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SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Fribourg Colloquium / Freiburger Colloquium / Colloque fribourgeoise 2015
„Medieval theories of the creative act /
Théories médiévales de l'acte créatif /
Theorien des kreativen Akts im Mittelalter“

Organisers: Prof. Elisabeth Dutton (Director of the Medieval Institute, University of Fribourg), Martin Rohde (Manager of the Medieval Institute, University of Fribourg)

The 2015 Medieval Institute Colloquium took place in the University of Fribourg, September 7–9: there were 12 contributions by invited speakers, from Switzerland, Germany, France, and the UK. Papers were given in English, French, or German. The Colloquium was open to auditors, and a number of graduate students and Faculty attended in this capacity: they were also invited to join in discussion.

The Colloquium explored medieval perceptions and articulations of the role of the artist and writer, and of the nature of creation. Since God is the ultimate Creator, should human creativity be understood as in the image of God, and human artistic achievements as participating in the divine? Or do those who seek to create seek to usurp the divine, exhibiting dangerous hubris and forming works that, like idols, distract human beings from their appropriate worship of God? ‘Medieval Theories of the Creative Act’, explored these questions by studying examples of works of art, music, literature and philosophy produced in medieval Europe.

The Colloquium began with a paper from Dr Jens Ruffer (Berlin) that explored the different terms in which creative activity could be articulated in the Middle Ages. Noting that the medieval world did not distinguish between the ‘artistic’ and the ‘artificial’, or between ‘artistic’ and ‘technical’ achievement, Dr Ruffer considered the work of medieval craftsmen; his paper provided a valuable starting point for the Colloquium discussions, particularly since it provocatively declared that medieval understanding did not include ‘creative acts’. Prof. Michele Bacci (Fribourg) then discussed the capacity of medieval craftsmen to ‘shape the holy’ – art and architecture in sacred spaces reveal human creativity in harmony with ideas of the divine creator. Prof. Tiziana Suarez (Fribourg) outlined the philosophical background to ideas connecting and contrasting human and divine creativity in the middle ages.

Insight from the discipline of musicology was offered by Profs Max Haas (Basel) and Laurenz Lütteken (Zurich): Prof. Haas’s paper explored ways of deconstructing ‘the work’ in the Middle Ages, and Prof. Lütteken considered the possibility of the composer as ‘creative genius’. Dr Schneider’s (Magdeburg) paper dealt with the poetic Speech as creative act by Konrad von Würzburg. Exploring creative literary acts, several papers focused on the French medieval tradition: Dr Marco Nievergelt (Paris) discussed the evidence of the Roman de la Rose tradition, vital to both English and French medieval vernacular literature. His paper considered ‘Creation, Reproduction and Idolatry’ in tellings and retellings of the Roman; in this

tradition, imitation is far from stale but rather is dynamic, creating sites in which writers can breathe new life into richly artistically realized re-presentations. Dr Liv Robinson (Oxford) explored a complementary topic, translation, and discussed the creative acts of medieval writers translating texts from French into English. The topic of creative adaptation/translation was discussed further by Dr Emma Buckley (St Andrews), whose paper 'Academic authors and classical authorities' delineated the adaptation by scholars at the University of Oxford of Roman authors, usually for political rather than religious purposes. Drama was also the focus of the paper by Elsa Strietman (Cambridge), who described the concepts of creation in medieval Dutch plays: Ms Strietman's focus was on religious plays, while Dr Buckley's dramatic material treated secular, humanist developments in drama.

Prof. Helen Swift (Oxford) offered a paper on 'Decomposition and Recomposition: Death and Identity in Late Medieval France.' A late-medieval proliferation of funerary art and literature (such as literary epitaphs) might provide clues to a new sense of individualism in relation to life and death: such works' concern for memorialisation, a concerted effort *exigere monumentum aere perennium*, their more or less implicit triumph over time and death promoting a 'pré-Renaissance' Petrarchan vision of glory. Prof. Swift discussed whether late-medieval funerary art can demonstrate a clear arc towards individualism. Her paper therefore connected with that of Prof. Peter Mack (Warwick), 'Expected responses and linguistic creativity in Renaissance Rhetoric': this paper concluded the symposium by looking forward from the medieval, exploring the significance of a perceived renaissance 'shift' in the understanding of the role of the human creator. Together with the presentation of Dr Buckley, Prof. Mack's paper indicated a shift in the understanding of creativity as a divine prerogative, while nonetheless asserting the continuing significance, to early modern authors, of their training in imitation and adaptation of sources, and their creative dependence on tradition.

The Colloquium was particularly successful at stimulating discussion. The timetable, which allowed an hour for each speaker, ensured that there was time both for speakers to develop their points and for audience to ask questions and discuss topics raised. As is the case when a topic is sufficiently stimulating, conversations among scholars continued during coffee breaks, over the relaxed lunches in the private room of the University Mensa, and at the conference dinner. The topic of 'Medieval Theories of the Creative Act' proved at once broad enough to facilitate interdisciplinary consultation and specific enough to keep discussion focused, even though the papers covered a range of disciplines and languages and also quite a broad time period. We believe that the conference made a significant contribution to scholarly understanding of how medieval writers, painters, philosophers, musicians understood their crafts and the fruit they bore.

The funds generously provided by the SNF, the Claire Sturzenegger – Jeanfavre Stiftung and the University of Fribourg were used to cover travel and subsistence expenses for our invited speakers. The conference allowed Swiss scholars to develop new European contacts, and gave Swiss graduate students the opportunity to meet leading scholars in medieval studies. Elisabeth Dutton and Martin Rohde are currently editing a volume of the papers from the conference, which will be published in 2016 in the Medieval Institute's own series, *Scrinium Friburgense*.

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