

'Neo-Medievalism Studies', Italy, and the Four Ghosts: architectural history and the study of medievalism

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Figure 1 [Francesco Milizia], *Le vite de' più celebri architetti d'ogni nazione e d'ogni tempo precedute da un saggio sopra l'architettura*, Rome: Paolo Giunchi Komarek, 1768, detail from the title page. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 85-B3319. Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

The title page illustration of *Le vite de' più celebri architetti d'ogni nazione e d'ogni tempo precedute da un saggio sopra l'architettura* (1768) serves as the emblematic architectural manifesto of Francesco Milizia (1725–98) [fig. 1].¹ The cartouche on the left reading 'hoc amet' ('love this') is juxtaposed to Nature and Antiquity, represented synecdochically by Marc-Antoine Laugier's primitive hut and a Corinthian portico. On the right, 'hoc spernat' ('despise this') stands as an exhortation to avoid Baroque and Gothic architecture. Though 'pleasing', the eighteenth-century architectural theorist from Oria describes medieval architecture as 'quintessentially barbarian', 'a vulgarity introduced in the arts after the ruin of the Roman Empire', and inferior to

¹ [Francesco Milizia], *Le vite de' più celebri architetti d'ogni nazione e d'ogni tempo precedute da un saggio sopra l'architettura*, Rome: Paolo Giunchi Komarek, 1768; David Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History*, London: The Architectural Press, 1980, 31.

classical architecture.² Italy's neo-medieval architecture has been ignored, underestimated, and even criticised, to the extent that we can draw a comparison between negative readings of medieval and neo-medieval architecture through the work of Milizia.³ A prejudiced art historical view of the peninsula has led to a similar assignation of '*hoc spernat*' to the neo-medieval, or, at best, to its marginalisation in relation to the 'neo-classical'.⁴

Since it was codified by Leslie Workman in the 1970s, the nuanced subject of medievalism studies, 'the study of responses to the Middle Ages', to quote the definition attributed to Tom Shippey, has gradually matured into a discipline.⁵ Yet, its place in the academy remains controversial, not least due to its problematic relationship with medieval studies.⁶ Whereas, due to external tensions, scholars (medievalists, in particular) working on medievalism still wonder whether the study of medievalism is a guilty pleasure rather than an appropriate pursuit, settings such as the 'International Conference on Medievalism', 'The Middle Ages in the Modern World' and 'Il Medioevo fra noi' conferences, and the *Studies in Medievalism* journal have facilitated a discussion of its subject matter.⁷ Within medievalism studies – a rather interdisciplinary field despite its traditional

² 'piacevole', 'certamente barbara', 'una rozzezza introdotta nelle arti dopo la ruina dell'Impero Romano'. [Francesco Milizia], *Principj di architettura civile*, Finale: Jacopo De' Rossi, 1781, vol. 1, 326–327; Francesco Milizia, *Dizionario delle belle arti del disegno, estratto in gran parte dall'enciclopedia metodica*, Bassano: Remondini, 1797, vol. 1, 270.

³ Tommaso Zerbi, "'Hoc amet" e "hoc spernat": Il sorgere problematico di una storiografia dell'architettura sul "neomedievalismo" italiano' in Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, Pierre Savy, and Lila Yawn, eds, *Middle Ages without Borders: A Conversation on Medievalism*, proceedings of 'The Middle Ages in the Modern World' conference (Rome, 21–24 November 2018), Rome: École Française de Rome, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.efr.28290>

⁴ In dialectical opposition to the neo-medieval, 'neo-classical' here signifies the broad (artistic and) architectural manifestation of classicism rather than a chronologically constrained (artistic and) architectural tradition.

⁵ On Workman's legacy, see Richard Utz and Tom Shippey, eds, *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of Leslie Workman*, Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1998. On medievalism, see David Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015.

⁶ For example, Matthews notes that 'For many traditional medievalists, in short, medievalism studies was a secondary or meta-discipline which came with too strong a whiff of postmodernism about it.' He adds that 'If the signs are positive for medievalism studies, however, this does not mean that it is yet entirely clear what the discipline actually is, could be, or should be.' Matthews, *Medievalism*, 8–9. The field has struggled to find its place in Italian academia even more than it has in the UK or US. See Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri and Riccardo Facchini, 'Al lettore' in *Medievalismi italiani (secoli XIX–XXI)*, Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2018, (7–8) 7; Umberto Eco, 'Dreaming of the Middle Ages' in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. by William Weaver, London: Minerva, 1995, (61–72) 63.

⁷ This issue has been addressed, for example, in the call for the roundtable 'Can We Be More Than the Middle Ages? Medievalism Studies and Medieval Studies' organised by Michael A. Torregrossa and Carl B. Sell for the 'Annual Convention of the Northeast Modern Language Association' (Philadelphia, 2021).

association with the work of medievalists – the roles of architectural history and the architectural historian remain unclear.⁸ Conversely, although there has been remarkable scholarship on neo-medieval architecture in architectural history, it is hardly seen as part of an exact genre and is, instead, associated with the study of specific cultural spheres (not least, the British), stylistic outcomes (in particular, the so-called 'Gothic revival'), and time periods (the [late] modern).⁹

This historiographical article presents the first sustained discussion of the study of – and the tendency to ignore, underestimate, or criticise – Italian neo-medieval architecture and reflects on the interplay of architectural history and medievalism studies, through examination of the Italian case. It suggests that, if medievalism and medievalism studies can be defined as the responses to the Middle Ages and the study of those responses, respectively, then 'neo-medievalism' and 'neo-medievalism studies' shall describe the architectural and artistic manifestations of medievalism and their study.

The case of Italian neo-medieval architecture is fascinating. It is no surprise that, beyond Italy, art and architectural historiography has associated medieval revivalism with the late modern period and, especially, the nineteenth century.¹⁰ In 1980, Renato De Fusco opened *L'architettura dell'Ottocento* by noting how, in architectural terms, the nineteenth century was not defective, but its historiography was.¹¹ Forty years later, we might say that every work on nineteenth-century revivalism (broadly) in Italy, *per se*, represents an attempt to give dignity and academic attention to a topic that has struggled to gain a foothold among art and architectural historians, not least due to the neglect of the (late) modern and the predominance of the early modern in international scholarship on the visual culture of the peninsula.¹² Added to this is the shadow of Modernism that haunts Italian schools of architecture (where architectural history research is traditionally

⁸ This does not mean that architecture has been rejected as a subject matter of medievalism studies (nor does it mean that architectural historians are not among the many scholars from a rich array of fields, including literature, cultural studies, music, film and television, who have contributed to the topic). See, for example, John M. Ganim, 'Medievalism and Architecture' in Louise D'Arcens, *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 29–44.

⁹ See, for example, Timothy Brittain-Catlin, Jan de Maeyer, and Martin Bressani, eds, *Gothic Revival Worldwide: A. W. N. Pugin's Global Influence*, Louvain: Louvain University Press, 2016; G. A. Bremner, *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Culture in the British Empire, c. 1840–1870*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013; Michael McCarthy and Karina O'Neill, eds, *Studies in the Gothic Revival*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008.

¹⁰ Michael Hall, ed, *Gothic Architecture and Its Meanings, 1550–1830*, Reading: Spire Books, 2002.

¹¹ Renato De Fusco, *L'architettura dell'Ottocento*, Turin: Utet, 1980, 2.

¹² On 19 June 2018, 3.5% of the dissertations in progress registered on the website of the Italian Art Society were dedicated to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art.

conducted). The case of medieval revivalism is even more problematic.¹³ If De Fusco himself concluded that the Gothic revival did not produce any masterpiece in Italy, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, writing in *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1958) of the neo-medieval elevations of Santa Croce and Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, noted that 'neither of these carefully archaeological compositions in polychrome Italian Gothic comes alive' like those by 'English architects, or even American ones'.¹⁴ What is surprising about such conclusions is that, with some exceptions, they are still common.¹⁵ Struggling to find a place in introductions to architectural history, the topic is haunted by an unfortunate, widespread, and persistent trope according to which Italy only engaged with medieval revivalism in rare instances and with scarce results – especially when compared to the Anglophone world. Altogether, Italian neo-medieval architecture has largely been ignored or dismissed as a vacuous *rêverie* or a bad imitation of foreign motifs.

This study argues that the reasons for this are historiographical. A prejudiced art historical view, the absence of a rich literature on Italian neo-medieval architecture, along with the flourishing work on the Gothic revival in other contexts – notably, Britain – and the natural boundaries between disciplines have led to simplistic conclusions about the absence or marginality of medieval revivalism in Italy. Thus, this article intentionally avoids discussing studies of the British Gothic revival, arguing that overfamiliarity with such literature has led to the assessment of other contexts, including the Italian, on a qualitative spectrum, and even to the assessment of medieval revivalism, and medievalism more broadly, as quintessentially British phenomena.

The article makes no claim to be an account of the histories or theories of neo-medieval architecture and its permutations in Italy from the end of the Middle Ages to the present day, nor to be a global architectural historiography of medieval revivalism. Rather, while discussing the state of the literature on Italian neo-medieval architecture and investigating the tendency to tarnish its study, the article shows how the term neo-medievalism can be reclaimed for architectural/art history and examines the role and duties of the architectural historian in the study of medievalism.

Through the analogy of the 'Four Ghosts' (the 'Ghost of the Present', the 'Ghost of the Future', and the two 'Ghosts of the Past'), the first section explores the historiographical reasons for the neglect and marginalisation, and bias towards, Italian neo-medieval architecture. The second section, which does not aim to be a definitive architectural historiography, reconstructs the subterranean history of the

¹³ Guido Zucconi, *L'invenzione del passato: Camillo Boito e l'architettura neomedievale*, Venice: Marsilio, 1997, 233–239.

¹⁴ De Fusco, *L'architettura dell'Ottocento*, 113; Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Harmondsworth, Baltimore, and Mitcham: Penguin Books, 1958, 200.

¹⁵ For a vivid introduction to nineteenth-century medieval revivalism in Italy see, instead, Elena Dellapiana, 'Il mito del Medioevo', in Amerigo Restucci, ed, *Storia dell'architettura italiana: L'Ottocento*, Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2005, 400–421.

study of Italian neo-medieval architecture, discussing its cornerstones and pioneers. While deepening the historiographical issues that relate to the study of neo-medieval architecture more broadly, the remaining portion of the article offers new trajectories and a definition of neo-medievalism, as well as an exploration of the notion.

The Four Ghosts

[...] this castle is certainly haunted!¹⁶



Figure 2 *Courtyard of Castle, Showing Conrad under the Giant Helmet*, ca. 1800. Watercolour on laid paper, 10 x 15.9 cm, mounted to 16.5 x 24.1 cm, from an extra-illustrated copy of [Horace Walpole], *The Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Story: Translated by William Marshal, Gent. from the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto*, 6th edn, Parma: Printed by Bodoni, for J. Edwards, bookseller of London, 1791. Farmington: The Lewis Walpole Library, 24 17 791P C 7. Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

Medievalism merges with terror in *The Castle of Otranto* by the English writer and collector Horace Walpole (1717–97), first published in 1764 under a pseudonym, and celebrated as the first Gothic novel. In a sense, this tale of the haunted medieval castle of Otranto foreshadowed future events, with the caveat that ‘neo’ be prefixed to the term ‘medieval’. The study of Italian (and, to some extent, broader) neo-

¹⁶ The character of Bianca in [Horace Walpole], *The Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Story: Translated by William Marshal, Gent. from the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St. Nicholas at Otranto*, 6th edn, Parma: Printed by Bodoni, for J. Edwards, bookseller of London, 1791, 63.

medieval architecture is, indeed, haunted, not by the enormous helmet that crushes to death Conrad, son of the Lord of Otranto, or by the series of supernatural events leading to the fulfilment of the prophecy of the rulership of the castle [fig. 2]. Rather, four tedious historiographical ghosts rattle around the foundations of the study of medievalist architecture and – two among them – the study of medievalism more generally: the Ghost of the Present, the Ghost of the Future, and – the most festering – the two Ghosts of the Past.¹⁷



Figure 3 *Padova – Caffè Pedrocchi – Lato artistico*, detail of the Pedrocchino. Postcard (circulated), 13.5 x 8.5 cm.
Courtesy of the author.

The Ghost of the Present, which haunts both the study of neo-medieval architecture and medievalism more broadly, is particularly dangerous. It symbolises how the current knowledge of and familiarisation with some cultures, British culture in particular (in a sense, *hoc amet*), can lead to the assessment of other contexts, such as the Italian, on a qualitative spectrum, and even to the assessment of medieval revivalism and medievalism as quintessentially 'British' phenomena that are exported elsewhere in a superficial and marginal way (*hoc spernat*).¹⁸ The reasons for this might be linked to the extensive fascination with British revivalism

¹⁷ I drew inspiration for the analogy of the ghosts from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. On the study of broader medievalism in Italy, see Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, 'Medievalismi: Il posto dell'Italia' in *Medievalismi italiani (secoli XIX–XXI)*, 9–28.

¹⁸ For example, 'Tale movimento neo-gotico in Italia non ebbe naturalmente importanza pari a quella assunta oltr'Alpe, specialmente in Inghilterra'. Adriana Boidi, 'Pelagio Palagi e il neo-gotico in Piemonte' in *Bollettino della Società Piemontese di Archeologia e di Belle Arti*, 19, 1965, (49–67) 59; 'In tutto l'Ottocento, la cultura italiana non produce opere di livello europeo'. Luciano Patetta, *L'architettura dell'ecclettismo: Fonti, teorie, modelli, 1750–1900*, Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1975, 260.

and medievalism in popular culture and the media and to the existence of a remarkable academic tradition on the topic.¹⁹ Indeed, the marginalisation of Italian revivalism and medievalism, when compared to the British context, is rooted in an historiographical paradox according to which the relative shortage of studies on the former has led to its being assessed against the rich literature on the latter. This is a dog chasing its own tail. Where the topic would deserve further studies, especially in terms of its cultural significance, one could highlight points of contact between Italian and British revivalism and medievalism. One thinks, in particular, of *la mode anglaise*, the Venetian medievalist architect Giuseppe Jappelli (1784–1852), and his design for the Pedrocchino in Padua (1839–42) – realised after a visit to England and France (1835–7) and one of the most referenced examples of Italian neo-medieval architecture [fig. 3].²⁰ Yet, neither the reworking of medieval nor the neo-medieval architecture in the peninsula can easily be described as an ‘imported’ phenomenon.²¹ Most importantly, they can be linked to specifically ‘Italian’ dynamics, such as the House of Savoy’s quest for *italianità* in a Risorgimento context.²² The historiographical nature of the Ghost of the Present is revealed by the frequent (and often unjustified) references to the literature on Britain and the examples of British revivalism and medievalism in literature that touches on Italian revivalism and medievalism. One thinks of Kenneth Clark’s pioneering work on *The Gothic Revival* (1928) or Strawberry Hill (1749–76), Walpole’s trendsetting Gothic revival mansion in Twickenham.²³ This leads us back to the author of the first Gothic novel. Walpole was fascinated by the Italian Middle Ages to the extent that he set *The Castle of Otranto* in Italy (telling readers that the book had been recovered from a manuscript set down by an Italian chronicler). Might it be possible to be acquainted

¹⁹ This issue, which some have linked to British exceptionalism, is a hot topic in medievalism studies. Although it is not uncommon to find remarkable works on revivalism/medievalism that, focusing on the British case, do not mention it in their titles (as if writing about revivalist architecture or the reworking of the Middle Ages means to write about British revivalism/medievalism), in recent years one can identify a change of course. See, for example, Joanne Parker and Corinna Wagner, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

²⁰ On *la mode anglaise* in garden design, see Renato Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott: L’invenzione del Medioevo nella cultura dell’Ottocento*, Naples: Liguori Editore, 1993, 19–42. On Jappelli, see Giuliana Mazzi, ‘Giuseppe Jappelli (1783–1852)’ in Restucci, *Storia dell’architettura italiana*, 590–605.

²¹ ‘Il medievalismo italiano si fonda soprattutto sui contributi francesi, inglesi e tedeschi’. Patetta, *L’architettura dell’eclittismo*, 260.

²² Tommaso Zerbi, ‘The Tricolour, Shield, and Cross of Savoy: “Sabaudian Medievalism”, the Risorgimento, and Neo-Medieval Architecture in Italy, c. 1814–1864’, doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2021.

²³ Clark’s work and Walpole’s villa are mentioned, for example, by Boidi, ‘Pelagio Palagi e il neo-gotico in Piemonte’, 59–60. On *The Gothic Revival*, see Ayla Lepine, ‘The Persistence of Medievalism: Kenneth Clark and the Gothic Revival’ in *Architectural History*, 57, 2014, 323–56. On Strawberry Hill, see Marion Harney, *Place-Making for the Imagination: Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

with – and, perhaps, fascinated by – British revivalism and medievalism without tracing their Italian counterparts to Walpole, his Gothic novel, and his Gothic revival villa?

The Ghost of the Classical Past is the strongest rival of the study of Italian neo-medieval architecture. It assumes the form of the hegemonic classicised view of the peninsula in art literature that suffocates or marginalises all that does not fit with such an image. This goes back to one of the oldest art historiographical debates about the relationship between Antiquity/the Renaissance and the Middle Ages.²⁴ Yet, the perennial dialectic of the classical and the medieval cannot be reduced to the idea that the overbearing presence of classicist art in Italy prevented the rise of medievalist traditions.²⁵ For example, in a Risorgimento and Sabaudian context, where classicist aesthetics remained central, neo-medieval imagery challenged and even subverted the hierarchical relationship with classicism.²⁶ None other than Viollet-le-Duc, for some *the* medievalist architect of the nineteenth century, praised the medievalist production in Italy, highlighting that:

the Italians have never allowed certain constructive methods employed by them during the Middle Ages to be entirely abandoned, and that they do not repudiate those methods, as is affected to be done among ourselves [in France].²⁷

Despite the author's apology, Italian neo-medieval architecture has largely been either ignored, underestimated, or criticised. Militia juxtaposed '*hoc spernat*' to the medieval. A similarly classicised academic view of Italy, displaying early modern biases and negative readings of the art of the Middle Ages, has contributed to a similar assignation of *hoc spernat* to the neo-medieval. Might we revise this as *hoc amet*?

²⁴ From an art historical view, this has widely been traced to Giorgio Vasari's depiction of the *maniera tedesca*. For his view of the medieval period and responses to his reading see, among others, Anne-Marie Sankovitch, 'The Myth of the "Myth of the Medieval": Gothic Architecture in Vasari's Rinascita and Panofsky's Renaissance' in *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 40, 2001, 29–50; Barbara Fonti, 'La "ruina estrema" del Medioevo: Genesi e sviluppi di un'idea' in *Arte Medievale*, 4:4, 2014, 231–252.

²⁵ There is a good body of varied literature on the Italian Renaissance revival. See, for example, Lina Bolzoni and Alina Payne, eds, *Revision, Revival and Return: The Renaissance in the 19th Century, Florence and Milan: Villa I Tatti and Officina Libraria*, 2018; Rosanna Pavoni, ed, *Reviving the Renaissance: The Use and Abuse of the Past in Nineteenth-Century Italian Art and Decoration*, trans. by Adrian Belton, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

²⁶ Tommaso Zerbi, 'Pelagio Palagi's Floating Castles: "Risorgimental Neo-Medievalism", Architectural Ephemerata, and Politics at the Court of Savoy' in *Architectural Histories*, 9, 2021, 1–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ah.462>

²⁷ E. Viollet-le-Duc, *Discourses on Architecture*, trans. by Benjamin Bucknall, Boston: Ticknor and Company, [1889], vol. 2, 388.

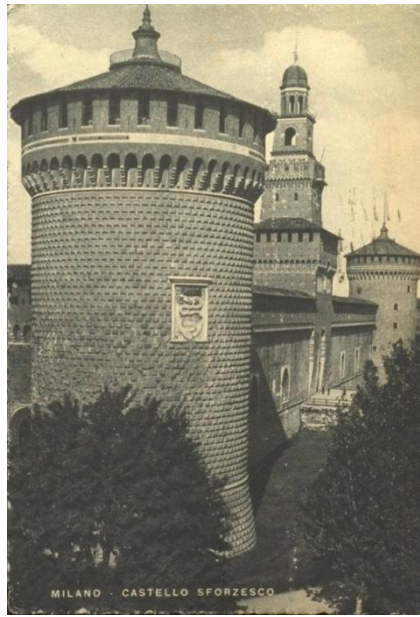


Figure 4 Edizioni Saemec, *Milano – Castello Sforzesco*. Postcard (circulated in 1942), 14.8 x 10.2 cm. Courtesy of the author.

Another ghost, the Ghost of the Medieval Past, haunts the study of neo-medieval architecture and medievalism more broadly, meaning that reworkings of the medieval tend, more or less explicitly, to be evaluated on a spectrum in relation to their distance from the Medieval Period, which retains a magical aura of superiority (in a sense, *hoc amet*) over its modern and contemporary counterparts (*hoc spernat*). This problematic relationship between the Middle Ages and medievalism runs through medievalism studies and is complicated by the paradox that medieval studies is, itself, a form of medievalism.²⁸ To state that medievalism should not be read as a 'fake' Middle Ages has become a leitmotiv in works on medievalism, tarnishing the biased copy-model entwined with the link between medievalism studies and medieval studies.²⁹ On closer inspection, even without the explicitly dismissive evaluations of medievalist constructs, similar statements are often followed by serious critical considerations that distance these constructs from the actual Middle Ages. In the case of Italian neo-medieval architecture, this is made

²⁸ Given this field's rather nuanced subject matter, and its tendency to reject fixed taxonomies, it differs markedly from the long-established field of medieval studies, which involves the study of the actual Middle Ages. The controversy arises from the fact that the study of the Medieval period itself, as a study of responses to the Middle Ages, might itself become the subject matter of Medievalism rather than Medieval studies. See, for example, Matthews, *Medievalism*.

²⁹ 'realizzazioni furono condannate (e spesso ancora lo sono) come espressioni di cattivo gusto, in quanto giudicate "falso medioevo", mentre nessuno si sognerebbe di definire "falso romano" o "falso greco" quelle neoclassiche.' Renato Bordone, 'La riscoperta del Medioevo tra ideologia e gusto' in *L'architecture, les sciences et la culture de l'histoire au XIX siècle*, Saint-Étienne: Université de Saint-Étienne, 2001, (65–71) 71.

worse by the dangerous proximity of architectural history to the schools of conservation theory and conservation studies, by their achievements, and by the fact that, for a long time, medievalist interventions were included in debates about nineteenth-century conservation. For reasons rooted in their theoretical apparatus, conservation experts and archaeologists are tempted to consider neo-medieval interventions on medieval structures as clumsy interventions into pre-existing, and therefore more 'valuable', medieval monuments, mere *superfetazioni* to be erased, or, at best, preserved as 'document-monuments'. Beyond conservation practice, conservation studies, especially around the figure of Marco Dezzi Bardeschi (one of the fathers of contemporary conservation theory), has long found its way into revivalism through the dialectic between the 'original' (the medieval) and the 'fake' (the revivalist product).³⁰ One thinks of the Sforza Castle in Milan and the dialectic between the medieval fortification and Luca Beltrami's neo-medieval intervention (1893–1905), culminating in the construction of the new Filarete tower [fig. 4].³¹ Such a dialectic is not always suitable to the understanding of medievalism as a subject matter of architectural history, not only because the term 'fake' still carries inevitable biases. A qualitative enquiry into the distance between neo-medieval and medieval architecture might lead to the paradox that, *principium imitationis*, revivalist projects are condemned for being either too philological in their references or not philological enough and thus too distant from the model.³² This issue can be tied to the problematic reception of revivalism and eclecticism, terms that tend to be seen in a negative light.³³ Indeed, the former has been associated with the intention to revive something 'dead' (the medieval) and tarnished as a bizarre hybrid; the latter, with its stylistic complexity and variety of influence, has been labelled as ambiguous.³⁴ Thus, it is not surprising that in order to shield examples of neo-medieval architecture from such criticism, scholars have removed them altogether from revivalism and eclecticism.³⁵ By banishing the Ghost of the Medieval Past,

³⁰ Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, ed, *Gotico, neogotico, ipergotico: Architettura e arti decorative a Piacenza, 1856–1915*, exhibition catalogue (Piacenza, 1884–1885), Piacenza: Grafis Edizioni, 1985; Graziella Guarisco, ed, *Milano restaurata: Il monumento e il suo doppio*, proceedings of the conference (Milan, 1995), Florence: Alinea, 1995.

³¹ To expand on Beltrami, see Silvia Paoli, ed, *Luca Beltrami 1854–1933: Storia, arte e architettura a Milano*, Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2014.

³² 'la rielaborazione [...] di modelli medievali [...] non può essere valutata e misurata secondo la distanza dall'"originale"'. Zucconi, *L'invenzione del passato*, 300.

³³ Some milestones in the re-evaluation of revivalism and eclecticism are, respectively, Giulio Carlo Argan, ed, *Il revival*, Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1974; Patetta, *L'architettura dell'eclettismo*.

³⁴ Yet significant efforts have been made in the study of eclecticism. See, for example, Loretta Mozzoni and Stefano Santini, eds, *Architettura dell'eclettismo: Esiste un eclettismo contemporaneo? Moderno e postmoderno*, Naples: Liguori Editore, 2018; Chiara Visentin, *L'equivoco dell'eclettismo: Imitazione e memoria in architettura*, Bologna: Pendragon, 2003.

³⁵ Zucconi, *L'invenzione del passato*, 47; Terry Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy: The Challenge of Tradition, 1750–1900*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005, 180; Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott*, 14 and 64; Guido Zucconi, 'Pietro Selvatico e Camillo Boito,

might we approach neo-medieval architecture and medievalism without having to evaluate how much their interpreters knew about the actual Middle Ages and its products?

The Ghost of the Future is found in art and architectural histories in, as Manfredo Tafuri would say, the 'operative' ways that architecture and the arts are analysed as plans of a precise poetical tendency.³⁶ In the evolutionist approach that undermines architectural and art history, as found in Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936), selected portions of the past – those of the so-called 'pioneers' – are brought up and celebrated as torches of the future (in a sense, *hoc amet*).³⁷ Accordingly, the remainders of that past are ignored or even dismissed as eccentric and anachronistic dead ends (*hoc spernat*).³⁸ Italian neo-medieval architecture tends to be situated among these.³⁹ The work of medievalist architects has been read in antithesis to Modernism (and in antithesis to the diktat of conservation theory), with architectural histories still tending to sound like an operative apology in the education of architecture students.⁴⁰ Medieval revivalism is included in such histories only when, for example, it can be shown to have foreshadowed the adoption of modernist materials, assisted in the definition of the modern typology of the industrial factory, or contributed to the rise of Liberty architecture – one thinks of, for example, Gino Coppedè's design for the Mackenzie

tra Padova e Venezia' in Alexandra Chavarría and Guido Zucconi, eds, *Medioevo fantastico: L'invenzione di uno stile nell'architettura tra fine '800 e inizio '900*, proceedings of the seminars (Padua, 2015), Sesto Fiorentino: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2016, (19–24) 21.

³⁶ Tafuri uses 'operative criticism' to refer to 'an analysis of architecture (or of the arts in general) that, instead of an abstract survey, has as its objective the planning of a precise poetical tendency, anticipated in its structures and derived from historical analyses programmatically distorted and finalised.' Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, London, Toronto, Sydney, and New York: Granada, 1980, 141–163.

³⁷ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, London: Faber & Faber, 1936. Among others, Tafuri refers to Sigfried Giedion and Bruno Zevi to explain the notion of operative historiography and criticism. Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, London, Toronto, Sydney, and New York: Granada, 1980, 151.

³⁸ Apodictic, here, are the words of Paolo Portoghesi who, highlighting the problematic reception of eclecticism, noted that 'il modernismo ha progredito all'insegna della semplificazione'. Paolo Portoghesi, 'La democrazia dell'eclettismo' preface to Visentin, *L'equivoco dell'eclettismo*, (9–20) 11.

³⁹ This might be related, for example, to the operative 'continuity' that architectural theoreticians have spotted between classicism and the compositional rules of some strands of twentieth-century Italian architecture, not least that of Rationalism and so-called 'Novecentismo'.

⁴⁰ The flourish of debates about the Modernist Movement and conservation theory in the 1940s predated and shadowed the rediscovery of revivalism in the 1960s. Among others, see Bruno Zevi, *Verso un'architettura organica: Saggio sullo sviluppo del pensiero architettonico negli ultimi cinquant'anni*, Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1945; Gustavo Giovannoni, *Il restauro dei monumenti*, Rome: Cremonese, 1946.

Castle in Genoa (1893–1905) [fig. 5].⁴¹ Might we confront this evolutionist approach with a reading of neo-medieval architecture that unearths its own dynamics rather than considering it a mere stopover on the way to the 'future'?

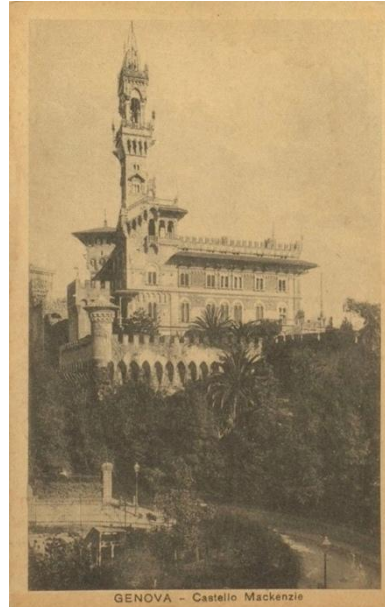


Figure 5 Ediz. F. Calì, *Genova – Castello Mackenzie*. Postcard (uncirculated), 14 x 8.9 cm. Courtesy of the author.

The study of Italian neo-medieval architecture: a critical history

These Four Ghosts have obstructed the rise of a literature on Italian neo-medieval architecture. Where its study remains a sporadic, localised, and subterranean phenomenon, what we might call 'pioneers' have planted the seeds for a critical engagement with the topic.

The way to reconciliation with Italy's medieval revivalism was paved in the 1960s as part of the architectural and historiographical revision of the historicist past found in critical reconsiderations of the Modernist Movement, such as Tafuri's *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* (1967).⁴² By including the medievalist architect Camillo Boito (1836–1914) in the category of architects who fostered a deformed view of history to sustain their theories of contemporary architecture, Tafuri does not seem keen of the topic.⁴³ However, his demythologisation of Modernism and attempt to demolish an 'operative' approach to architectural history marked a threshold for the analysis of traditions falling outside of the perimeters of the narrative promulgated

⁴¹ Zucconi has addressed this issue by noting that Italian neo-medieval architecture is seen to have anticipated the ornamental taste of Liberty architecture. Zucconi, *L'invenzione del passato*, 41.

⁴² Manfredo Tafuri, *Teorie e storia dell'architettura*, Bari: Laterza, 1967. Emilio Lavagnino had provided a strong overview of medieval revivalism as part of a broader 'Gusto romantico'. See Emilio Lavagnini, *L'arte moderna dai neoclassici ai contemporanei*, Turin: Utet, 1956, vol. 1, 349–378.

⁴³ Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, 148.

by, among others, Pevsner. The first significant attempt to systematise Italy's medieval revivalism appeared in the Anglophone sphere, where there was a strong background of studies on the Gothic revival. American architectural historian Carroll L. V. Meeks's chapter in *Italian Architecture, 1750–1914* (1966), 'The Picturesque System and Medieval Vocabularies', has this merit.⁴⁴ However, it remains problematic on many levels, not simply because of his claim that neo-medieval architecture 'came late to Italy' and 'emulated the national styles of other countries and particularly of England.'⁴⁵ The taxonomies proposed, rather than capturing an Italian medievalist phenomenology, only partially describe some of its products.⁴⁶ At the same time, the focus on the neo-medieval projects for the completion of the Duomo of Milan, Santa Croce, and Santa Maria del Fiore, though offering an interesting re-evaluation of revivalist architecture, displays a tendency to focus on revivalism's contribution to the heirlooms of Italy's medieval past – traditionally part of the art historical view – rather than to original projects.⁴⁷ Finally, the chapter only focuses on the second half of the nineteenth century, providing only an overview of 'Early Examples'.⁴⁸

The 1970s witnessed a rising interest in medieval revivalism in Italy.⁴⁹ Despite similarly marginalising earlier strands by focusing on the period beginning in the 1840s, and the surprising remark that medievalism in Italy 'did not find reference in Gothic architecture, that is extraneous to our traditions, but in the Romanesque', Luciano Patetta's chapter on 'I revivals in architettura' – published in Giulio Carlo Argan's edited volume on *Il revival* (1974) – set a solid base for its study.⁵⁰ The following year, the architectural historian from Milan dedicated an entire chapter of *L'architettura dell'ecllettismo* to the theme, which still constitutes one of the most vivid accounts of 'La tendenza medievalista in Italia'.⁵¹ However, the limitations of Patetta's pioneering investigation emerge in the first paragraph of the chapter, where he notes that neo-medieval architecture was a rather marginal phenomenon that came late to Italy in comparison to the rest of Europe, and that the neo-Gothic was a foreign language in Italy throughout the Risorgimento.⁵²

⁴⁴ Carroll L. V. Meeks, *Italian Architecture, 1750–1914*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966, 205–284.

⁴⁵ Meeks, *Italian Architecture, 1750–1914*, 205.

⁴⁶ 'Early Examples', 'History of the Façades of Florence and Milan', 'Secular Buildings and Churches', 'Synagogues', 'Protestant Churches'.

⁴⁷ Meeks, *Italian Architecture, 1750–1914*, 216–237.

⁴⁸ Meeks, *Italian Architecture, 1750–1914*, 210–220.

⁴⁹ For example, see Andreina Griseri and Roberto Gabetti, *Architettura dell'ecllettismo: Saggio su Giovanni Schellino*, Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1973.

⁵⁰ 'non trova un riferimento nell'architettura gotica, estranea alle nostre tradizioni, bensì in quella romanica.' Luciano Patetta, 'I revivals in architettura' in Argan, *Il revival*, (149–187) 178.

⁵¹ Luciano Patetta, *L'architettura dell'ecllettismo: Fonti, teorie, modelli, 1750–1900*, Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1975, 260–310.

⁵² Patetta, *L'architettura dell'ecllettismo*, 260.

Moreover, as suggested by the book's subtitle (*Fonti, teorie, modelli, 1750–1900*), in its approach to architectural history, *L'architettura dell'eclittismo* makes use of – albeit in a specific way – the established tools of the architectural historian rather than questioning the underlying cultural dynamics.

For gathering together contributors broadly interested in the medieval revivalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (not limited to the Italian case), 'Il neogotico nel XIX e XX secolo' conference (Pavia, 1985) was arguably the most significant intervention of the 1980s. The proceedings (1989), edited by Rossana Bossaglia and Valerio Terraroli, whilst constituting one of the richest catalogues of Italian medievalist architecture, offers no underlying narrative to bring together the different contributions, nor does it lay out a clear phenomenology of neo-medieval architecture in the Italian context – which, as a result, appears to be fragmented and marginal to the other national architectures (and their historiographical frameworks) presented in the two volumes.⁵³ At the same time, the 1980s paved the way in Italy for the rise of, what today are called, medievalism studies – not least with the conference 'Il Medioevo: Immagini, modelli e miti tra due popoli nell'Ottocento, Germania e Italia' (Trento, 1985).⁵⁴ Nevertheless, art and architectural histories and medievalism studies tended to follow parallel rather than intersecting paths.

The link between the two can be isolated in the figure of Renato Bordone. The medievalist from Turin never fully developed an architectural narrative, and his rich work on medievalism – of which he is recognised as one of the key pioneers in the Italian context – tends to be shadowed by the Ghost of the Medieval Past.⁵⁵ Yet, in 1988, he argued that neo-medieval architecture, 'before being represented as an architectural product, answers to the needs, real or fictitious, of emotional and social, collective and individual self-identification.'⁵⁶ Most importantly, some of the essays of *Lo specchio di Shalott* (1993), his *magnum opus* on (what today is known as) medievalism, touch upon medievalist architecture in Italy and situate it against the 'invention of the Middle Ages in nineteenth-century culture' through the analogy of

⁵³ Rossana Bossaglia and Valerio Terraroli, eds, *Il neogotico nel XIX e XX secolo*, proceedings of the conference (Pavia, 1985), Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1989, 2 vols.

⁵⁴ On the conference, see Guido Castelnuovo, 'Il Medioevo nell'Ottocento tra Germania e Italia', *Quaderni Medievali*, 21, June 1986, 202–210; Reinhard Elze and Pierangelo Schiera, eds, *Il medioevo nell'Ottocento in Italia e Germania*, proceedings of the conference (Trento, 1985), Bologna and Berlin: Il Mulino and Duncker & Humblot, 1988.

⁵⁵ Giuseppe Sergi, 'Il duplice Medioevo di Renato Bordone' in Enrica Pagella, ed, *Il Borgo Medievale: Nuovi Studi*, Turin: Fondazione Torino Musei, 2011, (11–13) 11.

⁵⁶ 'prima di rappresentarsi come prodotto architettonico, risponde a bisogni, reali o fittizi, di autoidentificazione emozionale e sociale, collettiva e individuale.' Renato Bordone, 'La fortuna del castello da Walpole a Hearst' in Enrico Menastò, ed, *Il Medioevo: Specchio e alibi*, proceedings of the conference (Ascoli Piceno, 1988), Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1989, (79–104) 85.

the mirror of the Lady of Shalott – that, whilst reflecting a distant projected image of the medieval past, betrays modern cultural dynamics.⁵⁷

The turning point in architectural history was the publication of Guido Zucconi's *L'invenzione del passato: Camillo Boito e l'architettura neomedievale* (1997), the first monograph to focus explicitly on Italian neo-medieval architecture.⁵⁸ The book, a refreshing departure from the biases of conservation studies, reclaims neo-medieval architecture as a subject matter for architectural history and reconstructs an Italian phenomenology. Revising previous descriptions of Boito as a father of conservation theory and a pioneer of the Modernist Movement, *L'invenzione del passato* carefully recasts the architect from Rome and his mentor Pietro Estense Selvatico (1803–80) as sort of A. W. N. Pugin, John Ruskin, or Eugène E. Viollet-le-Duc figures of Italian medievalist architecture.⁵⁹ Though focused on Boito and his work and influence in Northern and post-union Italy, the book dignified Italian medievalist architecture by outlining a clear neo-medieval phenomenology paired with the quest for nationhood. Indeed, the confluence of Boito's architectural practice with explicit defences of a national style for post-union Italy enabled Zucconi to present him, convincingly, as a key advocate of an Italian neo-medieval tradition.⁶⁰

Since the publication of *L'invenzione del passato*, there has been rising interest in post-union medievalism, including further studies of Boito and examinations of municipal and exhibition architecture – not least the case of the Borgo del Valentino in Turin (1884) –, cemeteries, religious and secular architecture, and the completion/reconstruction of the heirlooms of Italy's past.⁶¹ Efforts have also been

⁵⁷ See 'In principio era il giardino' and 'Neomedievalismo toscano della prima metà del XIX secolo', in Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott*, 19–59.

⁵⁸ Zucconi, *L'invenzione del passato*.

⁵⁹ Zucconi, *L'Invenzione del Passato*, 42–46. Among previous works on Boito and Selvatico see, for example, Liliana Grassi, *Camillo Boito*, Milan: Il Balcone, 1959; Maria Antonietta Crippa, 'Appunti per l'individuazione del carattere del neogotico e del medievalismo di Pietro Estense Selvatico' in *Il neogotico nel XIX e XX secolo*, vol. 1, 347–353. On the acknowledgement of Boito, it must be noted that already in the nineteenth century he was included in the section on 'Recent Architects' in Ashton Rollis Willard, *History of Modern Italian Art*, London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898, 528–573. To expand on Boito, see Sandro Scarrocchia, ed, *Camillo Boito moderno*, Milan: Mimesis, 2018, 2 vols.

⁶⁰ The narrative focuses on the period 1855–90. Boito's celebrated apologies were printed in, Camillo Boito, 'L'architettura della nuova Italia' in *Nuova Antologia*, 19, 1872, 755–773; Camillo Boito, *Architettura del Medioevo in Italia con una introduzione sullo stile futuro dell'architettura italiana*, Milan: Hoepli, 1880.

⁶¹ Guido Zucconi and Francesca Castellani, eds, *Camillo Boito: Un'architettura per l'Italia unita*, exhibition catalogue (Padua, 2000), Venice: Marsilio, 2000; Guido Zucconi and Tiziana Serena, eds, *Camillo Boito: Un protagonista dell'Ottocento italiano* Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2002; Margherita Nebbia, "'Tutto analogo allo stile del secolo XIII, se non che purgato": Un'idea di Medioevo nelle arti applicate dell'Italia unita. Emergenze dalle grandi esposizioni nazionali del secondo Ottocento e sul territorio piemontese', doctoral dissertation, Università degli Studi di Pisa, 2012; Pagella, *Il Borgo Medievale*; Chavarría and

made to increase public awareness about the neo-medieval heritage of cities, provinces, and regions.⁶² Also, since its use in *L'invenzione del passato*, the term 'neomedievalismo' ('neo-medievalism') has permeated architectural history in Italy, especially in the adjectival form of 'architettura neomedievale' ('neo-medieval architecture').

Neo-medievalism (studies)

Let us leave behind the Italian case and architectural history for the moment. 'Neo-medievalism' is a hot topic in medievalism studies.⁶³ Despite ongoing debates and the problematic relationship – and, for some, identification – with 'medievalism' itself, the term is traced back to Umberto Eco's notion (1985) that we are living in a sort of new Middle Ages, and it locates contemporary cultural phenomena that adapt the Middle Ages and forms of medievalism in a way that is recognisably neo-medieval.⁶⁴ The study of neo-medievalism, in this sense, has found fortune in the study of the media, in particular digital games.⁶⁵

Yet, in critical explorations of notions of neo-medievalism, it cannot be ignored that the term – with a different meaning – also suits architectural and art history, even at the cost of complicating the (already dense) debate on the term in

Zucconi, *Medioevo fantastico*; Hannah Malone, *Architecture, Death and Nationhood: Monumental Cemeteries of Nineteenth-Century Italy*, London and New York: Routledge, 2017, 170–192.

⁶² Giulia Sommariva, *Palermo neogotica, 1830–1930*, Palermo: Nuova Ipsa, 2017; Lorenzo Mamino and Daniele Regis, eds, *Cuneo gotico: Temi e itinerari nella provincia di Cuneo*, Genoa: Sagep, 2016; Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, ed, *Neomedievalismi: Recuperi, evocazioni, invenzioni nelle città dell'Emilia Romagna*, Bologna: Clueb, 2007.

⁶³ KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy: From Tolkien to Game of Thrones*, Boydell & Brewer, 2019; Karl Fugelso, ed, *Studies in Medievalism XIX: Defining Neomedievalism(s)*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010; Karl Fugelso, ed, *Studies in Medievalism XX: Defining Neomedievalism(s) II*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011; Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements, 'Living with Neomedievalism' in Karl Fugelso, ed, *Studies in Medievalism XVIII: Defining Medievalism(s) II*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009, 55–75.

⁶⁴ Cory Lowell Grewell, 'Neomedievalism: An Eleventh Little Middle Ages?' in *Studies in Medievalism XIX*, (34–43) 34. Where Eco had already written about the '*nuovo Medioevo*' in the 1970s, following Roberto Vacca's *Il Medioevo prossimo venturo*, by the 1980s he emblematically discussed '*neomedioevo*' in terms of the post-medieval dreams of the Middle Ages. Roberto Vacca, *Il Medioevo prossimo venturo*, Milan: Mondadori, 1971; Umberto Eco, 'Il Medioevo è già cominciato' in Umberto Eco, Furio Colombo, Francesco Alberoni, and Giuseppe Sacco, *Documenti su il nuovo Medioevo*, Milan: Bompiani, 1973, 5–28. On '*neomedioevo*', see Umberto Eco, 'Dieci modi di sognare il Medioevo' in *Quaderni Medievali*, 21 (June 1986), (197–200) 187–200. The essay was first published as part of *Sugli specchi e altri saggi*, Milan: Bompiani, 1985. The term 'neomedievalism' is mentioned in the English version. Eco, 'Dreaming of the Middle Ages', 63.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements, ed, *Neomedievalism in the Media: Essays on Film, Television, and Electronic Games*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2012.

medievalism studies.⁶⁶ Someone once said that if a term was to be introduced to refer to medievalist architecture/art, then 'neo-medievalism' would probably not be appropriate as it already has different connotations in medievalism studies. The person was probably not aware that 'neo-medievalism' already belongs (among others) to architectural/art history, nor that its use in this sense predates Eco's essay on neo-medievalism and, one could argue, the very rise of the debate about medievalism studies as a subject matter.⁶⁷ Indeed, one could point to the fact that Meeks used the term in 1966 in reference to Italian medievalist architecture.⁶⁸

Meeks's usage of the term, for which he did not propose a definition, did not set a trend in the study of Italian neo-medieval architecture, as it only entered into architectural view more consistently in the 1990s. Paradoxically, the term was more consistently imported into architectural history from adjoining fields where it had seemingly different acceptations. Indeed, Eco, the *deus ex machina* of neo-medievalism in medievalism studies, set the foundation for its adoption in Italy, an adoption which cannot be limited to a description of the use of medievalist tropes in postmodernity. The work of the Italian semiotician was brought into the purview of art/architecture by Bordone who, despite confronting neo-medieval architecture in a partial way, used terms such as '*neomedievismo*' and, later, '*neomedievalismo*'.⁶⁹ Zucconi's monograph on Boito eventually canonised the use of the term in Italy, especially in the adjectival form of 'neo-medieval architectures'.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ In political theory, neo-medievalism is associated with Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (1977), where he describes the erosion of state sovereignty in the contemporary world. Clare Monagle, 'Sovereignty and Neomedievalism: Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society* and International Relations Theory' in Louise D'Arcens and Andrew Lynch, eds, *International Medievalism and Popular Culture*, New York: Cambria Press, 2014, 1–17.

⁶⁷ See, among others, Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, 'The Origins of 18th-Century Neo-Medievalism in a Georgian Norman Castle' in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 40:4, 1981, 289–294; Nigel Yates, *Liturgical Space: Christian Worship and Church Buildings in Western Europe 1500–2000*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008; Sarah Dunnigan and Gerard Carruthers, 'Scottish Neo-Medievalism' in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism*, 235–248.

⁶⁸ Meeks, *Italian Architecture, 1750–1914*, 205.

⁶⁹ Bordone, 'La fortuna del castello da Walpole a Hearst', 84–85; Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott*, 14. The term remains undefined in Bordone's writings, in which '*neomedievalismo*' is problematically employed as a synonym of '*neogotico*' ['neogotico o neomedievalismo']. Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott*, 64.

⁷⁰ Neo-medievalism here appears chronologically and spatially delimited, linked to Boito's work, and opposed to the pre-existing Gothic revival. On the Gothic revival, see Zucconi, *L'invenzione del passato*, esp. 20 and 47. More recently, Zucconi has used 'Medieval Revival' to refer to neo-medievalism. See Zucconi, 'Pietro Selvatico e Camillo Boito, tra Padova e Venezia', 20. The Italian version was adopted, for example, in the subtitle of Cristina Natta-Soleri, ed, *Alpi gotiche: L'alta montagna sullo sfondo del revival medievale*, proceedings of the conference (Turin, 1997), Turin: Cahier Museomontagna, 1998. 'architetture neomedievali' appears, for example, in Dellapiana, 'Il mito del Medioevo', 403.

Despite this usage (in Italy and beyond), it must be noted that, where much has been written about the notion of Eco's neo-medievalism, it does not apply to the architectural/art notion of neo-medievalism.⁷¹ Paradoxically, where neo-medievalism has entered into relatively common use in architectural/art history, one would have little luck finding in dictionaries/glossaries not only a clear definition of the term but even an acknowledgement of its use.⁷² Considerations on the study of Italian neo-medieval architecture do not necessarily apply to the study of broader neo-medieval architecture. However, a reflection on the Italian case highlights common issues and the need to propose a manifesto that, while reclaiming the usage of 'neo-medievalism' in architectural/art history (without countering other usages), opens up lines of enquiry on the study of neo-medieval architecture/art beyond the boundaries of space and also beyond the boundaries of style and time.

'NEO-MEDIEVALISM (STUDIES)': A MANIFESTO – If medievalism and medievalism studies can be defined as the responses to the Middle Ages and the study of those responses, respectively, then 'neo-medievalism' and 'neo-medievalism studies' shall describe the architectural and artistic manifestations of medievalism and their study.

Neo-medievalism and style

In a remarkable editorial published in *Architectural Histories* in 2018, reflecting on how the concept of style has functioned in architectural discourse and on the reluctance to discuss style in contemporary architectural history, Mari Hvattum notes that 'Failing to problematise style [...] might paradoxically contribute to cement outdated notions of style, allowing to lurk as unquestioned prejudice'.⁷³ A critical reading of the study of medievalist architecture provides a glaring example of the danger of failing to problematise style.

It is not surprising that 'Gothic revival' and 'neo-Gothic' ('*neogotico*', in Italian) are recurring terms in the literature touching on (what we have defined as) 'neo-medievalism'. What is surprising is the recurring ambiguous, even improper, use of such, and similar, words relating to artistic taxonomies and style. One thinks of the adoption of 'neo-Gothic' to refer to neo-medieval artworks more generally. To give a dated example, this is notably the case in the conference proceedings *Il*

⁷¹ After all, a great deal of scholarship has dealt with the key critical terms of medievalism studies. See, for example, Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz, eds, *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014. In architectural/art history, the lack of a precise sub-field working on neo-medieval architecture/art has meant only rather marginal interest in such issues.

⁷² The term does not appear, for example, in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* (DOI: 10.1093/acref/9780199569922.001.0001) or Tate's online Glossary of Art Terms (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms>).

⁷³ Mari Hvattum, 'Mere Style?' in *Architectural Histories*, 6, 2018, (1–4) 3. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.342>

neogotico nel XIX e XX secolo, which, while explicitly focusing on the neo-gothic, discuss a broad range of medievalist architectures that include, but cannot be limited to, the revival of the Gothic.⁷⁴ This broad use of 'Gothic revival' and 'neo-Gothic' to refer to neo-medievalism flattens out the nuances and colourful manifestations of the reworking of the medieval to the Gothic. Whilst synecdochically incorrect, it is stubbornly rooted in the widespread, operative, and hegemonic association of the Middle Ages with the Gothic and an evolutionist and Western view of medieval art, which tends to favour its later European products and stylistic strands.

The objection to the use of 'Gothic revival' and 'neo-Gothic' as synonyms or substitutes for 'neo-medieval' does not mean the wholesale rejection of these terms but, rather, a more calibrated use as part of neo-medievalism. In this capacity, Patetta discusses [architectural] 'medievalism' as a macro-category divided into two sub-categories ('*neogotico*' and '*neoromanico*').⁷⁵ This systematisation remains problematic on different levels. If the Gothic and the Romanesque are wavering categories, inadequate as descriptors for the whole of medieval art, the neo-Gothic and neo-Romanesque are even less adequate for describing the reworking of the medieval, not only because they neglect or marginalise, for example, neo-Byzantine, castellated, and orientalist architecture and fail to take into account idiosyncrasies.⁷⁶ The reduction of a complex reality, such as the reworking of the Middle Ages in post-medieval architecture and art, to mandatory categories of the Gothic and Romanesque, has stretched the terms to the extent that one might find the same architecture described as neo-Gothic by one person and as neo-Romanesque by another.

Rather than as fixed taxonomies of any neo-medieval product, the neo-Gothic and neo-Romanesque qualify as stylistic tendencies of neo-medievalism. That is, all neo-Gothic and neo-Romanesque architecture is neo-medieval, but not all neo-medieval architecture can be reduced to the neo-Gothic and the neo-Romanesque. After all, is the presence of a pointed window enough to consider an architecture neo-Gothic?

Neo-medievalism goes beyond the boundaries of style. Before entailing an exact style, such as the revival of the Gothic, neo-medievalism entails a revival of an idea of the medieval as a perennial trope and, referencing Rosario Assunto's considerations on the idea of revival, a *renovatio* (renewal) of the present through the medieval.⁷⁷ Thus, Giuseppe Terragni and Pietro Lingeri's *Danteum* (1938), an unrealised modernist project dedicated to Dante and structured around an interpretation of one of the most celebrated works of literature of the medieval period, and BBPR's brutalist Velasca Tower in Milan (1955–1957) [fig. 6], echoing

⁷⁴ Bossaglia and Terraroli, *Il neogotico nel XIX e XX secolo*.

⁷⁵ Patetta, 'I revivals in architettura', 178–181; Patetta, *L'architettura dell'ecllettismo*, 260.

⁷⁶ Patetta has located the 'bizantino-moresco' among the 'svariate rielaborazioni che si intrecciano alla matrice dell'architettura romanica'. Patetta, 'I revivals in architettura', 180.

⁷⁷ On the link between 'revival' and the Latin '*renovatio*', see Rosario Assunto, 'Revival e problematica del tempo' in *Il revival*, (35–56) 41.

medievalist imagery and juxtaposed to the very Duomo (as its *campanile*, some say), might be seen as post-medieval architectural manifestations of the medieval.⁷⁸ Where neo-medievalism can be examined through the means of style and architectural/art taxonomies, neo-medievalism is not a style, per se. The quest for the Middle Ages before materialising into, for example, the neo-Gothic, implies a perennial *recherche* of an absolute antithesis or an open dialogue with classicism, a system of belief, the roots of individual, local, regional, national, and collective identities. To approach neo-medievalism means to question, through a reading of architecture and art, the topical return of the Middle Ages, an approach for which Eco has provided an apodictic warning 'that every time one speaks of a dream of the Middle Ages, one should first ask which Middle Ages one is dreaming of.'⁷⁹



Figure 6 Bromofoto, Milano – Torre Velasca. Postcard (circulated in 1959), 14.7 x 10.4 cm. Courtesy of the author.

⁷⁸ Thomas Renard, *Dantomania: Restauration architecturale et construction de l'unité italienne (1861–1921)*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019; Enrico Bordogna, *La Torre Velasca dei BBPR a Milano: Simbolo e monumento dell'architettura italiana del dopoguerra*, Naples: Clean, 2017.

⁷⁹ Eco, 'Dreaming of the Middle Ages', 68.

Neo-medievalism and time

The (late) modern period – the nineteenth century, in particular – is the main subject in literature on the emergence of the Middle Ages in post-medieval architecture/art.⁸⁰ Even less than the whole nineteenth century in the case of the study of Italian neo-medieval architecture.⁸¹ Indeed, Meeks's scepticism towards early nineteenth-century medievalist architectures (which 'emulated the national styles of other countries') is still persistent in the academy.⁸² The rising interest in and re-evaluation of the medievalist production of the post-union period following the release of *L'invenzione del passato* have gone through comparisons with the seemingly fragmented, superficial, marginal, and 'imported' revivals of the first half of the century, to the extent that Italian neo-medieval architecture is seen to have begun with national unification.⁸³

Without undermining the architectural/artistic outcomes of the post-union period (in Italy) or the significance of the nineteenth century and of the (late) modern period (in and beyond Italy), neo-medievalism is transhistorical. Where one could attempt to give chronological horizons to specific architectural/artistic movements (such as, for example, the Gothic revival) and traditions (such as High Victorian Gothic and Boito's style), it cannot be unequivocally confined to the nineteenth century or the (late) modern period.⁸⁴ Not every century had its Pugin or

⁸⁰ A notable exception is Giorgio Simoncini, *La memoria del Medioevo nell'architettura dei secoli XV–XVIII*, Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2016.

⁸¹ On the reference to the medieval in early modern Italy, see Richard Bernheimer, 'Gothic Survival and Revival in Bologna' in *The Art Bulletin*, 36, December 1954, 263–284; Elena Dellapiana, 'Da Cennini a Guarini: Le trasformazioni del mito del Medioevo nella letteratura architettonica' in *Architettura e Arte*, 4, October–December 1998, 43–44.

⁸² Meeks, *Italian Architecture, 1750–1914*, 205.

⁸³ These comparisons are partially due to the difficulty of finding an architect-theorist, such as Boito, who explicitly linked nationalist and medievalist narratives in his writings and took up the reins of Italy's neo-medieval architecture, and to the deep-seated (and misleading) notion that the pre-union Gothic revival in Italy was a foreign, marginal, and superficial phenomenon. On the pre-union rediscovery of medieval architecture, see Tommaso Zerbi, "'Immensa, misteriosa, leggera, fantastica, degna del Dio vivente": Luigi Cibrario e la rinascita risorgimentale dell'architettura medievale' in *Studi Piemontesi*, 50:2, December 2021, 523–528.

⁸⁴ Such attempts remain problematic. The definition of 'neogotico' provided by the *Treccani* – 'artistic movement, developed in nineteenth-century Europe, which aimed at the revaluation of medieval art and, in particular, of Gothic architecture' ['Corrente artistica, sviluppatasi in Europa durante il 19° sec., che mirava alla rivalutazione dell'arte medievale e in particolare dell'architettura gotica'] – while synecdochically incorrect in its association of neo-Gothic with the (broader) medieval revival, proposes a narrow periodisation that does not take into account the history of the Gothic revival prior to the nineteenth century.

Boito, its *Contrasts* or *Architettura del Medioevo in Italia*.⁸⁵ Yet from the end of the medieval period until today, albeit with nuanced outcomes, the reworking of the Middle Ages has permeated architectural and artistic culture as an everlasting trope of rebirth, in dialectical symbiosis and, to some extent, in contrast with the reworking of the classical. Indeed, Eco's remark that 'Immediately after the official ending of the Middle Ages, Europe was ravaged by a pervasive medieval nostalgia' and that 'Modern ages have revisited the Middle Ages from the moment when [...] they came to an end', leads us to a pivotal question – what was the response of architectural/art culture?⁸⁶

Neo-medievalism and medievalism

Whereas to talk about neo-medieval architecture implies talking about medievalism, to talk about medievalism does not imply talking about neo-medieval architecture.⁸⁷ This does not mean that 'medievalism' – a term that, for example, in the Italian version (*'medievalismo'*), Patetta uses to describe a macro-category that contains the neo-Gothic and neo-Romanesque – should be avoided. Rather, 'neo-medievalism' better describes the subject matter of the architectural/art historian in the study of medievalism and the extent to which neo-medieval architecture is the product of underlying medievalist dynamics. This is to say, in relation to architecture/art, the adjective 'neo-medieval' is heard more frequently than 'neo-medievalism'. Where the former tends simply to describe something built upon the medieval, the latter opens up onto complex questions about the phenomenology entwined in the suffix *-ism*. Indeed, whilst one easily gets a sense that neo-medieval architecture/art does exist, 'neo-medievalism' opens up lines of enquiry into its history and theory. Thus, drawing from the title of an essay by Mauro Moretti and Ilaria Porciani, we might say that the 'various Middle Ages' are reworked into various medievalisms, which, in turn, find architectural/artistic manifestation in

⁸⁵ A. Welby Pugin, *Contrasts: Or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day, Shewing the Present Decay of Taste*, London: for the author, 1836.

⁸⁶ Eco, 'Dreaming of the Middle Ages', 65–66. On the broad transposition of medievalism onto the art world during the early modern era, see Alicia C. Montoya, Sophie van Romburgh, and Wim van Anrooij, eds, *Early Modern Medievalisms: The Interplay between Scholarly Reflection and Artistic Production*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010.

⁸⁷ For example, despite using 'neo-Gothic' in its broad acceptance, Bonamico and Sistri distinguish "'medievalismo (quando si tratti di atteggiamenti culturali)' from "'neogotico" (quando si tratti dell'architettura legata a quegli atteggiamenti).' Francesco Bonamico and Augusto Sistri, 'Spalti, torri, sale come manifesti ideologici: Medievalismo liberale e medievalismo sabauda' in Alfredo Mango, ed, *L'età della Restaurazione e i moti del 1821*, proceedings of the conference (Bra, 1991), Savigliano: L'Artistica Savigliano, 1992, (319–326) 323.

various neo-medievalisms.⁸⁸ Their critical exploration is the subject matter of neo-medievalism studies.

Conclusion

If compared to, say, the British Gothic revival, little is known of Italian neo-medieval architecture, to the extent that one might conclude that architectural medievalism is a marginal phenomenon in Italy, if at all. As this article has suggested, the issue is historiographical, meaning that, with some exceptions, the topic has been neglected, underestimated, and even despised (*hoc spernat*). The analogy of the Ghost of the Present, the Ghost of the Classical Past, the Ghost of the Medieval Past, and the Ghost of the Future, that tarnish the study of neo-medieval architecture (and, two of them, medievalism more broadly), reveals that the biases are rooted in: the familiarity with other contexts and remarkable academic traditions on medieval revivalism and medievalism in such contexts; the deep-seated hegemonic classicised view of Italy in architectural/art scholarship; the evaluation of neo-medieval architecture and medievalism on a spectrum in relation to their distance from the actual Middle Ages; and the 'operative' reading of medieval revivalism as anachronistic obstacle – or stopover – to the 'future' (Modernism, most notably). Despite the haunting of the Four Ghosts, a subterranean scholarship has examined Italian neo-medieval architecture since the 1960s, of which this article has proposed a critical history.

Without tackling other (widely discussed) uses of 'neo-medievalism' in medievalism studies, where the term is associated with Eco's notion that we are living in a sort of new Middle Ages, the article has highlighted the use of 'neo-medievalism' in – and reclaimed its aptness to – architectural/art history. In so doing, it has drawn mostly from the Italian case, where the term has been used more consistently since the 1990s. The presentation of the paradox that, despite its usage in architectural history, the meaning of 'neo-medievalism' in that domain remains rather obscure (to the extent that one might argue that it does not have a definition), is followed by a manifesto. It is suggested that the term has a comfortable fit in architectural/art history to reflect the perennial *recherche* of an absolute antithesis or an open dialogue with classicism and its architectural/artistic manifestation, beyond the boundaries of space, style, and time entwined with, for example, studies in the Gothic revival, and it delimits a precise sub-field at the intersection between architectural/art history and medievalism studies. In this sense, neo-medievalism studies turn their attention to the role of architectural/art history in a field traditionally associated with the work of medievalists. Most importantly, neo-medievalism studies demark the responsibility retained by the architectural/art historian, whose focus is on one of the most powerful manifestations of medievalist

⁸⁸ Mauro Moretti and Ilaria Porciani, 'Italy's Various Middle Ages' in R. J. W. Evans and Guy P. Marchal, eds, *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2011, 177–196.

culture and its politicisation, to contribute to the understanding of the topical return of the Middle Ages and, for example, to the study of the burning issue of its political exploitation.⁸⁹

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⁸⁹ On the relation between medievalism and political culture, see Karl Fugelso, ed, *Studies in Medievalism XXIX: Politics and Medievalism (Studies)*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020; Karl Fugelso, ed, *Studies in Medievalism XXX: Politics and Medievalism (Studies) II*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2021; Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages: Contemporary Politics between New Barbarians and Modern Crusaders*, trans. by Andrew M. Hiltzik, Leiden: Brill, 2020; Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017.

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architectural history and the study of medievalism



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