that does not take cultural texts in isolation demands adequate theories of translation, multilingualism, form, and language (Stahuljak 2014; Novacich 2018) and of regional or intersocietal approaches (Degenhardt and Turner 2021; Stahuljak 2014). *Exemplaria* is particularly interested in providing a venue for work that theorizes race and global understandings of culture in the medieval and early modern periods. For example, Luke Sunderland's book review essay (2019) outlines the role of medieval studies in opening up the concept of cosmopolitanism—rethinking its periodization and genealogies—while also posing important questions about the need for further specificity, for greater focus on non-elite aspects of culture and for non-Eurocentric frameworks. As Geraldine Heng (2014) reminds us, engaging in the emerging field of premodern global studies requires “commitment to continual critical reflection on its animating terms, frames, methods, and approaches” (236). We hope that authors will keep looking to *Exemplaria* as a place to engage in this kind of reflection.

We also hope that our articles and review essays provoke and signal an openness to new approaches, questions, and methodologies. We are interested in the kind of “experimentation” called for by Roland Betancourt (2019), in which the writing of history is a means of making premodern temporalities accessible to our own experience and thought (264). Similarly, Simon Park (2021) departs

from established traditions for reading poetry, adopting a “creative-critical” approach to the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas de amigo* (298). Almost a decade ago Sarah Kay asked, “Is Interdisciplinarity the New Theory?” (2013), and recent work on performance studies (Chaganti 2013), cognitive approaches (Lockett 2016; Neuss 2021), anthropology (McKendry 2020), and law (Lerner 2020), show that this question is still worth asking.

One further turn we would like to see theory take is toward pedagogy and activism, both political and institutional. How can we use theory to connect pre-modern texts with the world outside the classroom? For example, Christine Varnado, in her article on whiteness in *The Merchant of Venice* and in the film *The Thief of Baghdad* (2019), observes that the “qualities of whiteness” are often distilled to a list “for pedagogical and activist purposes;” she sets out a collated version of such a list, bringing the pedagogical and activist form into her scholarly essay before moving into a more extended analysis of the texts (246). *Exemplaria’s* recent (virtual) panel at Kalamazoo asked our panelists and audience to think about the role of theoretical medieval studies in the classroom and in the university at large. Theory and practice—like the contemplative and active lives—are dichotomies that premodern scholars are well-accustomed to addressing.

Formal Innovations: Forums, the new BRE

One of the ways that we have tried to keep *Exemplaria* at the forefront of medieval and early-modern literary studies is through making formal innovations in the journal itself. Our primary mission has not changed in terms of content: we remain committed to pushing the boundaries of theoretically-informed conversations about medieval and early modern literature and culture. At the same time, we have sought to create new venues for timely and cross-disciplinary work.

One such formal innovation has been our creation of a guest-edited section within the journal, titled Forums, which will begin with Volume 34, Issue 3 (2022). The Forum section is inspired by the conference Roundtable and will consist of essays that are both shorter than typical research articles and organized around an evocative theme, such as “Spaces and Times of Crisis” and “Sensology.” Unlike special issues, which we will continue to have, and which involve a set of full-length essays edited both by an *Exemplaria* editor and by the guest editors, Forums will occupy a significant space, without taking over an entire issue. A Forum special-issue will typically include between five and eight articles of 2500-3500 words as well as an introduction.

We believe that the Forums can increase our journal’s timeliness. First, Forums allow for a quicker turnaround time than a special edition: with shorter pieces, our typical process of peer-review invariably moves faster, as does all revision. A more rapid process allows us to be more responsive to current concerns, and this responsiveness is particularly valuable as we seek to expand the reach of our journal into a wider range of fields and disciplines. Second, Forums also create space for highly suggestive work. The shorter format will encourage authors to write riskier and resonant reflections since they will not be required to provide exhaustive bibliography, nor will they feel compelled to offer the final word on a given subject. Third, the sheer variety of shorter takes will in and of itself demonstrate the multiple directions in which a research topic might be developed, and, thus, we hope, generate excitement around that topic.

We have also sought to bring an innovative spirit to our Book Review section. Led by our new Book Review Editor, Hall Bjørnstad, we have begun to change what we think a book review should be. Instead of letting the published books drive our choice of reviewers, we are actively seeking out scholars to review work from the perspective of new theoretical fields. In this way, we hope to encourage reviewers to see research more broadly, beyond the monograph, as including presentations, articles, conferences, or installations. We think that this new approach to book reviews will also allow us to be more attentive to interdisciplinary projects that are not themselves book-based.

Reflections on Peer Review

The RaceB4Race Executive Board's bracing and necessary June 2020 statement titled "It's Time to End the Publishing Gatekeeping!" outlines the particular perils that traditional systems of publishing gatekeeping and peer review pose for scholars of color, systems that should be understood in the larger context of our field's own ongoing problems with racism, microaggressions, and lack of diversity as well as the white supremacist weaponizations of premodern studies. Following this statement's release in the midst of 2020's racial justice uprisings, the editorial team had a sustained discussion about the journal's own practices of gatekeeping and peer review. We determined that we would revise the journal's "Aims and Scope" as one way of responding to this critique (Taylor & Francis Online, n.d.). These principles, published on the website, are transparent about the kind of work we seek to publish, the make-up of our editorial and advisory boards, and our review process. While acknowledging the pitfalls of gatekeeping, we explain our commitment to ethical, fully anonymous review. We recognize that as editors it is our responsibility to choose reviewers thoughtfully (especially for nontraditional, cutting-edge, or innovative submissions that more established scholars might dismiss or misunderstand because they do not fit the mold of previous scholarship), ensure the professional standard of readers' reports, and take it upon ourselves to make final decisions and withhold dismissive or unhelpful reviews. And although we maintain anonymity on both sides, we often contextualize reports by characterizing the specific expertise of the reviewer—as editors of an interdisciplinary journal, we find that it is often the case that articles must be reviewed by two or more scholars in more than one field.

This conversation followed upon an earlier effort to implement a program of ethical citation practice. In 2019 the editors had perused some statements regarding citation ethics from various journals and presses, and these largely hewed to problems of plagiarism and self-citation, which is a means of increasing impact factor either for the author or for the journal. But we found no statements regarding inclusive and diverse citation practices. We decided to create a statement of principle ourselves, and Andrea Denny-Brown revised our reader's report form in January 2020 to reflect these scholarly values. It now includes a question asking, "Is the essay inclusive and diverse in its citations? Do you have suggestions for making its references more inclusive and diverse (with respect to race, gender, academic position, and academic affiliation)?" This is the third of five numbered questions on the form, so its placement does not frame it as an afterthought or a token gesture.

The inclusion of this question is one small but concrete way for us to intervene in and interrupt the varieties of privilege that structure academic publishing. As Sara Ahmed puts it in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), "[c]itational privilege: when you do not need to intend your own reproduction" (150). We

aim for our review process overtly and intentionally to work against ingrained habits of dutiful citation of established scholars—often highlighted by naming them in the body of an article—and to build archives of research by scholars who represent a broad spectrum of institutions and identities. Citations should reflect the body of work that has influenced the article and that is relevant, but that archive should be the product of reflection upon blind-spots and evasions. Name-checking the scholars we all know can provide comfort and comprehension for the reader, but such comfort can short-circuit the kind of critical thinking and re-thinking that is our target.

Exemplaria is a living collaboration among the editors, the advisory board, authors, reviewers, and the broad, interdisciplinary fields of medieval and early modern studies. We look forward to a continuing evolution.

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