

## **Medievalism and Memory in Guy Gavriel Kay's Historical Fantasy**

The aim of this research project is two-fold yet strongly interrelated: 1) to critically examine the construction of medievalism in Guy Gavriel Kay's historical fantasy fiction; and 2) to develop an interpretative model for the analysis of medievalism as a form of cultural memory in contemporary popular fantasy literature. Such a scope results from an observation that Kay's fiction remains seriously underresearched, whereas it can serve – when set against other popular fantasy texts – as an original context for employing new interpretative categories derived from memory studies. The research project is thus intended to contribute to literary studies by examining multi-dimensional fictional texts which have so far received little academic attention, but also to extend existing interpretative frameworks so that they could be further applied in other areas of academic concern.

Guy Gavriel Kay is a contemporary Canadian writer, who has so far authored fourteen fantasy novels and a collection of poetry. His novels are popular among readers world-wide and have been translated into over thirty languages as of 2018. He has also won a number of prestigious awards for fantasy literature. Yet, despite this popularity, Kay's fiction has so far received little academic attention. My project aims to bridge this gap by analyzing his fiction from the perspective of a medievalist, who believes that the way the Middle Ages are represented in popular culture and literature can be understood as a contemporary cultural fantasy, which selectively appropriates various medieval motifs and topoi to recast them for the needs of modern readers and viewers.

The term medievalism can be understood very broadly as any post-medieval attempt to re-imagine the Middle Ages for the modern world. Seeing medievalism as a specific dialogue between the past and the present, I propose to situate Kay's fiction within the context of both medieval tradition and medievalist fantasy (especially by J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, T.H. White, Marion Bradley Zimmer, George R.R. Martin, Steven Erikson and Miles Cameron). This will allow me to provide a systematic overview of different approaches to medieval tradition in contemporary fantasy literature and to develop a theoretical model for their discussion within the context of cultural memory. In this approach, Kay's works can be read as creating a sort of palimpsestic construct of the Middle Ages, which builds upon not only medieval history, literature and culture but also on other medievalisms. However, my aim is not so much to trace the thematic and structural parallels between these traditions, but to investigate the ways in which Kay's fiction "remembers" and re-imagines historical and fictional Middle Ages to weave meanings important for contemporary readers. To demonstrate this, various aspects of his novels will be discussed (e.g. Arthurian motifs, the relationship between history and memory, the images of masculinity and femininity, and the representation of the Other). The working hypothesis is that Kay's narrative and world-building strategies, which demonstrate a predilection for focusing on those aspects of medieval history and tradition that are on the whole less explored in fantasy fiction, work towards expanding the boundaries of the genre as well as shifting the structures of cultural memory related to the Middle Ages.

Research results will be presented during international conferences. They will also be published in the first monograph devoted to Guy Gavriel Kay's fiction, accompanied by a series of articles. The outcomes of the project are meant to appeal to scholars and students interested in memory studies, medievalism and fantasy literature.