



Inventing the Middle Ages

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How are we to understand the past? Should history aspire to the ideal objectivity which, in some quarters, is said to characterize science? Should the works of historians be regarded as merely so many texts to deconstruct, revealing the power-systems in which their authors were consciously or unconsciously complicit? Norman Cantor rejects both of these currently fashionable alternatives. Instead, he shows concretely how the views of influential medievalists developed, how they gained academic currency and how they fell out of fashion or were modified by later generations of scholars.

Part history of ideas, part institutional history, part psychobiography, part high-class gossip, this exercise in historiography is above all a brilliant contribution to the sociology of knowledge. As such, its appeal isn't limited to readers who are fascinated by the Middle Ages. A few of Cantor's subjects, such as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, are widely known for writings outside the domain of their academic work. Others, such as Marc Bloch and Ernst Robert Curtius, will be familiar to most readers with a general knowledge of medieval history and literature; others still will be known primarily by specialists. All are made vividly present.

Forceful, witty, deeply learned, at times deliberately outrageous, Cantor has written a superb book. In addition to notes and an index, he has included a "Core Bibliography of Medieval Studies," consisting of 125 titles.

Sources for Further Study

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The Washington Post Book World. XXI, December 8, 1991, p. 1.

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