8th Annual Medievalists @ Penn
Graduate Conference:
Performance (3/18/16)

Keynote Speaker:
Theresa Coletti
Professor of English, University of Maryland

Papers are encouraged to address any aspect of the performances, whether planned or improvised, exceptional or everyday, which formed an integral part of medieval culture. While the rich tradition of mystery cycles, saints’ plays, and morality plays has been studied as great literature and continues to be performed, medieval drama challenges our modern notions of “theater” by flowing off the stage and by eluding the scripted page. Medieval “performance” extends beyond staged drama to include a wide range of religious and secular rituals including events such as the Mass, Papal processions, royal entries, courtly games, and civic theatricality. How did these events transform spaces and everyday objects through performance? How might a king perform power through his sumptuous clothing, or a bishop inspire devotion by leading a procession through a beautiful sacred space?

This conference will also seek to understand how performance enables critical readings of medieval texts by considering communal reading as a dramatic enterprise, from the rhetorical techniques of lectores to the responses of audience members. Numerous genres
(such as lyric, romance, saints’ lives, and fabliaux) were read out loud, and the culture of minstrelsy intimately bound text with oral performance. Performance thus emerged out of “scripted traditions” that are often mistakenly characterized as silent - a romance could be read aloud to a group of listeners at court, or a saint’s life could entertain a religious community during mealtimes. Similarly, how does performance complicate our understanding of recorded legal texts, such as laws and marriage banns, which would have existed both as physical texts and as oral performances? In what circumstances could the delivery of a now seemingly innocuous sermon have provoked political controversy? Papers may approach the topic of performance from a wide range of scholarly disciplines-- History, Art History, Musicology, Literary Studies, Theater History, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Cultural History, to name only a few.

We invite abstracts for 15-20 minute papers that explore and expand the definition of “medieval performance.” Please submit abstracts as attachments to pennmedieval@gmail.com by February 15, 2016. Submissions should include your name, paper title, email, and institutional and departmental affiliation. The deadline for full paper submission, not to exceed 10 pages, is March 6, 2016. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at pennmedieval@gmail.com.