



# Kyngervi



Foreword

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# Foreword

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*The Future is Bright!: An Introduction*

In her groundbreaking *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (1999), Carolyn Dinshaw concludes: ‘as queer historical projects aim to promote a queer future, the possibility of queerness in the past - of lived lives or fictional texts - becomes crucial’.<sup>2</sup> Why is the possibility of premodern queerness so crucial to queer futurity? For Dinshaw, reading Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* alongside John/Eleanor Rykener’s deposition documents, the possibility of medieval queerness ‘... makes it seem less likely that queers could ever be completely exterminated in the future.’<sup>3</sup> In other words, by gesturing to the place of queers in the past, medieval scholarship secures the place of queers in the future.

Although written over twenty years ago, Dinshaw’s recuperative scholarship reminds us of the urgency of medieval studies when ‘a unified straight white masculinity’ threatens queer lives. In June 2020, in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>4</sup> the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under U.S. President Donald Trump finalised a revision to Section 1557 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) (Simmons-Duffin, Office of the Secretary). The new rule removes nondiscrimination protections in health care and insurance policy for LGBTQ people—queer people may be denied care by doctors or coverage by their insurance. Considering this reversal occurred at the height of the increasingly

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<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) 140.

<sup>3</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 140.

<sup>4</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic began near the end of 2019, and at the time of this essay’s writing, continues.

lethal COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult to view the Trump administration's decision as anything other than a threat to queer lives.

Along with the outrage inspired by U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's rumoured revision of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, the reversal of Section 1557 raises a chilling question: is there a future for queers?<sup>5</sup> Queer theorists respond in myriad ways to this question, as a roundtable at the 2005 MLA Annual Convention demonstrates. On one side of the debate, we have Judith/Jack Halberstam and Lee Edelman. The latter's 2004 monograph gives their response to the question in its title: *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). On the other side of the conversation, is José Esteban Muñoz, who argues that '... queerness is primarily about futurity' and in fact, 'queers have nothing *but* a future'.<sup>6</sup> In formulating his theory of queer futurity, Muñoz (2005) cites Dinshaw's approach to the medieval period as a guiding methodology for attending to the past, critiquing the present, and anticipating a future.<sup>7</sup> The question of queer futurity is multifaceted and warrants a more detailed consideration of its application to medieval studies than what I allude to here. Nevertheless, I invoke this debate to suggest that *Kyngervi*, consciously or unconsciously, participates in the project of fashioning a queer future by through its presentation of the past.

Dinshaw, Edelman, and Muñoz interrogated queer futurity in response to critical cultural moments, when they were forced to ask: is there a future for someone like me? Briefly examining the context of their work helps illuminate how *Kyngervi* exists within this continuum of crisis and contributes to the ongoing exploration of this question. Beginning with Dinshaw, she wrote *Getting Medieval* in part to respond to the proposed defunding of the American National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) by U.S. Congressman Steven J. Chabot (R-OH) in 1998, as well as the more broadly growing anti-intellectualism in late-

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Hunte, 'Gender Recognition Act: LGBT Political Group Anger at Trans Law "Changes"', BBC News (BBC, June 20, 2020) <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-53101071>.

<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Caserio et al., 'The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,' *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (May 2006) 819-828, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25486357>, 820, 825.

<sup>7</sup> Caserio et al., 'The Antisocial Thesis', 826.

90s America.<sup>8</sup> Edelman's polemic *No Future* also responded to increasing conservatism in the United States, drawing from the debate around same-sex marriages, and the myth of 'reproductive futurity' espoused by a pro-life and homophobic family values crowd.<sup>9</sup> In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), Muñoz takes a similar starting point to Edelman, but moves to the (at the time) 'ongoing attack on cultures of sexual dissidence' enacted by Rudy Giuliani's (1994-2001) so-called 'clean up' of Manhattan during his tenure as New York City mayor, a policy adopted by subsequent mayor (2002-2013) and 2020 presidential-hopeful, Michael Bloomberg.<sup>10</sup> In all three theorists' work, the spectre of AIDS—the ultimate denial of queer futurity—lingers over their analysis.

*Kyngervi* likewise emerges from a time of crisis. The journal was formed in tangent with the Norse Queer and Gender Studies Network in 2018. As General Editor, Amy Jefford Franks attests, the journal was formed in response to the enduring neglect of gender and queer studies in the field.<sup>11</sup> But I would argue *Kyngervi* owes its existence just as much to the U.K. and the U.S.'s increasingly conservative political climate and the increasingly visible appropriation of medieval, and particularly Old Norse, aesthetics by far-right organizations. Shocking myself and many other medievalists was the display of Old Norse symbols by white nationalists at the 2017 'Unite the Right Rally' in Charlottesville, VA as they shouted the Nazi adage: 'blood and soil.'<sup>12</sup> These events were at the forefront of my mind when I agreed to edit *Kyngervi*. To paraphrase Muñoz, my decision emerged from the idea that the present was not

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<sup>8</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 173-179.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 28-29.

<sup>10</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) 53.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Jefford Franks, 'A Letter from the Editor,' *Kyngervi* 1 (2019) 5-8, [https://kyngervi.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/letter\\_from\\_editor\\_jefford\\_franks-2.pdf](https://kyngervi.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/letter_from_editor_jefford_franks-2.pdf), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Sierra Lomuto provides multiple examples of medieval symbols displayed at Charlottesville. For instance, she identifies the Elder Futhrak Odal/Othala rune on many of the banners of the 'Unite the Right' rally (Lomuto). For more about the strategic medievalism of the 'Unite the Right' rally, see: Sierra Lomuto, 'Public Medievalism and the Rigor of Anti-Racist Critique,' *In the Medieval Middle* (blog), April 4, 2019, <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2019/04/public-medievalism-and-rigor-of-anti.html>.

enough. As the events at Charlottesville reiterated, the present was and is ‘impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and ‘rational’ expectations.’<sup>13</sup> In *Kyngervi*, I saw an alternative to the present: a space that fostered a queer scholarly community and produces what Dinshaw calls a *queer history*.

In her introduction to *Kyngervi*’s inaugural issue, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2019) also offers the medieval past as a source for finding an alternative to the present. She remarks that the ‘possibilities of nonbinary and queer readings [are] one of the running themes in this first issue.’<sup>14</sup> What are the possibilities afforded by these nonbinary and queer readings? Do they rectify the present, popular and academic expectation of medieval Scandinavians: as white, cisgender, and heteronormative?<sup>15</sup> Jóhanna suggests that *Kyngervi*’s first collection of articles offers a constellation of possible alternatives to this present view, speaking to the journal’s broader thesis ‘[that] the concept of gender itself does not have one meaning for everyone today, nor did it in the past.’<sup>16</sup> Jóhanna’s reading of the first issue of *Kyngervi* emphasizes that predicating the journal’s insights, is the assumption that queers of the past, present, and future are connected. To borrow Dinshaw’s language, this guiding conceit renders *Kyngervi* a work of queer history. Dinshaw defines ‘queer history’ as an impulse to make connections, no matter how fragmentary, between ‘the lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and ... those left out of sexual categories now.’<sup>17</sup> By drawing these partial, transtemporal connections, Dinshaw posits that queer historical projects provide material for ‘queer subject

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<sup>13</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 53.

<sup>14</sup> Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, ‘Foreword,’ *Kyngervi* 1 (2019) 9-14, [https://kyngervi.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/foreword\\_fridriksdottir-2.pdf](https://kyngervi.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/foreword_fridriksdottir-2.pdf), 11.

<sup>15</sup> This is a generalization, but a productive one, perhaps best encapsulated by Judith Jesch in *Women in the Viking Age* (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1991). For an adjacent perspective, addressing the imagined white “Anglo-Saxon” in Early English studies, see Mary Rambaran-Olm’s recent work, more specifically: ‘Anglo-Saxon Studies [Early English Studies], Academia and White Supremacy.’ Medium, 2018. <https://medium.com/@mrambaranolm/anglo-saxon-studies-academia-and-white-supremacy-17c87b360bf3>.

<sup>16</sup> Jóhanna, ‘Foreword,’ 11.

<sup>17</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 1.

and community formation *now*.<sup>18</sup> Turning again to the first issue of *Kyngervi*, Jefford Franks' opening remarks likewise speak to the queers of the past as contributing to a present queer community's survival. *Kyngervi*, by presenting the possibilities of a queer medieval Scandinavia, cultivates a community comprised of queer people and allies. As Jefford Franks comments: 'we [the editorial team] came together after I sought out colleagues who were willing to support me in this endeavour. I found a group of people who, like me, could see how much the field needed a journal like this...'<sup>19</sup> By invoking a shared interest in—or more appropriately, a connection with—medieval queers, Jefford Franks created a queer medievalist community for the *now*.<sup>20</sup>

But what about *future*? Whereas Jefford Franks' remarks only invoke futurity with promises of this second issue, Jóhanna reiterates *Kyngervi* is part of the queer academe of the future. Praising the quality of the first issue and its editorial team, Jóhanna remarks that '... the future looks bright!'<sup>21</sup> As I look back on Jóhanna's introduction in the dark days of 2020, I can't help but wonder where that bright future *is*. As we move into 2021, what will the academic landscape look like? And more relevant to Jóhanna's optimism, how will *Kyngervi* participate in that future?

To speculate on how *Kyngervi* contributes to a queer future, I turn to how Dinshaw's purposed 'queer historical impulse' resonates with Muñoz's postulation that 'queerness is always on the horizon.'<sup>22</sup> Like Jóhanna, Muñoz and Dinshaw both believe in a bright future, to be achieved through a queer look at the past. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz offers 'a theory of queer futurity that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present.'<sup>23</sup> Inspired by Dinshaw (whom he briefly cites),<sup>24</sup> Muñoz argues that 'a posterior glance at different moments, objects, and spaces' offers 'an anticipatory illumination of

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<sup>18</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 22 - emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> Jefford Franks, 'A Letter from the Editor,' 7.

<sup>20</sup> Jefford Franks, 'A Letter,' 8.

<sup>21</sup> Jóhanna, 'Foreword,' 13.

<sup>22</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Muñoz names Dinshaw's notion of 'touching the past'—which I've more broadly called 'the queer historical impulse'—amongst the theories that shapes his approach. See: Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 17.

queerness'.<sup>25</sup> In other words, forming transtemporal relationships with the past offers possibilities for what the queer future *could* be. But that future is not here yet. Muños finds these potentialities in the twentieth-century Frankfurt School, whereas Dinshaw argues that the medieval is a source for fashioning a queer future. Near the end of *Getting Medieval*, Dinshaw posits that through these transtemporal relationships—what she calls the 'queer historical impulse'—medievalists will 'build selves and communities now and *into the future*'.<sup>26</sup> In Dinshaw, as in Muños, these future queer communities are not yet here—they exist in an unspecified future. Nevertheless, when the queer historical impulse is followed, the medieval past reveals queerness that 'can *for the future* offer a creative, even liberatory potential.'<sup>27</sup> A retroactive examination of *Kyngervi* through Dinshaw and Muños reveals a similar underlying theory of queer futurity. By reading the Scandinavian middle ages queerly, *Kyngervi* provides a posterior glance that helps us critique what queerness is *now* and anticipates what queerness *could be* in the future.

*Alternatives to the Present: This Issue's Contents*

*Kyngervi's* recuperative scholarship offers medieval Scandinavia as marked by difference and resistance to disciplinary structures and discourses that continue into the modern era. As Jóhanna claims in her introduction, *Kyngervi* offers a different possibility—the possibility of an alternative to the 'fictitious unity' of a hegemonic, heteronormative modernity.<sup>28</sup> In this edition of *Kyngervi*, our articles are loosely arranged around the theme of representation, and how non-normative identities manifest themselves in defiance of dominant discourse.

Even more so than in our first issue, this issue of *Kyngervi* demonstrates that lived experiences of gender can only be captured through considering multiple forms of representation. In her article, Julia Willborg examines representations of gender in material culture and ultimately critiques

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<sup>25</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 206 - emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 205 - emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*; Jóhanna 'Foreword,' 11.

scholarship's attempt to classify Viking-age women. Her supposition is that modern archaeologists frequently rely on the hegemonic gender norms of their own culture, rather than what is attested to in the material record (1). Taking the lady with the mead horn—the symbol of *Kyngervi*—as her focus, Wilhborg argues against archaeologists' biological essentialism in their approach to Viking-age figurines and burials (1, 11-12). Gazing at the material artefacts of the Viking Age through queer theory, she argues, affords a view of pre-modern sexuality that resists easy classification into gendered roles. Studies of gender in medieval Scandinavia often rely upon modern scholars constructing gender roles based upon particular actions or attributes that they determine are masculine or feminine.<sup>29</sup> Wilhborg's critique also extends beyond medieval Scandinavian studies, as this categorization also occurs in the adjacent field of Early English studies. Taking studies of *Beowulf* as an example, first- and second-wave feminist scholars attempted to foreground women in the poem by fitting them neatly into a series of categories.<sup>30</sup> Attempts to categorize gender in this way have proved influential and recuperative for women in both medieval Scandinavian and English studies, but this approach has underlying problems. Wilhborg offers an alternative to this dominant model of present scholarship: an alternative that is notably future-oriented. Her article ends with a passionate plea for archaeologists of the future to resist imposing modern gender stereotypes on Viking age material culture, and instead 'embrace the polysemous abilities of the material (14-15).' Like Dinshaw, Wilhborg urges that a queer approach to Viking Age artefact dismantles reveals gender as a social construct, and exposes 'the

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<sup>29</sup> There are many examples of this approach in Scandinavian medieval studies. Two influential frameworks are the one-gender model proposed by Carol Clover and the four female archetypes articulated by Jenny Jochens. See: Clover, Carol J. 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe,' *Speculum* 68, no. 2 (Apr., 1993) 363-387; Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia, PA: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Although the categorization of Early English women into the categories of 'hostess, peace-weaver, mourner, goader, and counselor' is less common in scholarship today, it still persists in the field. For a more in-depth historiography of these categories, see: Basil Arnould Price. 'Potentiality and Possibility: An Overview of Beowulf and Queer Theory.' *Neophilologus*, February 22, 2020, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11061-020-09636-8>.



impossibility of absolute straightness, whiteness, modernity of **essentially** *being* anything.<sup>31</sup>

As Dinshaw and Wilhborg's work demonstrates, the field of medieval studies reveals the impossibility of modern essentialisms. But in the popular consciousness, the medieval signifies when, prior to the advent of modernity, racialized and gendered essentialisms ruled.<sup>32</sup> In *Getting Medieval's* coda, Dinshaw approaches the medieval in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). She comes to the conclusion that the film presents the medieval as a violent step on the path to modernity. The modernity that the film imagines only emerges when white masculinity succeeds in eliminating the medieval, and all of its 'sodomy, sadomasochism, Southern-ness, and Blackness.'<sup>33</sup> Dinshaw's Foucauldian reading of *Pulp Fiction* offers the middle ages as a space of plural, unfixed identities prior to a disciplining white masculine modernity. But twenty-first century popular culture envisions the medieval not as a place where abjection and Otherness *exist* in defiance of hegemonic norms, but rather as a time when Otherness *could not exist*. Many recent popular medieval European fantasy films, television series, and video games present worlds that are predominately white and heteronormative. People of colour and queer people are at the margins of the screen, if they are included at all. Fans of this media often defend this decision by arguing that the exclusion of queers and people of colour is 'historically-accurate' to a fictional, medieval-ish world.<sup>34</sup> Although scholars such as Helen Young criticize these fantasies of an essentially white medieval period,

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<sup>31</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 189.

<sup>32</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 205.

<sup>33</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 185-186.

<sup>34</sup> Consider, for instance, fans' reaction to the criticism the acclaimed fantasy roleplaying game *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015) received for its failure to include a single person of colour in the base game. Many players responded by asserting that, since the game was set in a fictionalized East European medieval world, it was 'historically accurate' to include only white humans, elves, and dwarves. In a similar vein, fans of G.R.R Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, defend its predominantly white setting by asserting that only medieval Europe (and by extension, only medieval Europeans) offer anything of interest to the modern reader. After the series was adapted into the popular television show *Game of Thrones*, fans also justified its depiction of misogyny and sexualized violence as historically accurate to its setting. Further examples are noted in; Tauriq Moosa, 'Colorblind: On The Witcher 3, Rust, and Gaming's Race Problem,' *Polygon* (June 3, 2015), <https://www.polygon.com/2015/6/3/8719389/colorblind-on-witcher-3-rust-and-gamings-race-problem>; Helen Young, 'Place and Time: Medievalism and Making Race.' *Year's Work in Medievalism* 28 (2013) 1-6.

an ‘insistence on the fundamental and exclusionary whiteness of the Middle Ages’ persists amongst scholars and white supremacists.<sup>35</sup>

Futurity is at stake in this ongoing conversation about how modern and medieval materials imagine race. Sierra Lomuto argues that medieval studies has an ‘ethical responsibility to ensure that the knowledge we create and disseminate about the medieval past is not weaponized against people of color and marginalized communities in our own contemporary world.’<sup>36</sup> When I read Lomuto’s call, I see a parallel to Dinshaw’s argument that centring the possibility of queers in the past leads to the survival of queers in the future. Applying Dinshaw’s framework to race suggests that a medieval studies that foregrounds discussions of the experience and representation of people of colour is a discipline that rejects white supremacy’s attempt to deny a past, and consequently a present and future.<sup>37</sup> In this issue of *Kyngervi*, Dan Laurin and Ashley Castelino’s respective articles participate in this anti-racist project by exploring the intersection between ethnicity and gender identity in medieval Scandinavian textual sources’ construction of essentialized Otherness. Although both articles illustrate how the Icelandic sagas represent Scandinavia’s indigenous Sámi population, the authors differ in their conclusions about where these essentialisms originate. Castelino focuses on how modern critics deploy racialised and gendered essentialisms in his readings of *Ynglinga saga*, whereas Laurin’s close reading of *Eiríks saga rauða* reveals that these essentialisms are endemic to Old Norse literary culture.

Considering Castelino’s article first; he argues that although contemporary scholarship often constructs Sámi women as ‘archetypical Others,’ his reading reveals that these women, epitomized by Skjálf, can in fact enforce Scandinavian social mores. This argument runs contrary to Jeremy DeAngelo’s (2010) famous proposition that the sagas imagine Sámi (*finnar*) with

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<sup>35</sup> Young, ‘Place and Time,’ 6; Andrew B.R. Elliot, ‘Internet medievalism and the White Middle Ages.’ *History Compass* 16, no. 3 (2018) 4.

<sup>36</sup> Lomuto, ‘Public Medievalism and the Rigor of Anti-Racist Critique.’

<sup>37</sup> David Perry. ‘How to Fight 8chan Medievalism – and Why We Must.’ *Pacific Standard*. June 27, 2019. <https://psmag.com/ideas/how-to-fight-8chan-medievalism-and-why-we-must-notre-dame-christchurch>.

‘oppositional intent’: an inherent hostility to Scandinavian society and culture.<sup>38</sup> Castelino submits that there is a more complex and ambivalent relationship between indigeneity, particularly female indigeneity, and the continuation of normative Scandinavian society. One way to unpack this relationship is through the postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1984), who proposes that colonial discursive power craves ‘mimics,’ ‘a reformed, recognizable other ... a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.’<sup>39</sup> By upholding the cultural values of the dominant, colonial power (in this case Scandinavia), these mimics rise from the social margins into a place of prominence. Could this explain why the saga, as Castelino explicates, is so favourable to its female Sámi characters? If so, would this change how we understand the place of indigeneity in both contemporary and medieval Scandinavian culture?

Dan Laurin’s essay offers another possible framework for approaching the presentation of gender and indigeneity within the Icelandic sagas. Although interest in medieval Scandinavian gender is often recuperative and thus focuses on women,<sup>40</sup> rethinking masculinity has become an exciting new avenue for research, spearheaded by Gareth Lloyd Evans.<sup>41</sup> Laurin’s subject, *Eiríks saga rauða*’s Rǫgnvaldr, differs from Skjálfr not only in his gender identity, but also in his role within normative Scandinavian society. Laurin claims that Rǫgnvaldr is not a potential colonial mimic like Skjálfr, but rather a ‘hybrid’: composed of marginalized masculinities and femininities (4). Ethnicity and indigeneity is also a participant in the construction of hybridity, as Dinshaw notes in her description of hybridity in medieval literature. Citing Bhabha, Dinshaw claims that the hybrid subject, generated by ‘uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural, and ... climatic differences...’ deconstructs normative and dominant

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<sup>38</sup> Jeremy DeAngelo, ‘The North and the Depiction of the ‘Finnar’ in the Icelandic Sagas.’ *Scandinavian Studies* 82, no. 3 (2010) 257-286, [www.jstor.org/stable/25769033](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25769033), 258, 271.

<sup>39</sup> Homi Bhabha. ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.’ *October* 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis (1984): 125-33. doi:10.2307/778467, 126.

<sup>40</sup> Some examples of this recuperative scholarship include: Clover, ‘Regardless of Sex’; Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women*; and more recently, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*. Springer, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example: Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders* (Oxford University Press, 2019); Gareth Lloyd Evans and Jessica Clare Hancock, eds. *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature* (Boydell & Brewer, 2020).

cultures.<sup>42</sup> Laurin wisely cautions against seeing Røgnvaldr as ‘a martyr of queer victimhood’ and, like Willborg, asks us to instead reconsider unconscious classifications of medieval figures into modern gender stereotypes (18). But reading Laurin’s article through Dinshaw moreover affords reading Røgnvaldr as a figure of resistance. Medieval literature presents hybrid identities ambivalently, and Dinshaw suggests that ‘resistance is in fact enabled by this ambivalence.’<sup>43</sup> Just as Willborg revealed in her essay, Laurin and Castelino’s approaches to indigeneity and gender rethink dominant classifications and resists essentializing a multifaceted Scandinavian medieval past.

*Kyngervi* provides a platform for asking what medieval Scandinavia offers a tumultuous present and uncertain future. But the questions posed by these articles extend beyond the journal. Through our book reviews, this issue facilitates a discussion with recent scholarship that provides new relations, new identifications, and new communities, with which we are, as Dinshaw states, ‘connected partially by virtue of shared marginality, queer positionality.’<sup>44</sup> Our book review editor, Lee Colwill, solicited reviews for new approaches to Scandinavian medieval studies that centre that which has been overlooked,<sup>45</sup> and/or exhibit a broad range of theoretical borrowings, including gender studies,<sup>46</sup> queer theory,<sup>47</sup> and ecocriticism.<sup>48</sup> Under normal circumstances, *Kyngervi* would include conference reports in addition to these book reviews. Conferences form a tangible expression of medieval studies’ plural communities, and the multitude of answers posed to the question: *but what about the future?* Given the cancellation of many of these conferences due to the ongoing pandemic, *Kyngervi*’s coverage of these communities will be limited.

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<sup>42</sup> Homi Bhabha, ‘Postcolonial criticism,’ In *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles B. Gunn. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992): 441-445, qtd. in Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Particularly relevant to this issue is Neil Price’s discussion of Sámi and Norse interactions in *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), reviewed in this volume.

<sup>46</sup> Anne Marie Rasmussen (ed.), *Rivalrous Masculinities. New Directions in Medieval Gender Studies*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

<sup>47</sup> Evans, *Men and Masculinities*.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Abrams, *Evergreen Ash*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019).

But it would be erroneous to say these circumstances stalled medievalists' efforts to build future communities by interpreting contemporary events through the medieval past. On the contrary, the parallels between the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Death engendered much productive conversation about how medieval studies could contribute to 'the new normal.' One example is the Medieval Academy of America (MAA)'s special webinar, 'The Mother of All Pandemics: The State of Black Death Research in the Era of Covid-19.' MAA launched the seminar to consider how medieval notions of and responses to epidemic can help inform a 'recovery from COVID-19.'<sup>49</sup> Implicit in the webinar's description is the promise of a future without COVID-19, although in MAA's home country, the United States, climbing infection and death rates suggest otherwise.<sup>50</sup>

Although COVID-19 is an overwhelming shadow over 2020, medievalists have also responded to recent and ongoing racially-motivated violence, sparked by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police. Medievalist gatherings in wake of these events are worth noting here, given *Kyngervi's* effort to build transtemporal communities 'connected by virtue of shared marginality.' MAA launched 'Race, Racism, and Teaching the Middle Ages,' a webinar that uses the medieval past to respond to contemporary racism—particularly within the classroom. But the webinar also promises a future: suggesting that the participant will come away with ideas, texts, and resources for teaching students in Fall.<sup>51</sup> In a similar vein, the RaceB4Race (RB4R) community's virtual roundtable 'To Protect and Serve' responds to Floyd's murder, and contemporary police brutality more broadly, by examining

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<sup>49</sup> 'The Mother of All Pandemics: The State of Black Death Research in the Era of Covid-19.' MAA Webinars. The Medieval Academy of America, May 15, 2020. <https://www.medievalacademy.org/page/webinars>.

<sup>50</sup> The US Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports as of July 21, 2020 (12:15PM) that there are 3,761,362 cases in the United States, and that there have been 140,630 deaths. According to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s 182th situation update (July 20, 2020), the Americas claim over half (7,584,675) of the global number of cases (14,348,858). See: 'Cases in the U.S.,' Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 21, 2020) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>.

<sup>51</sup> 'Race, Racism, and Teaching the Middle Ages,' MAA Webinars, The Medieval Academy of America, July 20, 2020. <https://www.medievalacademy.org/page/TeachingTheMiddleAgesWebinar>.

the historical precedents for the motto of the Los Angeles police department. By reconsidering this phrase in a premodern context, the roundtable asks: ‘What does it mean to protect and to serve?’<sup>52</sup> RB4R promises a future where social change is realized: that punishing, disciplinary forces can be combated, resisted, and removed. The ‘partial connections’ between medieval and modern drawn by both of these virtual communities, the MAA and RB4R, offer an alternative vision to a virulent and violent present: one that is ‘impoverished and toxic’ to those outside white, cisgender heteronormativity.<sup>53</sup> Despite our failure to cover these gatherings in depth, *Kyngervi* nevertheless shares these projects’ aims: to respond to the moment, offer alternatives to presents, and build a better future by understanding the past.

#### *Utopian Medieval Futures: A Conclusion*

Early in this essay, I asked: how will *Kyngervi* participate in constructing the future of the academy? My reading of this volume, as well as my brief discussion of developments in the field, suggests that the academy’s future is one where medievalists not only consider their participation in the present, but also what they offer for a future. Once again, I cannot help but ask: when is the bright future Jóhanna promised? By way of conclusion, I answer this question by once again turning to Dinshaw and Muñoz, and the promise of queer utopia.

Utopia is central to Dinshaw’s framework of ‘partial connections’ between medieval, modern, and future queer communities. Throughout *Getting Medieval*, Dinshaw stresses that the modern queer will find queer possibilities in the medieval past that help them construct communities for the future. This does not mean that the medieval past was ‘a lost and golden age’ of queerness.<sup>54</sup> In fact, Dinshaw criticizes this mythologizing of the middle ages. Nevertheless, she refuses ‘to discard utopianism altogether.’<sup>55</sup> Dinshaw proposes that queer

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<sup>52</sup> ‘To Protect and to Serve: A RaceB4Race Roundtable,’ RaceB4Race (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, July 23, 2020) <https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race>.

<sup>53</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 27.

<sup>54</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 200.

<sup>55</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*.

utopian views of medieval ethics and aesthetics enable fashioning a *future politics*.<sup>56</sup> In other words, examining medieval studies through a queer lens affords alternative ways of thinking, acting, and/or being that engender a *future* utopia. For Dinshaw, utopia forms out from defying linear time and forming connections that are transtemporal. Consequently, the utopia itself is temporally paradoxical: it is simultaneously a product of the past and future. But crucially, it is *not here yet*.

As Muñoz explains in *Cruising Utopia*, utopia's destabilizing influence on linear time means that utopia is an inherently queer concept. Like utopia, queerness dwells outside positivist notions of time, and normative conceptions of history. Of course, queers exist in the past and present, but as Muñoz claims: 'we are not quite queer yet, that queerness, *what we will really know as queerness, does not yet exist*.'<sup>57</sup> In Muñoz' formulation, queer futurity exists as a desire for a utopian future that is not here yet.<sup>58</sup> To synthesise Dinshaw and Muñoz, both queerness and utopia are interrelated and reinforcing concepts that are perpetually on the horizon.<sup>59</sup> Although queerness and utopia might be perpetually out of reach, Foucault provides a way to move towards that horizon. In an interview in 1981, Foucault posited: '[w]e have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing what we are.'<sup>60</sup> Making a 'partial connection' between this statement, Dinshaw, and Muñoz, I propose that queer scholarship is an ongoing, unending effort towards a utopia that is [always?] on the horizon.

*Kyngervi* is one such effort. In the coming year, we will continue our project of promoting the possibility of queerness in the past for the purposes of realizing a queer future. Our next issue will be our first foray into a special issue. Although the forthcoming call for papers explains the theme in greater detail, I will briefly summarize here. We are asking for papers themed around medieval Scandinavian studies and *politics*. This topic is intimately connected to Dinshaw's

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<sup>56</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*.

<sup>57</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Qtd. in Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 209.

question of queer futurity. In contrast to the bright future Jóhanna predicts, Dinshaw prophecies that should medievalists abandon any sense of social responsibility, the future is surely dark.<sup>61</sup> *Kyngervi* offers a space for students of medieval Scandinavia to realize their voice and responsibility as we advance towards a bright future that is not here, not yet.

Basil Arnould Price<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 37.

<sup>62</sup> Thank you to my co-editors for their insightful feedback on this piece.



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