

The Middle Ages as a metaphor?

5:30 pm on Dec 6, 2017
CEU—Gellner Room
Budapest, Nádor u. 9



Chris Jones
University of St Andrews

This lecture series has focused on the long (European) tradition of dividing history into three periods with a ‘middle’, as well as on the arbitrariness of historical periodization in general, and specifically of the various scholarly debates about when and why the Middle Ages may be said to begin and end, and about how meaningful these dates might be in different parts of Europe, and the world. The final lecture will focus not on Middle Ages as a period of history, but rather the metaphorical implications that reside in ‘The Middle Ages’ and the adjective ‘medieval’ when they are



Cartoon from the International New York Times, August 2014

deployed in global Anglophone public discourse. Examples of contemporary usage will be drawn from print, digital and broadcast media to demonstrate how deeply embedded the metaphor of The Middle Ages is within Anglophone public discourse, and to build up a detailed picture of what kind of work this metaphor currently does in Anglophone societies. As an example, deployment of the term ‘medieval’ in Western media to describe the actions of Isis/Daesh will be interrogated; other examples may be drawn from the reporting of events occurring in the weeks leading up to the lecture. The lecture will conclude by arguing a personal viewpoint: that ‘the middle age’ has always been metaphorical from its fourteenth-century origins; and that ‘medieval’ is a major trope by which the West (or at least the Anglophone West) narrates and governs its relationship with the rest of the globe.

Chris Jones is a senior lecturer in English at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. He is the author of *Strange Likeness: the use of Old English in twentieth-century poetry* (2006), which was shortlisted for the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) ‘best book’ prize of 2007. Together with Bettina Bildhauer he has co-edited the collection *The Middle Ages in the Modern World*, which will be published as part of the Proceedings of the British Academy series later this year. His second monograph is currently in press *Fossil Poetry: Anglo-Saxonism and linguistic nativism in nineteenth-century poetry*.