

## **Colloquium: The Idea of the Gothic Cathedral from the Post-Medieval to the Post-Modern, University of Copenhagen 17-18 June 2005**

The Theological Faculty at the University of Copenhagen provided the setting for a group of literary scholars, art historians, and architectural historians from France, Germany, Spain and the United States to discuss the post-medieval representations of the Gothic cathedral in a colloquium sponsored by the Danish National Research Foundation's Centre for the Study of the Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals and organized by Dr. Stephanie A. Glaser, research fellow at the Centre. The colloquium, *The Idea of the Gothic Cathedral from the Post-Medieval to the Post-Modern*, opened the discussion across linguistic, geographical and disciplinary boundaries, to deal in depth with the phenomenon and discourse of the Gothic cathedral in the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to demonstrate the ubiquity of the edifice in the modern period from travel guides and the picturesque to ideological uses and interpretations in Spain, England, Germany and France.

Jean-Michel Leniaud, Directeur d'études at the École pratique des hautes études and Professor at the École nationale des chartes and specialist on the cathedral during the nineteenth century opened the colloquium with a talk on Gothic delirium and opium reveries. Joelle Prunghaud, Professor of Comparative Literature at Université Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3 and author of a forthcoming work on the cathedral at the *fin de siècle*, then analysed literary and verbal representations of the Gothic cathedral during World War One. Following her talk, Klaus Niehr, Professor of Art History and author of the groundbreaking study *Gotikbilder–Gotiktheorien. Studien zur Wahrnehmung und Erforschung mittelalterlicher Architektur in Deutschland zwischen ca. 1750 und 1850*, presented several Romantic approaches to Gothic architecture, focussing on the connection between perception and representation and on the spatial relation between viewer and monument. After this, the evening began with the opening of an art exhibition by the Saarbrücken painter, Christel Bak-Stalter, *Bilder zur gotischen Kathedrale in der Recherche von Marcel Proust* and ended with a rendition of musical cathedrals, Erik Satie's *Quatre Ogives pour piano* (1886) and Claude-Achille Debussy's « La cathédrale engloutie » (1910) from *Préludes, Premier Livre*, performed by Nils Holger Petersen, Centre Leader and his son, Andreas Leif Petersen. The music was complemented by a reading of Jorge de Sena's 1964 poem "La Cathédrale engloutie de Debussy"

Saturday morning began with a talk by Stephanie A. Glaser, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre and author of *Explorations of the Gothic Cathedral in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ph. D. dissertation, Indiana University), that examined synaesthetic transpositions of the Gothic cathedral into music. She was followed by Luc Fraise, Professor at the **l'Université de Strasbourg and author of several works on Marcel Proust, who** reassessed the relationship between Proust and Emile Mâle. Afterwards, Kevin D. Murphy, Associate Professor of Art History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and at Brooklyn College and author of the important work, *Memory and Modernity: Viollet-le-Duc at Vezelay*, compared the social and political agendas behind the restorations of the cathedrals

of Rouen and Paris. Continuing the discussion about Viollet-le-Duc, Elizabeth Emery, Associate Professor of French at Montclair State University and author of *Romancing the Cathedral: Gothic Architecture in Fin-de-Siècle French Culture* spoke about his children's book *Histoire d'une cathédrale*, examining the retired restorateur's pedagogical tactics in persuading his young readers of the republican dimension of the Gothic cathedral. The discussion then moved from France to Spain with Mathilde M. Mateo, Assistant Professor at the Department of Fine Arts at Syracuse University, a medievalist specialized in the reception of Spanish medieval art, who presented a little-researched but key phenomenon in the rediscovery of the Gothic, the Saracen or Moorish cathedral. She brought to light the different Spanish and European perspectives on the Arabic origins of the Gothic and showed what aspects of Spanish cathedrals could have been used to prove this theory. Ségolène Le Men, Professor of Art History at the Université de Paris X-Nanterre and Directrice des études littéraires at the Ecole normale supérieure, gave the colloquium's final lecture on the Stryge and verticality in Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, in lithography and in photography.

The colloquium then concluded with a round table discussion that emphasized the importance of the cathedral in the modern period and demonstrated that, though rooted in Gothic Revival and Romantic medievalism, the post-medieval interpretation Gothic cathedral really constitutes its own discourse, which partakes both in the history of the discipline of art history and in nineteenth-century nationalism, and also represents a prominent theme in literary works and the visual arts from lithographs through photography to contemporary comic strips. Ironically perhaps, the discussion was sparked by the question of religion and why it was hardly touched upon in the lectures, which opened a debate about the status of religion in the Gothic discourse: whether it is inherently connected with the Gothic edifice and thus taken for granted or whether its absence characterizes modernist interpretations of the Gothic cathedral or even that this non-religious stance reflects the focus of twenty-first century scholars. That the colloquium took place at the Faculty of Theology indicates, perhaps, the first.

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