

## **Editor's Introduction**

Our Spring 2020 issue offers articles from an interdisciplinary group of high-school and college teachers. We offer lessons for history and art history students, and for literature students, most of which promote engaging students concrete, physical and sensory ways. The many excellent submissions we received for our 2019 TEAMS Essay Prize led us to award two prizes: John Terry's "Gardening With the Dead," and Yvonne Seale's "Mapping the Middle Ages." Both essays describe innovative methods for active learning in the classroom: Seale's article demonstrates how to engage active student learning through the use of mapping skills and available mapping technologies; Terry's article blends medieval and modern gardening techniques. Susan Yager's approach brings an accessible, playful and challenging way for students to learn to read Chaucerian rhythms; Julie Pace proposes an art history class based on "multi-sensory" methodology; and Caroline Womack draws on Chrétien de Troyes' romance, *Cligès*, as an underpinning to teach Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. All of the articles in this issue aim to bring the medieval to life and strive to encourage students to see the modern in the medieval and the medieval in the modern.

Professor Seale's prize-winning two-part lesson in "Mapping the Middle Ages," provides her history students an exciting hands-on introduction to mapping technology so that they acquire an "awareness of context" essential for moving beyond conventional rote learning. Seale's valuable lesson plan enhances students' ability to analyze sources, especially maps and globes, so that "students better conceive of the horizons of the medieval world." By using the Virtual Mappa (VM) project (<https://sims2.digitalmappa.org/36>) and other online archives, Seale makes a number of digitized medieval maps available, along with explanations. The dozen or so *mappa*

*mundi* included in the Virtual Mappa project makes global, geographical and contextual interconnections visible so that students can study how medieval map-makers conceived of and reflected their world, as well as how their views evolved over time. As digital mapping tools become more and more useful for medievalists, Seale's article demonstrates to teachers and students alike an extremely effective and engrossing method for introducing many aspects of Medieval Studies to our students.

John Terry's "Gardening With the Dead," the co-winner of the TEAMS 2019 essay prize, describes a fascinating project for his high school sophomore history students that combines history, medieval gardening technology, with his students' own gardening experience in his school's community garden. Using Walafrid Strabo's ninth-century poem *Liber de cultura hortarum* ("Book on the cultivation of gardens" or *Hortulus*), as a primary source, Terry links the gardening labor that Strabo delineates in his poem to the experience of making a community garden today. In doing so, Terry's students acquire an understanding for "pre-modern monastic labor, foodways, and the ways in which a pre-modern text can be enacted as opposed to passively read for sense." Today's gardeners can easily relate to the kind of physical labor and frustrations Strabo writes about, such as destroying "the tunnels of the moles that haunt dark places" and summoning the worms "back to the realms of light." Reading about medieval garden practices through Strabo's poem and other sources allow students not only to connect with this ancient work, but also demonstrates how much of the activities and techniques he describes are still required to make a home or community garden today. The project presented in "Gardening With The Dead" demonstrates Terry's theory that "Enacting a source can activate it. Reading

history is more rewarding if we can develop empathy and real understanding—in this instance, for someone describing the challenges and rewards of clearing land for something new.”

Albrecht Classen’s timely essay, “Teaching Medieval Studies with a Modern Learning Management System: Top Hat in a Medieval Seminar” will be of especial interest considering the quick shift many teachers have had to make to online teaching for our courses. Beginning by acknowledging the challenges we face in a presentist universe, Classen shows that deploying the latest digital teaching tools can greatly benefit teachers of medieval studies by shifting us out of our traditional teaching methods and into a “more collaborative learning situation.” He finds that teaching with Top Hat generates innovative, relevant, useful and engaging teaching practices. In his article, Classen explains how an effective use of Top Hat makes every student feel equally included in discussions and makes especially shy students less intimidated to express views. And rather than the students’ handy electronics being a distraction, they can now be “functionalized” and applied to the classwork of the day. Through the use of discussion boards and online assignments, the students are encouraged to write critiques more often and are able to build confidence through the collaborative learning that a learning management system allows.

An art history lesson for us all, Julie Pace’s beautifully illustrated “Teaching the Multi-Sensory Experience of Byzantine Art: Images at Chora Church, Turkey, and What They Mean,” takes a “sensory turn” approach to studying the medieval wall images at the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Chora Church in Turkey. Her pedagogical methodology diverges from the typical art history lecture format which prioritizes the visual qualities of the artwork. Pace prefers a process in which she contextualized the artwork in its original context and function. A series of unique and somewhat miraculously preserved fourteenth-century frescoes and mosaics surround the interior of the

church: some are placed high up, others are “tucked away in curves and niches, stuck in corners, on the ceiling,” in ways that make the art “difficult to see from most vantage points.” Their situational context show them “embedded in the very fabric of the building..., experienced above you, behind you, around you.” The sensory framework Pace supplies (the smell of incense; the sounds of chant and street noises, the taste of the Eucharist, the texture of the mosaics) engages students in an active and physical way so that their “feel” of the unfamiliar artwork provides a more wholistic and relevant experience for their analysis. Pace’s article opens up an enchanting aspect of medieval culture from which those of us who are not her students or art history teachers can greatly benefit.

In her “Medieval Approach to *Romeo and Juliet* in the High School Classroom,” Caroline Womack chooses to situate students in the medieval period prior to turning to *Romeo and Juliet*. Introducing the medieval romance, *Cligès* by Chrétien de Troyes, Womack provides background information on chivalric behavior and medieval conventions of courtship and marriage that, in turn, makes Shakespeare’s play more accessible to high school students. The background context and the reading of *Cligès* is effectively used to explain and contrast the two works. With an understanding of the temporal and cultural context of medieval life and literature that her lessons provide, students are able to increase their capacity for literary analysis, bringing richer skills to their readings of both texts.

Susan Yager’s “Playing with the Rhythms of Chaucer’s Poetry” recommends creating ways for undergraduates to experiment with performances of Chaucer’s poetry. Yager uses short and simple excerpts accompanied by oral recitations and audio examples of the original language to

construct lessons that are enjoyable and less intimidating and more familiar than having students initially confront larger segments of Chaucerian texts. Imitating Chaucer's birds in his short sections from various poems, for example, can help students engage with Chaucer's humor as they experiment with the rhythms of his poetry. By imitating and playing with Chaucer's bird sounds and songs, students can also see how Chaucer differentiates, individualizes and animates the birds. Along the way, students learn how to grasp the rhythms as they learn to scan a Chaucerian line. Yager's thesis is that when students "literally *play* with the sounds of Chaucer – both as hearers and as speakers – the more they will enjoy exposure to his, and indeed any writer's, poetry."