

## Not Without a Trace: Residual Regional Medievalisms

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### at first sight: spuren / auf den ersten blick: traces

In the 1990s, the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* in Marbach began to engage in a project entitled *Spuren* (“traces”). Every year, the *Literaturarchiv* published four sixteen-page booklets, each folded out of one large sheet of paper, featuring locations in southwest Germany as sites illuminating specific topics in literary history. These “sites,” in the editors’ own words, are places “where literary traces were not noticeable to the naked eye, where there is no museum or commemorative plaque.”<sup>1</sup> The authors of each booklet are said to work with “detective shrewdness” to piece together the mosaic of a rich and colorful literary landscape in which events of world and regional literature complement each other. Ideally, the miniatures start off at the margin, trace a vague track, and resemble voyages of discovery that shed new light on a well-known author, text, or place. To achieve this, they search in archives, present unpublished manuscripts, letters, sketches, and photographs which, arranged with a semi-transparent regional map and special publisher’s signet, entice readers with their bibliophile and multimodal materiality as they reveal Jean Paul Sartre’s traces in Stammheim, Hannah Arendt’s in Marbach, and Ossip Mandelstam’s in Heidelberg, to mention only three examples.

Several of this project’s epistemological underpinnings suggest to me certain paths to pursue when tracing the continuous presence of medieval culture in our contemporary lives. First of all: The *Literaturarchiv* authors and editors see existing literary histories as potentially flawed or at least incomplete. Second: They assume that serious investigative work done in the present may bring to light manipulated, erased, or forgotten traces of the past. Third: They believe that the new light shed on mainstream national or global narratives of the past by these newly detected traces can originate from deceptively minor events in provincial localities. Fourth: They have full confidence that elements in the biographies of creative subjects (authors; artists) leave traces in the objects (text; artifacts) they produce. I would like to test these hypotheses in the narrative that follows.

### residual medievalisms / restmittelalterliches

In his 2015 history of medievalism, David Matthews suggests that, after a period of modernity during which medievalism appeared in some of the central cultural practices in the western world, much of the medievalist energy in canonical texts, architecture, and the arts gradually diminished and reconcentrated around the institutionalized forms of inquiry at the modern university.<sup>2</sup> As a result, medievalism was displaced from

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.dla-marbach.de/shop/spuren/?sword\\_list\[\]=SP&sword\\_list\[\]=1&no\\_cache=1](https://www.dla-marbach.de/shop/spuren/?sword_list[]=SP&sword_list[]=1&no_cache=1), accessed 17 March, 2023. All English translations of German original texts in this essay are the author’s.

<sup>2</sup> David Matthews, *Medievalism. A Critical History* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015). Preliminary versions of the section on East Bavarian medievalisms in this essay were published in “Residual Medievalisms: Historical Pageants in Eastern Bavaria,” *The Year’s Work in Medievalism* 31 (2016):

the central cultural position it held during Britain's Victorian or America's pre- and post-Civil War periods to an increasingly marginal one, a process described in detail by Kathleen Biddick in her 1998 study, *The Shock of Medievalism*. Matthews declares that this move to the margin ironically rendered medievalism almost omnipresent, albeit in smaller doses and with lesser consequence. He calls this medievalism "residual," remarking how medievalism now left its mark no longer with the lead genres, authors, and texts, but as substrates, implications, and references, or as mere tropes in twentieth-century genre fiction. He also claims there are no English-language medievalist movies that have achieved both popularity and won sufficient cultural capital to be thought of as canonical.<sup>3</sup>

Matthews' foundational observation is valid: It is during the nineteenth century (peaking between the 1850s and the 1870s) that the study of medieval texts and art progressively passes from the hands of non-academic antiquarians, bibliomaniacs, dilettantes, and enthusiasts into those of university-educated specialists; and it is during the nineteenth century that movements like the English Medieval Revival (or the French Catholic Revival on the continent) dominate certain subsections of cultural production; and it is also during the nineteenth century that terms such as "medieval," "Middle Ages," and "medievalism" enter into the vocabulary of those numerous scholars who are eager to historicize the past.<sup>4</sup> However, as I was reflecting on Matthews' findings, I could not rid myself of the impression that his distinction between "central" and "residual" medievalism is mostly a function of his underlying conviction that, at least by the end of the Great War, the acceptance and adaptation of medieval ideas and teleologies had become too complex, if not impossible.

Matthews adduces as evidence J.R.R. Tolkien's creation of an "infantilized" version of the Middle Ages, often "on the edge of bathos" and "about the lives of satirically small people" in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* instead of the serious epic and "high-art vision" of English mythology he intended to write.<sup>5</sup> The end of medievalism's cultural centrality can also be seen in T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* which, while beholden to the Arthurian legend, draws just as heavily on the Classics, the Bible, Baudelaire, and Verlaine; or later in medievalism's move into a range of more popular and allegedly low-brow cultural forms, especially film, computer games, graphic novels, music, heritage, and tourism. Matthews also suggests that medievalism's impact in any given

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pp. 75-81, and *Medievalism. A Manifesto* (Bradford: ARC Humanities Press, 2017), pp. 39-51. This essay offers a detailed update on numerous contexts based on newly available scholarship, news media, and social media sources. The essay's title alludes to the U.S. TV series, *Without a Trace* (CBS, 2002-2009), which featured fictional case studies about a FBI Squad that solves missing persons cases by identifying traces overlooked by previous investigations.

3 At least one medievalist English-language movie, based on Umberto Eco's 1980 Italian novel of the same title, *The Name of the Rose* (1986), has become a true cult film. While Matthews may think of it as a continental European production (French director Jean-Jacques Annaud; German producer Bernd Eichinger), the film was produced in English (plus untranslated Latin passages) and has reached worldwide distribution and canonical status among critics. The distinction between "English" and "non-English" film production is perhaps somewhat dated at this point when one considers how many of the medievalist film classics have long been available in dubbed and subtitled versions (for example: *The Seventh Seal*, 1957, directed by Ingmar Bergman) or how many films are nowadays produced in English even if they are about non-English narratives (for example: *Medieval*, 2022, directed by Petr Ják, which celebrates the exploits of Bohemian/Czech military commander, Jan Žižka).

4 For the emergence of these terms, see Richard Utz, "Coming to Terms with Medievalism," *European Journal of English Studies* 15/2 (2011): pp. 101-13.

5 Matthews, *Medievalism*, p. 138.

culture might be most pervasive not when it is dominant, canonical, and central (i.e., limited to the social and cultural elite), but when it has become residual but omnipresent, a pervasive form of what one might call *Restmittelalter*.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I would like to test David Matthews' observations by confronting them with medievalisms occurring in cultural contexts substantially different from the dominant British and metropolitan perspective in his study: Medievalisms in the geographical area comprising post-1871 Germany include various well-known nationalist and nativist incarnations. However, due to the long-term medieval and early modern particularist histories of the German-speaking world still tangible between 1918 and 1933, local and regional folk customs, often linked with religious traditions, co-exist alongside the much better-known national medievalist discourse from the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. These regional histories, often rooted in the medieval past, are not always easily traceable, but continue and persist as thought patterns, mentalities, moods, atmospheres, vocabularies, traditions, and rituals that shapeshift and adjust to even some of the most radical social and political upheavals. In the case study I would like to offer, medievalisms can be seen to survive two world wars and their accompanying pervasive social and political traumas and, I might add, successfully resist various mainstream revisionist attempts to manipulate, forget, and erase them. In fact, some of them have persisted all the way into 2023.

### **iTrace, one / ich bin die Spur**

At this point, the investigating subject (I), irrupts into the subject under investigation. I announce this intervention as a conscious effort, asking my readers to consider accepting myself, my biography, education, memory, experience, as one living trace for the subject I would like to discuss. Like Paul Zumthor, in *Parler du Moyen Age* (1980), I do not believe in "the delusion which might lead one to speak of the past otherwise than on the basis of now."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, like Carolyn Dinshaw, in *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (2012), I see myself not detached and distanced by my position as a scholar from my medieval subject matter, but an intimate and self-aware part of a constant process of inventing what the medieval past means to each post-medieval generation. To describe my position even more clearly: Unlike traditional medievalists, and especially traditional medieval historians, I practice readings that allow us to realize the psychic continuity of humanity across centuries and reveal the constructed nature of subjectivity over time.<sup>8</sup> Thus, some of the narrative I have prepared here is situated in my own lifetime; some in the lifetimes of my parents; some in those of my grandparents; and biological anthropology would place all three of these modern narratives themselves within only 20 or 21 generations from the late medieval events which my family and I have

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6 In this claim, Matthews presages similar findings Andrew B.R. Elliott (*Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-first Century*. Woodbridge: Brewer, 2017) has made for the appropriation of medievalia by twenty-first century politics and media.

7 I am quoting from the English translation, by Sarah White, *Speaking of the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 32-33.

8 On this topic, I follow the recommendations on "presentism" and "pastism" made by Juanita Feros Ruys, "Playing Alterity: Heloise, Rhetoric, and *Memoria*," in *Maistresse of my Wit. Medieval Women, Modern Scholars*, ed. Louise D'Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 211-43.

reenacted and re-presented, and which I still study, hardly a length of time posing insurmountable barriers for understanding other humans and their behavior.<sup>9</sup>

About three to four times per week I speak to my mother back in Germany via Facetime. At the age of 95, she suffers from any number of age-related health issues, but all of them seem to be exacerbated by abrupt changes in weather conditions. One of the ones she will mention at least once every month is a weather event she variously calls the “Easterly wind” [*Ostwind*] or the “Bohemian Wind” [often abbreviated as: *der Böhmische*; rarely *Böhmwind*] which, whether by changing barometric pressure or the electrification of the atmosphere, she blames for a deterioration in her symptoms, including high blood pressure, headaches, and severe back aches. What is interesting about her attribution of these instances of deterioration is that they always originate from a vague eastern source and that they seem to invoke, in her voice and my reception, a deeper and darker danger that is part of an ineffable but nevertheless traceable collective memory my mother, her neighbors, and many inhabitants of her region share. Above and beyond its existence as a scientifically established weather pattern, a katabatic wind similar to the Adriatic *bora* or the Californian *Santa Ana* winds, the Bohemian or Easterly wind seems to be a cultural as well as a meteorological phenomenon. And as a cultural phenomenon, it stands for a century-long fear of foreign invasions that originate in the East. When, in 2020, the Bavarian author Christoph Nußbaumer published his 650-page novel, *Die Unverhofften*, which is situated in a village in the Bavarian/Bohemian Forest, he describes the power of the Bohemian Wind on the first page to create recognizable local color.<sup>10</sup>

I participated in this narrative when serving in the German army as an 18-year-old, stationed in a garrison that served as first line of defense for securing the German border toward (then) Communist Czechoslovakia. During my military service, I was asked to participate as a “reenactor” dressed in a medieval soldier’s garb, in what may well be Germany’s oldest continuing open air folk pageant, the City of Furth im Wald’s *Drachenstich* (Spearing of the Dragon). Similar to the medieval Corpus Christi procession from which today’s pageant and play originate, my fellow soldiers and I would walk through the city center and streets performing fake sword fights and demonstrating other forms of primitive behavior often associated with ‘the medieval’. The play itself features a romantic story between a brave knight who saves a damsel in distress by killing the incarnation of evil, a dragon which, standing for a never fully explained threat of ravaging war threatening from the dark border forests of the East and perhaps related to the teachings of the church reformer John Huss, invokes the spearing of the dragon by St. George.<sup>11</sup> The modern *Drachenstich* pageant is part of a veritable boom of similar history-adjacent pageants created and performed on the European continent, beginning in the late nineteenth and continuing throughout the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup>

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9 My count is based on the established sociological and anthropological definition of “generation,” which determines 25 to 30 years as proper estimate of intergenerational intervals. See, for example, Marc Tremblay and Hélène Vézina, “New Estimates of Intergenerational Time Intervals for the Calculation of Age and Origins of Mutations,” *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 66/2 (2000): pp. 651-58.

10 Christoph Nußbaumer, *Die Unverhofften*. Roman (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2020), p. 1.

11 On the history of the *Drachenstich*, see Ingeborg Perlinger and Werner Perlinger, *Seit Jahrhunderten Drachenkampf in Furth* (Furth im Wald: Historischer Verein, 2007).

12 Historical pageants in Britain began as an “Edwardian craze,” i.e., in the early twentieth century and after what David Matthews establishes as the heyday of medievalism in the Victorian era. See Angela

### iTraces: family footprints / familienfußspuren

The version of the *Drachenstich* play performed in 1932 was written by a man by the name of Eugen Hubrich, a teacher, teacher educator, and active member of the Bayerische Wald-Verein, an association celebrating and creating regional identity and advocating for economic support for the relatively poor population in the East Bavarian borderlands. In 1930, when he had become editor of the association's magazine, he published the following poem about his region:

Es bringt Dir Duft und Waldeswonne,  
bringt Bergfreiheit und Höhensonne,  
es ist ein Gruß vom Grenzwaldkamm,  
von jenem kernhaft, deutschen Stamm,  
der Gut und Boden für Dich gegeben,  
daß Du als Deutscher frei kannst leben!<sup>13</sup>

It offers you fragrance and forest-bliss,  
mountain-freedom and mountain-sun;  
it is a greeting from the border-ridge,  
from that very true German stock,  
that has sacrificed life and limb for you,  
so that you might live free, as a German!

The folksy text contains all the ingredients of the typical borderland ideology of the time and stresses the sacrifice of the region's inhabitants and their role in defending German nativist freedom. By 1933, Hubrich had taken one step further and advocated openly for the construction of refuge huts for hikers along the Czech border, calling them "Stamm- und Trutzburgen" (family seats and defensive castles) for "Germanity" and inviting his readers to think about ways of uniting with the Sudeten Germans living on the Czech side of the border, who had been separated from the rest of Germany (and Austria) since the Treaty of Versailles (1918). As the most potent unifying practice his essays encouraged the singing of songs that "warm the heart with German native tunes" ("Heimatlaut").<sup>14</sup>

In the same year, he published the panegyric "Heil Hitler!" which includes these lines:

Dort tief im Böhmerwald, wo man die Heimat liebt  
und für die Heimat Gut und Leben gibt,  
wird Deutschlands Weckruf zum Erlösungsschrei.

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Bartie, et al., eds., *Restaging the Past: Historical Pageants, Culture and Society in Modern Britain* (London: University College of London Press, 2020), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Eugen Hubrich, "Die Zeitschrift, der Spiegel des Waldes," *Der Bayerwald* 24 (1930), p. 4. Hubrich sees his journal here very much as a mirror in the sense of the medieval literary speculum, offering readers doctrine and a reflection of the ideal role the forest and its inhabitants can play in the new Germany.

<sup>14</sup> Hubrich, "Geleitwort zum Jubiläumsjahr," in *Der Bayerwald* 27 (1931), p. 2.

Heil Hitler heut und immerdar!  
Heil Hitler erst recht in der Gefahr!<sup>15</sup>

Deep down there in the Bohemian Forest,  
where people love their homeland  
and will sacrifice life and limb for the home country,  
Germany's wake-up call turns into a clarion call.  
Heil Hitler now and evermore!  
Heil Hitler now that we're in danger, even more.

The shape-shifting between these texts demonstrates how easily border-regional nativist identity and Catholic Christianity (the text invokes a widely known intercession prayer to the Virgin Mary) could be integrated with the national-socialist glorification of a leader-savior, who would free the German nation from the eternal eastern threat of its Slavic neighbors which Hitler had mentioned as early as 1924 in *Mein Kampf*. Hubrich even medievalized his "Heil Hitler!" poem, likening the Third Reich's "clarion call" in the Bohemian Forest to the sounds of change the *Nibelungenlied*'s hero, Siegfried, was thought to usher in with his hammer ("Siegfrieds Hammerschlag"), a motif celebrated by Richard Wagner's opera, *Siegfried* (1876), in the famous "Siegfried's Forging Song," and present in popular German war poetry as early as 1914.<sup>16</sup>

In 1934, on the invitation of Josef Filbig, a teacher appointed Nazi mayor of Amberg, who wanted to mark the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city's first recorded mention, Hubrich also wrote the text for the open-air pageant entitled *Amberger Blut* (Amberg Blood). The pageant centers around the lavish wedding festivities for Margarete, daughter of Duke Ludwig IX of Bavaria, with Philip the Upright, Elector Palatine of the Rhine, in 1474, and was performed in front of the late medieval Gothic City Hall. In this foreword to the play, Hubrich stylized Philip's adoptive father, Count Friedrich, as an indisputable allegorical predecessor of Adolf Hitler, a leader who unites a disjointed country, battles down unjustified bourgeois resistance, increases prosperity, keeps non-Arians out of higher education and most businesses, so that everyone can see in these medieval historical events the prefiguration of (in his own words) "the dawning of Hitler's Germany."<sup>17</sup> My parents, both born in Amberg, and 13 and seven years old in 1934, may well have been witnesses to the widely advertised events surrounding the pageant. They still lived in Amberg, when the former Nazi major became major of the city once again in 1952, this time democratically elected with 64% of the vote as

15 Hubrich, "Heil Hitler!," in *Der Bayerwald* 27 (1931), p. 113.

16 See, for example, the anonymous poem "Alldeutschland macht mobil," published in the *Deutsche Zeitung*, 3 August, 1914, reprinted in *Deutsche Kriegsklänge 1914-1915*, compiled by Johann Albrecht Herzog of Mecklenburg (Leipzig: Köhler, 1915), pp. 26-27. Hitler was often seen, and saw himself, as a reincarnation of Siegfried, hammering and "forging once again the Notung sword, which had been shattered by Germany's defeat in 1918 but was now whole, and battle-sharp, and shining." See Antonio Muñoz Molina, "Siegfried's Bloodline," *Hudson Review* LXXII, Spring 2019: <https://hudsonreview.com/2019/05/siegfrieds-bloodline/>; accessed 17 November, 2023.

17 Eugen Hubrich, *Amberger Blut: Festspiel zur 900-Jahrfeier der Stadt Amberg* (Ms. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 1934), 3-7. For one of the rare photographs of the 1934 pageant, see the picture entitled "900-Jahrfeier – Aufführung *Amberger Blut* 1934" on the private blog of Wolfgang Ignatz, *Die Bilderwelten des Vilswanderers*: <https://vilswanderer.blogspot.com/2015/10/amberg-antik-repros-bildband.html>; accessed 17 November, 2023.

candidate for the right-wing party Deutsche Gemeinschaft, which advocated for the reestablishing of the German Reich within its 1937 borders.<sup>18</sup> My parents were both more than witnesses in 1953 when they, like large sections of Amberg's population, dressed in handmade premodern garb to populate the city's main square and streets. My father, a music teacher, directed one of the choirs performing the musical portions of the event. While the Nazi foreword had been removed from the pageant's 1953 program, for Amberg citizens the restaging of the event under the pre-1945 mayor must have presented a tremendous trace of historical continuity from medieval times through the present, one that offered them a welcome opportunity to erase the unloved post-war denazification and indirectly exonerated the entire city from unpleasant Third Reich memories.<sup>19</sup> In 1954, the cast of the pageant even presented itself in their costumes during West German President Theodor Heuss's visit to the city, but at least no additional performance of *Amberger Blut* took place.<sup>20</sup> It has taken more than 70 years for any officials in my hometown to trace the continuity between pre- and post-World War II Nazi medievalism in the city. However, the public acknowledgement of this continuity did not originate with the mayor's office, but the leaders of the municipal theater, who decided to perform both the Nazi and the 1953 version to begin the important mourning work for the city's twentieth-century history.<sup>21</sup>

In 1935, Eugen Hubrich, at the time NSDAP district warden for cultural affairs, wrote perhaps his most famous pageant, *Die Agnes Bernauerin zu Straubing*. For this play and festival, the goal was again the commemoration of regional medievalist identity, in this case the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Agnes Bernauer, a widely known fifteenth-century figure memorialized in Bavarian and German literature and art. Born around 1410, she is believed to have been the daughter of an Augsburg citizen, and became the lover, perhaps even the wife, of Count Albrecht III of Bavaria. The most common narrative on this relationship assumes that Albrecht's father, Count Ernst, disapproved of his son's mésalliance with a woman of lower social status and had her drowned in the Danube River.

One of the many Nazi messages Hubrich inserted in his version of the Agnes story is a rebuke of Count Ernst's notion that the outcome of his son's relationship with Agnes would produce a "bastard" offspring. His son's answer is: "He who has German

18 On Filbig's return as mayor, see Maximilian Erras, *Die Regelung des Versorgungsanspruchs kommunaler NS-Wahlbeamter in der Nachkriegszeit. Eine Analyse am Beispiel des Amberger Oberbürgermeisters Josef Filbig* (Hamburg: Wissenschaftsverlag Dr. Kovačs, 2010).

19 According to the Jewish Virtual Library (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/amberg>, accessed 16 November, 2023), the furnishings of the Amberg synagogue, Jewish shops, and homes were demolished by groups of Nazis during *Reichskristallnacht*.

20 Johannes Laschinger, "Amberger Hochzeit, 1474," *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*: [https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Amberger\\_Hochzeit\\_1474](https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Amberger_Hochzeit_1474), accessed 16 November, 2023.

21 Stadttheater Amberg, "Amberger Blut – Das Machwerk 1934/53," <https://stadttheater.amberg.de/veranstaltungen/amberger-blut/>, accessed 16 November, 2023. The city's Stadtmuseum supported the theater with a social media entry on Instagram, which also includes a photograph of the 1934 cast of the pageant: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CpfFmJFKZDN/>, accessed 16 November, 2023. The regional TV channel Oberpfalz TV produced a 20-minute program, entitled *Amberger Blut: Der Versuch eines Festspiels*, in 2000. I was not able to access a copy of this program, produced on VHS. For the instrumentalization of Amberg's medieval history and the pageant, see the chapter, "Das Festspiel Amberger Blut," in the city's propaganda- and tourist-oriented volume, *Amberg. Die Alte Stadt im neuen Reich* (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark, 1939).

blood running through his veins cannot a bastard be.”<sup>22</sup> Agnes herself declares, right before her death, in Nazi fashion (albeit cachéd in religious language): “Faith will live on, even if we perish.”<sup>23</sup> Heinrich Lersch, a widely disseminated and taught worker poet and among the 88 poets and writers who vowed total obedience and loyalty to Adolf Hitler in 1933, had written in his 1916 poem, “Soldier’s Farewell”: “Germany must live on, even if we perish.” At the premiere of the pageant in 1935, the audience sang a song referring to the Hussite danger threatening Bavaria from the East. Then, the leading NSDAP regional magistrate (his title, *Gauleiter*, intentionally links back to the medieval Frankish word “Gaugraf,” a rough equivalent of English “Sheriff”) reminded the audience of the impending Bolshevik threat from the Slavic peoples to the East. And in a 1937 performance, after the final song of the choir, a loud and joyous “Alleluja!” was replaced with the more up to date “Heil, Deutschland, Heil!”<sup>24</sup>

Hubrich’s medievalism reveals itself as a practice that will invoke continuity as well as discontinuity with the Middle Ages as needed to promote specific (often even logically contradictory) ideological goals. While he is eager to show how the contemporary Nazi rule has replaced all medieval class- and status-based privileges by a simple national affiliation based on common German “blood,” he writes the following about his intentions with the pageant on Agnes Bernauer:

To bring back to life the Castle of Straubing with its contemporary (medieval) inhabitants, to make Agnes Bernauer speak and act there as a real person, means an interweaving of destiny with the place in which the destiny happened, means the fulfillment of the word in blood and soil. The great-grandchildren should feel what their ancestors have felt in the same location. However, they should also realize how Agnes was sacrificed as a member of the Volk, devoured by the gruesome Middle Ages, but that she may be resurrected in purity at a happy moment in time, during which the renewal of blood and morals by the *Volk* is realized from within its deepest and earliest origins.<sup>25</sup>

The staying power of Hubrich’s plays was considerably enhanced by the pageant genre for which he wrote. The participation of large numbers of citizens joining in the reenactment of the medieval and early modern historic moments, the presence of actual historical buildings serving as *lieu de memoire*, and the inclusion of ritual and musical elements all contributed to his productions’ performance long after the end of the Third Reich. *Amberger Blut* was revived in my and my parents’ hometown of Amberg during the conservative backlash against denazification in 1953, and Hubrich’s play on Agnes Bernauer continued to be performed in somewhat expurgated versions into the 1980s. He himself spent about one year in prison for his leading role in the NSDAP, but was allowed to reenter his profession as a teacher after he served his time, focusing his post-war poetic production on seemingly non-political regional,

22 Cited according to Werner Schäfer, Agnes Bernauer in Straubing. Das Festspiel – der Festspielverein (Straubing: Attenkofer, 2003), p. 102.

23 Heinrich Lersch, “Soldatenabschied,” originally published in the collection Herz! Aufglühe dein Blut. Gedichte im Kriege (Jena: Diederichs, 1916), pp. 14-15: facsimile available at <https://archive.org/details/herzaufgluhedei00lers/page/14/mode/2up>; accessed 5 January, 2024).

24 Cited according to Schäfer, Agnes Bernauer, p. 102.

25 Cited according to Schäfer, Agnes Bernauer, p. 77.



dialectal, and religious texts, a retreat to the pre-Third Reich foundations from whence he hailed.<sup>26</sup>

### backtracking into the forest / rückzieher in den wald

Hubrich made a seamless transition from his 1939 glorification of the Bavarian/German forest as a place that had to be protected from *Volksschädlingen* (“harmful pests”) to one that sustained pseudo-religious traditions in 1952.<sup>27</sup> Hubrich’s most famous post-World War II publication are the lyrics to Ferdinand Neumaier’s composition of the *Waldlermesse*, or “Mass written for the inhabitant(s) of the Bavarian Forest,” which is even today among the most popular and widely sung and played pieces of *Volksmusik* (“popular music”) in East Bavaria, and its reception extends into other rural parts of southern Germany and Austria. One of my uncles has requested in his will that it be played at his funeral. While denied the official status of a Catholic mass by the religious authorities, it is most often performed during events happening at the intersection of official Catholic ritual and secular, often folksy, festivities (for example the annual *Arberkirchweih*, one of the oldest religious fairs in the Bavarian Forest region, since 1769). Direct ideological messages are absent, but the *Waldlermesse* is difficult to read as a text dedicated to the Catholic liturgical tradition. In fact, the lyrics only seem to affect piety and suggest an almost pantheistic nature mysticism, within which God only exists as some kind of impersonal eternal principle or cosmic force, reason enough at least for high-ranking Catholic officials to express their dissatisfaction with the inclusion of the mass in official church events.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps more significantly, the text has returned to the mood and vocabulary of the very border country ideology that became political program during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich and added continued cultural significance to a meteorological phenomenon, the darkly threatening Bohemian or Easterly wind. That wind itself was also easily instrumentalized as early as 1933 by Nazi poet Heinz Schauwecker for anti-Slavic propaganda, for the jubilee celebrations of the victory against a Hussite army during the Battle of Hiltersried (1433), and for the cover of Nazi propagandist Kurt Trampler’s brochure, *Not und Aufbau der bayerischen Ostmark* (“Plight and Reconstruction of the Bavarian Eastern Marches”), which featured a fir tree on the German side of the border, bent by a strong wind gust coming from the sinister side.<sup>29</sup>

Hubrich’s *Waldlermesse* and songs about the famous Bohemian wind continue to appear on innumerable Bavarian folk music compilations. Its reception attests to the fact that he has created just the right “native tune,” the very *Heimatlaut* he

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26 The only detailed scholarship on Hubrich’s biography is Johannes Laschinger, “Eugen Hubrich und das Amberger Blut. Zwischen Uhu und Hakenkreuz,” *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte* 79/3 (2016): pp. 585-624.

27 On Hubrich’s call for the elimination of “harmful pests” (a Nazi term to brand any non-conformist Germans as vermin), see Josef Breinbauer, “‘Des grünen Waldes Gottesweben’: Anmerkungen zu Eugen Hubrich und seiner Waldlermesse,” *Literatur in Bayern* 24 (2008): pp. 63-68, here p. 65.

28 On this question, see Hans Kratzer, “Darf man Lieder eines überzeugten Nationalsozialisten im Gottesdienst singen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 August 2017: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/kirche-darf-man-lieder-eines-ueberzeugten-nationalsozialisten-im-gottesdienst-singen-1.3638896>; accessed 16 November, 2023.

29 See Albrecht Bald, “Braun schimmert die Grenze und treu steht die Mark! ”: der NS-Gau Bayerische Ostmark/Bayreuth 1933-1945: Grenzgau, Grenzlandideologie und wirtschaftliche Problemregion (Bayreuth: Bumerang, 2014), pp. 329-31.

recommended to the Sudeten Germans in the Bohemian border country in 1933. If this *Heimatlaut* felt innocuous enough at the time, until its creator aligned himself and his music and poetry unreservedly with Nazi ideology, its proponents are now again celebrating it as just another slightly nostalgic and innocuous regional feature, unrelated to this alignment and as if nothing ever happened. Performances of the *Waldlermesse* continue to be announced in the semi-mystical language that characterized the publications of the Bayerische Wald-Verein in the 1920s and 1930s. An invitation to a 2015 performance describes the mass as mirroring the vastness of the forest, the isolated lives of the region's inhabitants, and their happiness (despite poverty), and it displays a yearning back to a "sad and melancholy" past that can still be intimated in the simple idiom that continues to be spoken in the region. The invitation also mentions the author of the mass lyrics, "Oberstudienrat Eugen Hubrich," who is said "to belong among the poets who, during the time of the revitalization of the *waldlerisch* kind of life [in East Bavaria] was very engaged as a poet."<sup>30</sup> The adjective *waldlerisch* and even more so the noun *Waldler* are key words in (East) Bavarian identitarian discourse since the late nineteenth century, but especially since World War I, supported since the Weimar Republic as part of a larger movement of "folklore" and "folklorism" and often in support of nationalist and xenophobic agendas.<sup>31</sup> As a 1926 pseudo-scientific attempt at explaining the phenotype of the inhabitant of the Bavarian/Bohemian Forest explains, "The *Waldler* is a noble descendant of the old Germans."<sup>32</sup>

Hubrich's own family and the fans of the *Waldlermesse* have been all too happy to erase the problematic Nazi traces of traditionalist Bavarian popular (and medievalist) culture. As recently as 2022, the mass received an inaugural performance (as part of a Catholic mass) in the small municipality of Marzling (Freising County, Bavaria), and the news article reporting on the event shows a photograph of Eugen Hubrich's grandson, Hans Peter Hubrich, proudly displaying a picture of his grandfather. The article speaks of Eugen Hubrich's position as teacher in Straubing and his authorship of the 1935 version of the medievalist Agnes Bernauer pageant, but carefully avoids any mention of his outspoken public role in support of Hitler's regime in many of his writings as well as NSDAP district warden for cultural affairs.<sup>33</sup> There are even more militant defenders of the *Waldlermesse* and its traditions, who confronted a local

30 "Zur Erinnerung an Ferdinand Neumaier. Einladung zum Gedächtnissingen." [https://www.bayerischer-waldgau.de/website/Aus\\_den\\_Vereinen/Einladung%20Ferdinand-Neumaier-Ged%C3%A4chnissingen%20September%202015.pdf](https://www.bayerischer-waldgau.de/website/Aus_den_Vereinen/Einladung%20Ferdinand-Neumaier-Ged%C3%A4chnissingen%20September%202015.pdf); accessed 16 November, 2023.

31 See, for example, Zephyrin Zettl, *Waldlerisch: Gedichte in der Böhmerwaldmundart* (Vienna, 1919). For the history of folklorism and Volksmusik in Hubrich's region, see Carsten Lenk, "Cultivated Folk Music: More Invention than Discovery? The Appropriation and Mediation of Songs in East Bavaria," *The World of Music*, 41/2 (1999), pp. 63-97.

32 George Leopold Weisel aus dem Neumarkter Landestor. *Die Volkskunde eines Aufklärers*, ed. Josef Blau (Reichenberg, 1926), in a section entitled, "Die Bewohner des Böhmer- und Bayerwaldes, vom medizinischen Standpunkte betrachtet," p. 28. Unsurprisingly, the book was published by the Sudeten German publisher Franz Kraus.

33 Maria Martin, "Musikalische Premiere in Marzling: Uraufführung der Waldlermesse," *Merkur.de*, 15 May, 2022: <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/freising/marzling-ort377194/musikalische-premiere-in-marzling-urauffuehrung-der-waldlermesse-91544002.html>; accessed 16 November, 2023.

Catholic priest who had been critical of the mass as “non-liturgical,” “with a doubtful Christian foundation,” “based on Hubrich’s political convictions,” and plain “Kitsch.”<sup>34</sup>

The Bayerischer Wald-Verein and its publication, *Der Bayerwald*, which Hubrich edited and in which he published his poetry, still exist today. Their externally facing web sites show no signs of any public acknowledgement of their association’s previous alignment as “followers“ (*Mitläufer*), “lesser offenders” (*Minderbelastete*) or “offenders“ and “profiteers“ (*Belastete*), to use the nomenclature of the never finished process of post-war denazification.<sup>35</sup> The erasing of information about these organizations’ former leading members and their activities intends to continue pre-1933 traditions about regional folk culture as if that very culture’s thinking and practices had not prepared the way, and had not easily intersected with, national socialist ideologies. Hubrich’s and others’ seamless crossover from allegedly innocuous folk tunes, poems, plays, and pageants about East Bavaria and its inhabitants to their active support of national socialism should offer a caveat to those who would still celebrate similar traditions without at least a modicum of critical distance and historical perspective. As recent scholarship demonstrates, the persistence of certain cultural phenomena, like East Bavarian medievalisms, may really be considerably more powerful than hitherto assumed. Using data on modern anti-Semitism and plague-era pogroms as an indicator for medieval anti-Semitism, Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth for example have offered conclusive evidence that medieval anti-Semitism reliably predicts violence against Jews in the 1920s, votes for the Nazi Party, deportations after 1933, attacks on synagogues (*Reichskristallnacht*), and readers’ letters to the Nazi magazine, *Der Stürmer*.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, we should not be surprised if nineteenth- and early twentieth-century medievalisms manage to persist into the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century.

### post vestigia, vestigia

This concise case study of regional medievalisms in East Bavaria extends David Matthews’ mostly Britain- and city-based observations on residual medievalisms. Residual regional medievalisms in East Bavaria have existed before and existed after the “boom” period of the mid- and late-nineteenth century, and they seem to thrive independent of any synchronous “high-culture” manifestations of the phenomenon.

34 Reported by Maximilian Seefelder, “Wie erkennt man (mangelnde) Qualität? Eine Werkanalyse am Beispiel der Waldler-Messe,” in *Studententagung zur Kulturarbeit in Niederbayern an der Universität Passau am 12. Juli 2003. Vier Vorträge*, Schriftenreihe der Universität Passau, 27 (Passau: Ostler, 2004), pp. 13-26, here p. 16, and fn. 19.

35 See their website: <https://bayerischer-wald-verein.de/>; accessed 16 November, 2023. The organization supports the *Arberkirchweih*, an annual event at which Hubrich’s *Waldlermesse* has seen regular performances. The Bayerischer Wald-Verein also has a dotted line with the Bayerischer Waldgau group (founded 1931) which, while it changed the title of its president from *Gauleiter* (also the title of a regional leader of the Nazi Party, head of a *Gau* or *Reichsgau*, and the third-highest rank in the Nazi political leadership) to *Gauvorsitzender* in 1954, retains the troubled association with *Gau* in its association’s title and all its leadership titles (*Gauschritfführer*; *Gaukassier*; *Gaujugendleiter*; etc.). The medieval *gau* was the prevalent term for administrative regions among the Germanic peoples, and hence revived by the Nazis as another piece of evidence of the thousand-year-old history of Hitler’s regime.

36 Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth, “Persecution Perpetuated: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Semitic Violence in Nazi Germany,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127/3 (2012): pp. 1339–92.

They are powerfully malleable, almost empty signifiers that can be adapted and aligned with any and all goals. As a cognitive shortcut, they continue to produce meaning during the (second) German empire, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the Federal Republic of Germany, and post-reunification Germany. The modern process of historicizing as well as the focus on modernist “high culture” in humanities scholarship had us almost convinced of an unbridgeable epistemological chasm between ourselves and the medieval past. However, as Nancy Partner has aptly observed, the *middleness* or *middle status* of the period may really be little more than an “amoebic construct justified by nothing firmer than the uneven thinning out and eventual demise of Roman provincial government in Western Europe for a beginning, and, at the other end, the self-congratulating pronouncements of a few Italian intellectuals” who maintained they “wrote better Latin than anyone who had lived since Cicero.”<sup>37</sup> The omnipresent and powerful residual medievalisms surrounding us would indicate that the *longue durée* of medieval humanity may well extend beyond the royal thaumaturgic touch of the last French monarchs (a *terminus ante quem* often invoked), and that all of us continually are and will be, as the title of a twenty-first-century scholarly journal maintains, *postmedieval*.<sup>38</sup> This postmedieval condition unites all of us who re-present, i.e., those who reenact, recreate, reinvent, remember, and research versions of medieval culture, inside and outside the academy.

If some among us, inside or outside the academy, abuse medieval culture for nefarious purposes, it is our professional responsibility to object and, as public medievalists, stop such individuals and groups in their visible and not so visible tracks. Therefore, I am recommending a more effective and open transfer of knowledge between the academy and society at large, to lower our carefully constructed (and often jealously guarded) linguistic and conceptual drawbridges and to establish a more productive and transparent dialogue and collaboration with all those who love the Middle Ages. Such dialogue and collaboration will not only reveal malevolent traces of the medieval past in our midst, but also a vast number of benevolent continuities between ourselves and the Middle Ages.<sup>39</sup>

This case study suggests that many of the traces of cultural phenomena similar to modern medievalism may not reside within the cultural, political, and economic centers and metropolitan areas and their high-culture productions, but in under-researched nonurban regions, which often do not participate in the accelerated pace of innovation and change, but have a stronger tendency to synthesize new developments with continuist thought, rituals, and traditions. Similar to the results of the *Spuren* project scholarship practiced by the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* for German and European literary history, this case study also reveals existing historical accounts of medievalism as sketchy and in need of corrective completion. Such additional

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37 Nancy Partner, “Did Mystics Have Sex?” in *Desire and Discipline: Language and Sexual Difference in Middle English Literature*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 296-311 (296-7). A similar view of the Renaissance was advanced by historian Jacques Heers, in his study *Le Moyen Age une imposture* (Paris: Perrin, 2008).

38 My use of “postmedieval” as an intellectual condition might be seen in relation to Bruce Holsinger’s use of “premodern” in his study, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

39 Numerous examples of such benevolent continuities can be found in Albrecht Classen, ed., *Medieval Answers to Modern Problems* (San Diego: Cognella: 2nd edn., 2017) as well as in Jan Ziolkowski’s magisterial six-volume reception history, *The Juggler of Notre Dame and the Medievalizing of Modernity* (Open Book Publishers, 2018).

investigations on deceptively minor, regional, and allegedly “low brow” artistic productivity may reveal numerous manipulated, erased, and silenced traces of the modern reception of the medieval past and help create more geographically and ideologically inclusive national and global narratives.

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