Call for Papers

Medieval Studies vs. Gérard Genette

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Gérard Genette's passing in May 2018 has led to several retrospectives of his critical work, all faced with the same paradox – that of a corpus that has had both the fortune and the misfortune of becoming an orthodoxy. In the eyes of many scholars in the Francophone world and beyond, Genette's work embodies a poeticist and formalist norm that offers an exhaustively precise grammar to those seeking to study literature's inner mechanisms and devices. Since the late 1980's, however, the increase in contextual studies and the renewal of historicism have overshadowed the formalist approach; to his critics, Genette's production has come to symbolize the desiccating coldness of the structuralist era. "Genette" has therefore turned into an epistemological issue, a synonym of "poetics" or even "theory": a label to be claimed or rejected, burdened with a series of expectations, biases and presuppositions about literature.

The upcoming issue of *Perspectives médiévales* seeks to provide such a retrospective, paradoxes included, by focusing on the ways in which medieval studies have dealt, and still deal, with Genette's body of work. This involves an additional paradox: like most theoreticians of his generation, Genette neglected the Middle Ages, perpetuating the notion that medieval texts cannot be analyzed through the same theoretical lens as other literary works – perhaps because medieval literature isn't *quite* literature. Yet Genette's theories were widely influential in the field of medieval studies and have echoed throughout it well beyond the structuralist period: his *Narrative Discourse* has had a profound impact on the narratological study of medieval works, while *Palimpsests* shifted our views on intertextuality and parody; the influence of *Paratexts* on the study of texts in their codicological context has been just as important. How did medievalists choose among the many theories and analytical tools devised by Genette? Did they (and do they still) openly acknowledge his influence, or is it blended into a more generic style of formalism or structuralism that dare not speak its name?

This issue of *Perspectives médiévales* will tackle the question of the uses of Genette's works by medieval studies through a wide-ranging series of articles, covering as many aspects as possible, from methodology and epistemology to case studies. Rather than applying Gérard Genette's theories, methods or concepts to specific texts, the aim is to examine Genette's theoretical apparatus and question its consequences for medieval studies. How does it help or hinder our approach of medieval texts? What is the relevance of Genette's toolbox to our corpus?

Based on Genette's major works, several key questions are particularly worthy of interest:

- *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* **(1972)** (in *Figures III*) and *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1983) helped found classical narratology, based on the study of textual temporality and focalization, as well as on the role of the narrator. Are these notions applicable to medieval narratives? What are their limits?
- *The Architext: An Introduction* **(1979)** posits genre as a contingent and historical phenomenon. How were generic categories developed and essentialized in the Early Modern and Romantic period, leaving little room for alternative categorizations of literature, such as medieval textual classes? What was the impact of this process on the development of medieval studies and of their discourse on vernacular genres?
- *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* **(1982)** studies mechanisms of intertextuality, parody and reinvention. How might we envisage the act of rewriting in a period defined by textual instability and a variable – or even nonexistent – authorial presence? How can we apply hypertextual notions of irony, parody, pastiche or plagiarism to medieval texts?
- *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* **(1987)** deals with the limits of the text, its boundaries and borders. How relevant are Genette's categories to medieval culture, where notions of titles, the limits between works, and authorial *vs.* scribal discourse are complicated by a manuscript environment?
- *Fiction & Diction* **(1991)** raises the question of literarity, which specialists of the Middle Ages deal with on a daily basis: are some medieval texts intrinsically literary, or is it entirely anachronistic to apply the notion of "literature" to the Middle Ages?
- *The Work of Art* **(1994-1997)** raises the question of the interplay between literature and visual arts. The relation between text and image is of particular interest to specialists of the medieval era, where it was articulated in specific terms that do not necessarily apply to subsequent periods of production.

It goes without saying that articles on other volumes of the *Figures* series, on *Mimologics* or on *Metalepsis* would also be welcome.

This issue will strive to look both backward and forward: retrospective articles offering appraisals of Genette's contributions to medieval studies are welcome, as are prospective ones focusing on new areas of investigation that Genette's concepts might help identify or renovate.

Perspectives médiévales accepts proposals in French, English and Italian.

Article proposals (one-page project + a bibliography) should be sent conjointly to isabelle.arseneau@mcgill.ca, patrick.moran@ubc.ca, veronique.dominguez@u-picardie.fr and sebastien.douchet@univ-amu.fr before October 1st, 2020.

The calendar is as follows:

- October 1st, 2020: Proposal submission.
- December 1st, 2020: Reply from the journal's scientific committee.
- March 1st, 2021: Article submission for peer review.
- May 1st, 2021: Peer review reply.
- June 1st, 2021: Submission of final version.
- July 1st, 2021: Online publication (journals.openedition.org/peme).