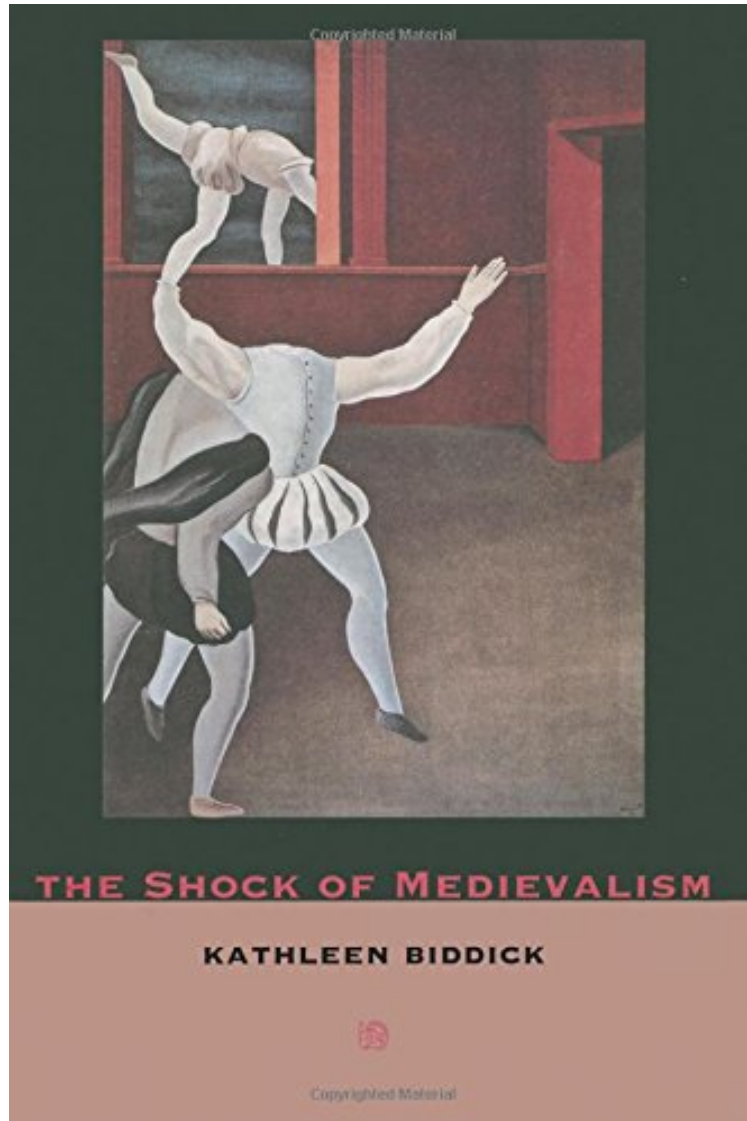


## The Shock of Medievalism

*Kathleen Biddick*

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**Kathleen Biddick : The Shock of Medievalism** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Shock of Medievalism:

In *The Shock of Medievalism* Kathleen Biddick explores the nineteenth-century foundations of medieval studies as an academic discipline as well as certain unexamined contemporary consequences of these origins. By pairing debates

over current academic trends and issues with innovative readings of medieval texts, Biddick exposes the presuppositions of the field of medieval studies and significantly shifts the objects of its historical inquiry. Biddick describes how the discipline of medieval studies was defined by a process of isolation and exclusion, a process that not only ignored significant political and cultural issues of the nineteenth century but also removed the period from the forces of history itself. Wanting to separate themselves from popular studies of medieval culture, and valuing their own studies as scientific, nineteenth-century academics created an exclusive discipline whose structure is consistently practiced today, despite the denials of most contemporary medieval scholars. Biddick supports her argument by discussing the unavowed melancholy that medieval Christians felt for Jews and by revealing the unintentional irony of nineteenth-century medievalists' fabrication of sentimental objects of longing (such as the gothic peasant). The subsequent historical distortions of this century-old sentimentality, the relevance of worker dislocation during the industrial revolution, and other topics lead to a conclusion in which Biddick considers the impact of an array of factors on current medieval studies. Simultaneously displacing disciplinary stereotypes and altering an angle of historical inquiry, *The Shock of Medievalism* challenges accepted thinking even as it produces a new direction for medieval studies. This book will provoke scholars in this field and appeal to readers who are interested in how historicizing processes can affect the development of academic disciplines.

Biddick injects the reflexivity of postmodern critics into a field that clings to traditional notions of historiography and history, demonstrating that it is possible to read differently and with wonderful results: these essays are original and imaginative readings that open up whole new ways of understanding how history might be written. Joan Scott, Institute for Advanced Study