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Response to Geoffrey Koziol's review of **Robert M. Stein**, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006. ix + 294 pp. Abbreviations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN-13: 978-0-268-04120-3.

Response by Robert M. Stein, Purchase College and Columbia University.

On minoring in anthropology: A response to Geoffrey Koziol

The editors of H-France have invited me to write a response to Geoffrey Koziol's review of *Reality Fictions* since, as they put it, "Professor Koziol raises a number of important questions that we believe could merit further discussion and clarification from you, the author, for the benefit of our readers." Let me say right away that I deeply appreciate the serious and probing thoughtfulness of the review. I think Geoffrey Koziol understood the depth and significance of the book, thought deeply both about it and about the sources of his own pleasures and discontents while reading it, and he wrote a review that, unlike some other quite laudatory reviews the book has received, was seriously grappling with the main theoretical issues that the book poses. In brief, as it seems to me, Koziol was struck by what he describes as the book's very detailed, nuanced, subtly shaded textual readings, but finds them set off against a political world that is, to his taste, not equally subtle, nuanced, and shaded. He is, of course, an eminent historian of the period, and he would like to have found in my book all the local complexity and local interests of politics and ambition that it is his business to discern and that he writes about so well. And he does discern this complexity in the writings of those historians whose work he admires and who form the professional circle of his peers, a circle to which he would not admit *Reality Fictions* as a full-fledged member although, as he writes, it "produces exactly the kinds of imaginative and subtle insights historians need and have not been able to produce."

Koziol begins with an anecdote as honest as it is telling, about his attempt, as a graduate student in history, to write an anthropology paper about a Cistercian cartulary. The prof, whom, I take it, Koziol admired as much as I admire Koziol, summarizes the paper, but avoids the evaluative questions, and when finally pressed, says that she doesn't know how to evaluate it because "it's not anthropology." Koziol to his credit does not side-step evaluation in his review, but he does ultimately wind up saying that much as he found to like in the book, "it's not history." I think the question of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity gets to the heart of the matter. I agree with Koziol's judgment; the book isn't "history" in the professional sense of the term, but it does, as Koziol sensed, proceed as "a literary scholar's appropriation of texts and questions normally the defining preserve of my [i.e. Koziol's] field." What the book sets out to do, as I see it, is to examine what kind of positive knowledge about the past can be derived from a scrupulous attention to the textuality of the most important kinds of narrative writing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—which of course includes, along with epic and chivalric romance, the new kinds of chronicles narrating the past but ultimately motivated by the changing scene of contemporary life. If I may quote a passage from my introduction:

While what I am writing about is a political process and its connection with literary innovation, I am not concerned with narrating the trajectory of political change in itself. I intend rather to deal directly with the pressures on modes of representation that are correlative to changes in the structure of political power. Above all, I do not see the political process as a static or knowable, factual context in which to situate artistic change in order to explain it. To paraphrase what Marx refers to as the guiding idea of

all his inquiry, it is the sphere of culture in the largest sense in which people become conscious of changes in their existence, and in which these changes are fought out. They are fought out theoretically in the realm of political theory, theology, philosophy, and in the realm of literary representation that is the subject of this book. They are also fought out practically in war, internecine battle, and other types of armed struggle and unarmed social conflict—but even in the towns, in fortified strong houses, and castles in the midst of conflict it is only through protocols of representation that people decide to take sides, take action, understand and assert the significance of the action they take, and justify themselves to themselves and to others. Thus changes in the structure of representation are themselves primary phenomena, and their analysis can provide us with as direct an entry point into the lives of real social actors as quantitative or other hard evidence can (pp. 2-3).

Normal history — I mean this in the sense that Thomas Kuhn talks of normal or routine science — still proceeds as if one could contextualize romances, epics, or chronicles by placing them into a rich field of human action that exists outside the text in question and is knowable independent from it. Thus, this operation assumes various kinds of understanding, both of the text, whose meaning is determined by the limits of its context and especially of the context, the place to which the text is to be returned once so understood. Moreover, it is this context that we, as historians, want to know in an ever more detailed, thick, and localized fashion. In this way, one reads a romance (although one would probably much prefer to read a diploma, and preferably one without one of those boilerplate preambles so interesting to literary scholars!) as essentially another document with which to thicken the context by its return to its proper place — a place defined by patronage circles, book ownership, networks of lineage, vassalage, political affiliation, and so forth.

It is this type of contextualization that Koziol expected to find and thus found wanting in *Reality Fictions* — I agree, it isn't there. I tried rather to take notice, in the thickest and most concrete way that I could, of the salient features of the texts in question, to analyze their relations in the intertextual field of narrative innovation during the period in question, and to see what this analysis could tell us directly about the boundaries between self and other, the experience of eros, and the differentiation of public from private life that all took on new contours during the period, for these matters were new urgencies demanding practical knowledge (see *Reality Fictions*, p. 2). Perhaps, I thought, such a procedure could tell us something we did not already know about the period from other sources and from following the ordinary protocols of normal history.

Koziol finds much of *Reality Fictions* simplistic; yet every time he offers to paraphrase a piece of it he protests that he is "oversimplifying" or "hardly doing justice" to it. I will leave it to anyone who chooses to read the book to decide whether my view of the period is as "statist" or as simplistic as Koziol says it is, whether I know enough about eleventh and twelfth century history to be a trusted interlocutor for either historians or literary scholars, whether Koziol has seriously misread my first chapter on the *Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium* and oversimplifies its argument to the point of parody. In another place Koziol and I could have what I am sure would be an extremely productive theoretical and historiographical discussion about whether or not the ninth-century Le Mans Forgeries could be said to be "doing exactly the same thing" as the *Gesta Episcoporum* — or what it means to say "exactly the same" in this sort of historiographical context.

Let me rather end by saying that interdisciplinarity does not mean that scholars trained in one discipline should try to take up the normal operations of a second discipline by following normal protocols to the best of their abilities; rather what I tried to accomplish in *Reality Fictions* was something different that might provide another model of interdisciplinarity. I wanted to make a historical intervention by taking as seriously as I knew how the implications of the linguistic turn throughout the human sciences; that is, to see if a literary analysis of historiography considered within the full constellation of high medieval literary production and uncompromisingly facing the full significance of our postmodern awareness of the problematics of signification could escape on its own from the "prison house of language" and eventuate in "exactly the kinds of imaginative and subtle insights historians need and have not been able to produce." I am grateful to Professor Koziol for writing such a serious review and to the editors of H-France for giving me the opportunity to respond.

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