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Special Cluster: Medieval Literature and its Scholarship: Continuity, Transmission, and Relevance

Introduction

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Putting the Cluster Together

Medieval societies produced myriad genres—for example, the roman, the lais, hagiographies, chivalric literature, beast epics, fabliaux, and sagas—throughout the period’s long durée and geographical expanse; from Byzantium in the east to Scandinavia in the far northern most reaches of medieval Europe. Where then to begin to showcase the wealth of medieval literature? When I was invited to edit this cluster my remit was comparatively broad in that I was asked to assess the current state of scholarship for various genres of medieval literature. My own paper is a very literal take on that notion in that it is a review of fabliau scholarship that takes up from where Harry F. Williams’s 1981 review article left off; his article was also published in South Atlantic Review. Of course I am certain that a series of literature reviews might not be the most interesting way to showcase the current state of medieval literature’s scholarship. Thus with virtual free rein I set out to make this cluster as eclectic as possible and to reflect the scholarly scope of medieval literature on many levels.

In this special cluster, then, there are seven essays that feature a variety of medieval literary genres: early Irish; medieval travel literature; old English; the old French Fabliaux; bestiary and other animal tales; and Arthurian literature. Chronologically, they cover virtually half of the medieval period, featuring works that were produced between the ninth and fifteenth centuries. They are also geographically diverse, although there is undeniably a strong focus on the north-western area of medieval Europe. Thematically and theoretically the essays are equally
distinct covering a range of topics such as identity, humour, law and order, and virtual reality; whilst the scholarship examines these topics through such lenses as post-colonialism, gender theory, and language acquisition. Likewise the authorship is as diverse, with contributions from established, early career, and emerging scholars, who are dispersed across three continents.

With no specific theme in mind for this cluster the next question that arose was how to link the articles and present them in a coherent and cohesive way. When every essay has, for instance, the crusades as its theme, then methodology, gender, or military leadership perhaps becomes the significant marker; such an approach evidently would not work for this cluster. Rather, I decided to rely on questions that have piqued my interest throughout my academic career and have been posed time and again. Those questions are: why medieval, what relevance does it have for today’s society, and can literature be a historical source? Thus notions of continuity, transmission, and relevance became the links that connect and bind the articles in this cluster.

For me, as a medieval historian interested in the intersection of medieval society and culture through its vernacular literature, I find that a society’s literature often reveals issues that concern that particular society at a given moment in time and place; yet these are issues that can also transcend time and place and thus occur time and again throughout history. Take, for instance, the fabliau *Le Villain mire*, in which a peasant poses as a doctor and successfully cures the king’s daughter of her ailment after many real physicians have failed. The fabliau’s plot is replicated in Molière’s play, *Le Médecin malgré lui*. Arguably then, in some circles of thirteenth- and seventeenth-century France respectively, the practice and practitioners of medicine were a source of mirth. Other literary examples expose a continual disquiet amongst societies concerning the maintenance of social order. As medieval European society understood itself through the paradigm of Christianity, it is unsurprising that Christian morality pervades its literature. Many fabliaux, despite their comedic form, warn against the vices that hindered a Christian’s ultimate salvation. For instance, the tale of the partridges, *Les Perdrix*, serves as a warning against the vices of lust, gluttony, and greed (Helsinger, *Pearls* 93–105). Similarly, J. Meade Faulkner’s nineteenth-century smugglers novel, *Moonfleet*, also features the morality of greed. In this novel a young boy experiences a series of adventures, in which he must make morally just or unjust decisions and then deal with the contingent circumstances. The main character only finds success in his life when he finally eschews greed for largesse. Whilst the novel may have been published at the end of the nineteenth century (1898), it remained popular throughout most of the twentieth century;
it was such a valued text for its didactic message that it was studied by many British school children as part of the curriculum. The novel exemplified a society’s continuing angst toward the vice of greed by presenting an overarching moral lesson that resonated with its readership.

Notwithstanding that the study of literature across time does reveal endurance or continuity of issues within subsequent societies, the issue for scholars in the current economic climate is how to finance such studies. In most cases humanities scholarship relies heavily on government, rather than industry, funding. How then can scholars attract funding, especially when grants are highly competitive and other disciplines (medicine, science and technology, etc.) are competing for a share in the allocation? Notably, one particular success story stands out for the very reason that is featured in this cluster: the relevance of the study of medieval culture to meet the needs of a post-modern society—in this case Australia. Stephanie Trigg highlights the case of a collaborative group of humanities scholars at a leading Australian University. They convinced the Australian federal government to bestow a considerable sum of money for research focussed on the “influential reach of medieval and early modern social and cultural forms into settler colonies like eighteenth-century Australia and beyond” (319). One of the “medieval . . . cultural forms” unsurprisingly included medieval literature. One reason for the team’s success lay in their ability to make links between cultural aspects of medieval society and Australia’s “economic and national priorities,” the key selection criteria of the funding body (319).^{3} David Lowenthal may have written *The Past is a Foreign Country*, yet I believe that understanding the past is crucial to understanding the present. As the early twentieth-century American historian Frederick Jackson Turner stated, “Each age tries to form its own conception of the past. Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time” (18).

Thus, with these examples of repetition and relevance in mind, I have aimed to source essays that focus on the continuity and transmission of ideas across genres, time, and societies. Simultaneously, the cluster will emphasize a myriad of ways in which medieval literature is a rich material source and will draw attention to the fact that issues that affected medieval society continue to have relevance for our post-modern society.

**Medieval Literature as History—Writing History from Medieval Literature**

The relationship between history and literature has not always been harmonious, with past practitioners of history excluding literature as
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genuine source material, preferring to base historical interpretations on legal, royal, papal, or other such “official” documents. This has certainly been the case for the old French fabliau, my chosen research field; the genre only became a “respectable” source of study after Joseph Bédier’s late nineteenth-century doctoral thesis. Yet, I subscribe to another of Turner’s opinions: that “history is past literature” just as it is also past politics, religion, economics, and other social factors; indeed “History is the biography of society” (18). With this premise in mind, then, to what extent are the disciplines of medieval literature and history discrete or fused?

As a discipline the study of medieval literature has taken a variety of directions; for instance, scholars might take a linguistic, lexical, textual, or historical approach. Equally, scholars may perhaps choose to examine their chosen texts through a variety of lenses, supported by one of many strands of literary theory and their corresponding schools of criticism, including but not restricted to Formalism, Marxist theory, Structuralism, and New Historicism. John Burrow notes the changing trend in literary studies over the past fifty years: from scholarship focussed purely on the text to one that is informed by history (278–79). Whilst Burrow, to an extent, laments the change, I would argue that the shifting of approaches—using a historical approach in literary studies—extends the possibilities for avenues of study. More significantly however, the study of literary texts through a historical lens offers an approach that provides the opportunity for relevance. Thus, the “influential reach” of the medieval world and its culture is a fitting medium for understanding post-modern society (Trigg 319).

Yet this approach is not a new phenomenon. Using fabliau scholarship as a case in point, J. G. Espiner-Scott, identifies Claude Fauchet (d. 1602) as the earliest recorded fabliau scholar who used fabliaux as examples of medieval customs, thus recognizing their cultural import. For instance, in Le Sacristain, the fabletrot tells of a traveller in Normandy wishing to lodge the night telling a tale to their host; Fauchet claimed that this literary act implied that it was an authentic Norman custom (Espiner-Scott 198). Of course, Fauchet’s line of reasoning certainly appears simplistic and unsubstantiated by contemporary methods, but this did not prevent later antiquarians and historians from applying similar approaches. Using the fabliau to provide an accurate picture of life in medieval France appears to have been the general tenor of the early scholars, particularly those active during the Enlightenment, such as La Curne de Sainte-Palaye (Gossman, Medievalism 225–26). Even in the mid-nineteenth century some scholars, such as Victor Leclerc, were promoting the fabliaux, “comme de fidèles peintures des mœurs du temps” (“as faithful paintings of the habits of the time”; 70).
By the mid-twentieth century this style of scholarship was more generally referred to as socio-cultural history and one of the first social historians to use the fabliau genre as a historical source was the French historian, Marie-Thérèse Lorcin. Influenced by the French Annales School, her 1979 publication *Façons de sentir et de penser: les fabliaux français* considered the fabliaux as representative of people’s attitudes about themselves, registered through their “feelings” and “thoughts.” Lorcin’s approach, despite attracting some criticism, provided a new orientation for fabliau studies demonstrating how a literary text could be a useful primary source for social historians. Other scholars followed Lorcin’s example. Philippe Ménard considered that the fabliau genre was: “précieux pour la connaissance de la vie quotidienne des français” (“precious for the knowledge of everyday life of the French”; 107). My principal concern regarding this approach is that in many instances, findings were based solely on one source, a piece of literature, and no attempt was made to cross-reference findings against other contemporary sources. R. Howard Bloch was more forceful in his condemnation, although it may serve to highlight merely an antagonism between different scholarly approaches (5–6). He advocated a post-structuralist analysis centred on text and the ambiguity of language at the expense of social realist theories. As a result, combining text and history underscored the pitfalls for early social and cultural historians using literature as a source.

One methodology that led literary scholarship and its relationship with historical approaches in a more nuanced direction was the 1980s New Historicist School of literary thought. Led by Stephen Greenblatt, this methodological approach aimed to understand literary texts in a wider context than solely from within their textual boundaries. Greenblatt argued that the two areas—literature and history—did not develop in isolation but rather that the one shaped the other. Mitzi Myers described the reciprocal influences as “extra-literary” cultural formations in that whilst they were influencing literary discourse, literary practices were simultaneously influencing practices in society (42). As with all theories however, New Historicist thought was not above criticism. Lee Paterson, for one, argued that the scholarly method favoured social groups over the individual and hence failed to take account of discrete protagonists (66–67).

Regardless of its detractors, multi-disciplinary approaches to any field of study, especially within the humanities, are *de rigueur* nowadays. Daron Burrows’s work on the stereotype of the fabliau priest (discussed in more detail in my essay) had a tripartite theoretical approach: it relied on a socio-historical-psychological approach. More significantly, he located his hypothesis in the theories of stereotyping
that emanated from the work of social psychologists. Burrows’s work on the stereotype of the fabliau priest was described by one reviewer as an “innovative contribution to a long-running critical debate [within fabliau studies]” (Srase 196).

Multidisciplinary approaches, then, have understandably led to a growth in scholarly outputs that embrace myriad methodologies and this is reflected in the essays in this cluster. They are not exclusively textually based, historically focussed, or grounded closely in literary theory; instead, they reflect a merger of literary and historical approaches. In the past, there may have been some sense of antagonism (real or perceived) between the disciplines of medieval history and medieval literature. This is today a non-issue: Pearsall has implied that whilst literature is “essentially historical,” the outcomes of the study of literature are “something other and more than the pursuit of historical enquiry” (48). Consequently, this cluster does not intend to engage in the debates surrounding the merits of the study of literature versus the study of history as a means to understand the Middle Ages; rather it embraces the two disciplines as a way to provide meaning and relevance not simply to a time past but also to the time present.

The Essays

The seven essays in this cluster stand testament to the heterogeneous nature of medieval literature; although their very heterogeneity poses problems for organization. Selecting an order in no way reflects a hierarchy of authorship. Rather, the order of the essays starts chronologically and features one of the earliest produced texts before continuing with essays that link to the preceding work according to one, two, or even all three of the featured themes: continuity, transmission, and relevance.

The first essay, “Gender and Comedy in the Early Irish Tale Fled Bricrenn” by Jennifer Dukes-Knight, features a tale from the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology. Fled Bricrenn dates from the eighth century, with the earliest extant manuscripts dating from the eleventh century. Dukes-Knight offers a re-reading of the text that eschews the traditional strands of scholarship that have tended to focus on the text’s parallels with a Classical tradition and its connections to a Celtic past. Instead, she has chosen to examine the way in which humor is realized in the tale—through the inversion of expected gendered roles—to argue that Fled Bricrenn should be read not as a window into the distant Celtic past, but rather as a sophisticated piece of medieval Irish literature.

Undoubtedly, as Dukes-Knight acknowledges, in a traditional reading Fled Bricrenn has obvious parallels with the Arthurian tale, Sir
Gawain and the Green Knight, particularly the beheading scenes; yet Dukes-Knight’s focus on humour and role reversal is reminiscent of the very funny and anonymous French twelfth or thirteenth-century *chantefable*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*. The French tale is very much a parody of several genres, including courtly love literature, hagiography, and the epic. Nicolette, the principal female character, dresses up as a troubadour to entreat her beloved. The *chantefable* even features a pregnant king, whilst wars resemble food fights rather than the expected masculine theatre of violence replete with brave and heroic deeds. Dukes-Knight’s analysis of the eighth-century Irish tale thus reveals an early medieval text whose comedic techniques were conceivably continued and conveyed across centuries and seas.

The second essay, Diane Heath’s, “Burnellus Speaks: Beast Books and Beastliness in Late Twelfth-Century Canterbury,” features the only Latin text in this cluster. The medieval beast poem *Speculum Stultorum* [Mirror for Fools] was written by the Canterbury monk, Nigel Wireker. Heath, like Dukes-Knight, also has a strong focus on manuscript transmission, with particular reference to numerous animal texts from the medieval libraries of Canterbury’s Christ Church Priory and the neighboring St. Augustine’s Abbey. Dating Nigel Wireker’s poem and locating its production in a variety of contexts—historical, social, political, religious, geographical, and literary—is critical to Heath’s argument that the *Speculum Stultorum* is a highly charged political piece of writing. It reveals the political posturing over appointments to positions of power in English religious politics during Richard I’s reign and absence from England. Her thorough research on manuscript transmission, monastic library records, and the way in which she had traced a variety of depictions of the donkey (ass) in a range of animal texts, persuasively cements Wireker’s tale as a cautionary piece. *Speculum Stultorum* was a stinging work deliberately written to remind a leading figure in Canterbury’s monastic (and England’s political) scene of the virtues in humility. Ultimately, Heath’s nuanced reading of *Speculum Stultorum* affirms the relevance of medieval literature as an important historical source.

The next two essays feature tales from the Arthurian corpus, although separated by two centuries. David King’s essay features the thirteenth-century Prose *Lancelot* whilst Sheri Chriqui has chosen Malory’s fifteenth-century *Morte Darthur*. Undoubtedly, Arthurian literature would have to be one of the most well-known and possibly popular genres from the Middle Ages. Norris Lacy noted in 1996 that the number of publications relating to this fecund genre had increased five-fold since the first edition of the *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society* (1948) that recorded the topic’s pub-
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lications (vii); equally, the last twenty years have continued the trend and the scope for scholarship appears limitless. Yet Arthur, his wife, Guinevere, and the Knights of the Round Table were no less popular throughout the Middle Ages, featuring in literary works produced in French, Breton, English, Dutch, Italian, German, and other European vernaculars—testament to its continuity and transmission.

Whilst any choice of Arthurian scholarship might seem arbitrary, the selection of David S. King’s essay, “Victories Foretelling Disgrace: Judicial Duels in the Prose *Lancelot*,” realizes many of the intended goals of this cluster. First, it offers a new analysis of a much studied text. Through scrutiny of the performance and ritual surrounding Lancelot’s many duels, King argues that the contests serve to announce Lancelot’s downfall in the series’ sequel: the quest for the grail. Second, whilst not overtly heralded in his essay, King’s reading exemplifies some aspects of historical scholarship on the concept of chivalry. Maurice Keen has described chivalry as a culture in which martial, aristocratic, and Christian elements are fused together. King’s study reveals that Lancelot’s actions often contradict the religious element of chivalric convention, and thus justify his eventual downfall. Finally, King’s reading of the Prose *Lancelot* potentially signposts a linkage between past and present events suggesting that events from history—real or fictitious—offer relevance to specific events occurring today throughout the world. For instance, King’s nuanced reading of the Prose *Lancelot* underscores the relationship between immanent justice and the righteousness of combatants within medieval society. Yet King’s reading is all the more pertinent when applied to many present-day global conflicts that are underscored by religiosity, and the conviction of immanent justice.

The second Arthurian study, Sheri Chriqui’s essay “A ‘Foreign’ Queen in King Uther’s Court: Fifteenth-Century Insular Xenophobia and Malory’s Portrayal of Arthur’s Mother,” engages with notions of marginality and identity. Chriqui has chosen to examine these notions through the lens of gender and in particular she reveals how Malory inscribed Igrayne’s body with cultural meaning to represent the subjugated peoples of Cornwall. Further, that Chriqui locates her argument in post-colonial scholarship makes her analysis of Malory’s portrayal of Arthur’s Cornish mother conceptually sophisticated.

Chriqui’s scholarship should also alert us to the current global events that engage with the notions of identity. How people around the world today see themselves and others and, more significantly, how they behave towards each other suggests that individual and group identity transcends time and place. The European Union might have removed its borders to promote economic growth, but when faced with a massive migration influx, one nation at least has responded by reinstating
its borders. For instance, as I write this, Hungary is in the process of building a border fence to prevent Syrian refugees from entering their nation state, and Romania and Slovenia are voicing similar concerns.

The fifth article, Lynn Ramey and Steven Wenz’s “Immersive Environments for Medieval Languages: Theory and Practice,” is the essay that deviates most from that which readers might expect in this cluster. Rather than provide a close analysis of a medieval text, Ramey and Wenz show how a medieval text can be integral to language acquisition in the modern classroom. Arguably this article has a standout topic that not only bears witness to the current state of medieval literature’s scholarship but also signals a potential new direction for future scholarship. For me, their work is a very exciting prospect for the future of foreign languages, especially “dead” medieval languages such as Old French.

Ramey and Wenz take a twelfth-century hagiographical account, *The Voyage of St. Brendan* (Brendan was a sixth-century Irish monk), and immerse the language student in the medieval world using non-traditional methods of language teaching. Instead of the usual rote learning of verbs, declensions, and noun genders, Ramey and Wenz apply the technology of gaming and virtual reality to promote the student learning experience. It is more than simply a merging of past and present or a passive language class; students are encouraged to immerse themselves in the past in an active way, taking on an avatar and having to experience a medieval life. Whilst the intended outcome is a greater proficiency and confidence working with old language texts, the students also have the opportunity to immerse themselves in medieval culture. In this way, literature, history, and the digital world combine with exciting prospects for the future.

The final two essays share a review style although they feature diverse genres and approaches. The penultimate essay, Lindy Brady’s, “Constructing Identity in Anglo-Saxon Literature: Review of Current Scholarship,” shares Chriqui’s topic of identity. Rather however, than focus on expressions of identity as expressed through gender or post-colonial ideology, Brady focuses on the ways in which identity was expressed in opposition to other diverse peoples. In choosing Anglo-Saxon literature as her source material, Brady highlights various ways in which one ethnically distinct group encountered and received a tripartite of other ethnic and culturally diverse groups: Britons, Danes, and Normans.

Brady and Chriqui’s research topics might be separated by four to five centuries, but they signal the continuing angsts social groups felt and expressed in terms of identity and difference. Conversely, they share the same geographical region—England and its relationship
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with its neighboring, and at times rival nation states; a rivalry or conflict even that continues today. The United Kingdom, comprised of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, might appear a misnomer, as Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have been devolved to practice various forms of self-government in the recent past; and in 2014 the Scottish Government held a passionately contested and close referendum for Scottish independence. Although failing to pass, forty-five percent of voters assented to the independence proposal. Despite some good-natured banter between the Scots and English, Scotland retains a strong national and culturally distinct identity.

The final essay, “New Directions for the Old French Fabliaux: Updating Harry F. Williams’s 1981 Review,” is my contribution to this cluster. It is a traditional literature review of fabliau scholarship since 1981 that stems from my doctoral thesis. The old French fabliaux are known for their ribald and irreverent nature with confrontational titles such as _Cele qui fu foutue et desfoutue_ (“She who was fucked and unfucked”). It was their supposed vulgar status that caused many nineteenth-century scholars to reject the genre from the “worthy” corpus of medieval literature; yet the genre prevailed, thanks to Joseph Bédier’s pioneering late nineteenth-century thesis, _Les Fabliaux: Etudes de littérature populaire et d’histoire littéraire du moyen âge._

Their reputation as legitimate scholarly texts grew throughout the twentieth century, although the dominant focus was restricted to definition studies until the 1960s social revolution encouraged new scholarly interests. In 1981 Williams wrote his review essay in recognition of the burgeoning of fabliaux studies into new directions. This essay reveals new directions of the past thirty-five years, many of which Williams could not have anticipated. The fabliau genre might not be as well-known as King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, but it sustained its popularity over a one hundred and fifty year period (c. 1170–c. 1340) and beyond, influencing later writers such as Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Molière.

Conclusion

This special cluster of essays has showcased a small selection of research that marks the current state of scholarship for various genres of, and theoretical approaches for, medieval literature. Whilst some themes reappear in the featured essays—for instance, gender and identity—these topics are testament to their relevance for current trends in the field of medieval literature. The different ways in which they have been applied to the scholarship further reveals the potential for
scholarly directions. Just as gender studies rose in prevalence in the 1960s mirroring the rise in the feminist movement, I believe that work on identity is to some extent a response to the world in which we live today. Identity—who we are, where we came from, and to whom we “belong”—is reflected in current debates, conflicts, political ideologies, and popular grass roots movements. Contemporary scholarship of medieval literature is thus informed through scholars’ engagement with local, national, and global concerns and debates; medieval authors responded similarly. The parallel response, centuries apart, reflects not only the nature of man but also continuity in the intersection of society, literature, culture, and history.

Notes
1. Whilst there is ongoing debate concerning periodization, which I fully acknowledge, I loosely take the Middle Ages to cover approximately 1000 years, from 500 AD to 1500 AD.

2. The fabliau, Le Villain mire, was first published in France by Etienne Barbazon in the century following Molière’s death.

3. The collaborative group was named the Network for Early European Research (NEER). A core group from this network was instrumental in putting together another successful research group that attracted the largest amount of government funding awarded to the humanities in Australian history. That group, The Australian Research Council’s Centre for Excellence for the History of the Emotions, is based at the University of Western Australia with nodes located at five other Australian universities as well as global linkages.

4. I use the fabliau as my case study for two reasons: it is my specialist field of study and the liveliness and worldliness of the fabliau invite scrutiny as lived experience.

5. See Le Sacristain. in Noomen and Van den Boogaard 153–99.

6. Bloch wrote, “. . . beginning with the Annales School, refined methods of historical research continue to deepen our knowledge of medieval life and yet have led only to increasingly excessive claims concerning the mimetic accuracy of the fabliaux. Two recent books in particular herald a new and absurd plateau [:] . . . Marie-Therese Lorcin[’s and] . . . [s]imilarly, Philippe Ménard’s reading of the fabliaux . . . .”

7. Stephen Greenblatt was influenced by the work and ideas of Foucault, Marxism, and the Annales school; for Greenblatt’s retrospective explanation of the genesis of this approach, see Gallagher and Greenblatt 1–19, esp. 1–4.

8. Guy Halsall has a stimulating piece questioning and challenging the merits of interdisciplinary on his blog, Historian on the Edge.
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9. *Aucassin et Nicolette* is the only known chantefable—a combination of prose and verse—and dates from the twelfth or thirteenth century. There is only one extant copy: BnF Fr 2168.

Works Cited


About the Guest Editor
Kathryn Smithies is a medieval historian and honorary fellow in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She is a fabliau scholar interested in the social and cultural aspects of medieval society, particularly the intersection of high and popular culture as a means of ensuring social order and regulation. Within her research field, Kathryn is currently extending her work on fabliau didacticism to examine how the fabliau may be understood as exclusionary literature, marginalizing certain sections of medieval society. She is currently an Associate Investigator with the Australian Research Council’s Centre for Excellence for the History of the Emotions, researching emotional responses to the medieval leper. Email: smkl@unimelb.edu.au.
Gender and Comedy in the Early Irish Tale *Fled Bricrenn*

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*Fled Bricrenn* [Bricriu’s Feast] is one of the most well-known tales of the early Irish literary corpus, and this is chiefly the result of two components of the tale that have attracted the most scholarly and popular attention. Firstly, the heroic boasting contest that constitutes the shell of the plot frequently draws the tale into discussions of Classical references to the continental Celts, particularly the description of the Greek historian Posidonius in the first century BC of Celtic men battling with words and swords over honor and the best cut of meat.¹ In addition to this, a portion of the tale contains a beheading contest with the shape-shifting hero Cú Roí in which his severed head is restored after each fight, drawing parallels with the Welsh tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and to the possibility of a common Celtic tradition contained in both.² These two elements have combined to ensure that the bulk of scholarly attention paid to the tale has been to elucidate features perceived to be deeply traditional and connected to the distant Celtic past. Such elements are frequently referred to uncritically in the introductions to translations of the text, as in those of George Henderson (*Fled Bricrend* xiv), Jeffrey Gantz (219), and T. P. Cross and C. H. Slover (254). In the 2000 publication of the Irish Texts Society devoted to *Fled Bricrenn*, three out of five articles address these themes in various ways (Jacobs, Koch, Maier). While these contributions are far from uncritical, and are tremendously useful, they are indicative of how discussion of the tale in this light has traditionally dominated the discourse.

In its simplest sense, the tale of *Fled Bricrenn* does describe the contest between three of the greatest Ulster heroes for the curathmír (“champion’s portion”): the prime victuals of a feast that are symbolic of masculine glory and preeminence in the court. In such virility competitions, female characters are either entirely absent or sideline observers who vicariously participate in the action that centers on the heroic honor code of men. Yet, *Fled Bricrenn* is a complex tale where expectations are frequently reversed, and this becomes most clear when we examine the role of the female characters and the use of gender. Here, we are confronted with women who recurrently take the more aggressive role in their interactions with men, and even interact with one another in a particularly hostile and competitive manner. In fact, we see a host of female characters that regularly parallel or usurp
typical male activities. The effect of such activities is to create in *Fled Bricrenn* the image of a topsy-turvy world where the reversal of male and female gender roles, and masculine and feminine imagery, forms the cornerstone of the farcical humor of this well-constructed tale. The role of gender in the tale, which I will argue is a result of intentional comedic design, demonstrates that the work should be read not as a window into the distant Celtic past, but rather as a sophisticated piece of medieval Irish literature.

Throughout *Fled Bricrenn*, we see female characters acting in situations designed to parallel those of their male counterparts, often with the men concurrently occupying more passive roles. First, there is the *briatharcath na mban* (“women’s war of words”), in which the actions and attitudes of the heroes’ wives mimic those of the men in the tale, as well as those of men elsewhere in the medieval Irish literary corpus. This is followed by several scenes set in Ailill and Medb’s court in Crúachu which are highly sexually charged and set Medb as a second Bricriu. Even in minor asides, such as Cú Chulainn’s pseudo-feat of needle juggling with the girls of Crúachu and the pursuit of Cú Chulainn by the smitten girl Buan, a general image is created of a world in which women are acting as men, and men as women. Gender is an unavoidable presence throughout the tale, yet its function as the primary theme cannot be taken to glorify, on a real or symbolic level, the influence of the feminine. In this topsy-turvy world the entire framework of the tale creates a reversal of expected gender roles that undermines the masculinity of the heroic idiom.

Some of the interactions of male and female characters are blatantly emasculating, a theme most dramatically played out when the heroes are forced to relinquish weaponry symbolic of manhood to a troop of female sprites. Other traditionally misogynistic themes, like the depiction of hyper-sexuality among the female characters, serve to amplify both the humor and the effect of the flux of gender roles. Meanwhile, several scenes appear to contain references to other tales (or, perhaps, other traditional formulae) in the corpus, but feature a subverted element that changes the meaning of the scene. While comedy in the early medieval period remains an under-studied subject, the consistency with which the technique of subversion is employed and the humorous incongruences that result suggest that *Fled Bricrenn* was deliberately constructed as a comic tale. Further, much of the humor that the tale contains hinges on a deliberate use of sexuality and gender tropes that ultimately reveal a misogynistic comparison of men to women.

To understand the role of gender and comedy in *Fled Bricrenn*, it can be helpful to be aware of a few details regarding the history of the tale’s transmission. The majority of *Fled Bricrenn* can be found in four man-
uscripts, the earliest and most complete version being located in the twelfth-century manuscript *Lebor na hUidre* (*LU*). The dating of medieval Irish texts is a notoriously fraught task, but the text as we have it has been placed in the eleventh century by Gearóid Mac Eoin (119), while Rudolph Thurneysen has linguistically dated the earliest parts of the tale to the eighth century (449). The analysis of Edgar Slotkin seems to provide the key to understanding the complicated manuscript history of this text. All versions of the tale present in the manuscript tradition bear clear connections to each other and to a common exemplar. Further, all preserve essentially the same tale and contain much structural and linguistic similarity (Slotkin 66). For instance, in all four of the most complete manuscripts, the final portion of the text, the “Champion’s Bargain” episode, is missing, even though they each mention it in the title of the tale. Yet, the earliest version contained in *LU* varies at a few significant points from the rest of the manuscripts in the number of episodes that it includes and the order in which they are placed. *LU* incurred some damage after its original compilation by the scribe Mael Muire (Oskamp 135), followed by significant reconstruction of portions of the text at the hands of the scribe known as *H* and this may account for the missing ending in most texts. Slotkin thus supposes that the later texts may have originated either from *LU* itself, after it was damaged but before the work of *H*, or from another common exemplar, making the work of *H* responsible for divergences in the *LU* text (72).

In his 1899 edition, George Henderson recognized the presence of two recensions in the text of *Fled Bricrenn* as we have it today (xxxii–iii). According to Henderson, the current text has integrated a version in which the judgment of the contest of heroes is sent to the court of Ailill and Medb with a separate version in which the judge is instead Cú Róí mac Dáire. Building on Henderson’s observations, Petra Hellmuth has demonstrated the centrality of Cú Róí’s character to what Henderson termed the Emain-Cú Róí recension while noting that the author of the Dun Rudraige-Ailill recension had “a very different kind of story” in mind (65). This is in part due to the dissimilar nature of the relationship between the Ulster heroes and each set of judges. In the rest of the Ulster Cycle, Cú Róí figures as a semi-magical nobleman with ambiguous, but not entirely negative, relationships with the Ulster heroes. Ailill and Medb, meanwhile, are regents of the neighboring province of Connacht and the traditional arch-enemies of the Ulstermen. Therefore, while Cú Róí appears to have been selected as an impartial figure who could magically disguise himself to challenge the heroes directly (Hellmuth 66), the selection of Ailill and Medb as judges provides far greater space for conflict and subversion. It is this
version of the tale—Henderson’s Dun Rudraige-Ailill recension—that I contend was initially composed as a gender comedy.

It is at or before the composition of the common exemplar proposed by Slotkin, then, that the two recensions came to be integrated. It seems clear that both recensions were rooted in the same traditional and folkloric stock of a triadic heroic competition (Mac Cana 72), and the redactor may have viewed them as forms of the same tale when he drew them together into his version. But the thematic composition of the Dun Rudraige-Ailill recension clearly suggests the presence of a literary work with its own intent and direction prior to its reuse in the extant version. Fled Bricrenn thus appears as an especially clear example of how a compiled text might be composed. The continuity of the plot, the use of characters, and composition along thematic lines all indicate the presence of two individually coherent narratives that have been grafted into a new, and itself individual, work of art.

A close analysis of the Dun Rudraige-Ailill recension reveals that it is consistently and deliberately united by a theme of gender-role subversion for comic effect. The episodes of the tale are interdependent and highly connected by the theme of gender, and they build upon each other with a layered use of gender play. The tone is immediately set as Bricriu, the eponymous trickster of the Ulster Cycle, works to bamboozle the Ulstermen into attending a feast at his hall, finally resorting to threats and intimidation. However, the Ulstermen are well aware of the ill intentions that he has at heart, and are unmoved even by Bricriu’s threats to unleash total war on Ulster. In the end, the heroes are only convinced to attend by a bizarre threat regarding their women: “immacossaítíub dí cích cacha óenmná la Ultu co mmatuairce dóib co mbréñfát ocus co llofát la sodain” ‘I shall raise contention between the two breasts of every single Ulsterwoman so that they will beat one against the other until they rot and putrefy’ (Mac Cana and Slotkin lines 50–51; trans. §6). The image is grotesquely comic, and it encapsulates the gender inversion that will characterize much of the tale that follows. The women’s breasts, so symbolic of feminine identity and sexuality, will engage in the masculine game of war until they become as rotten and putrid as battlefield dead. Compelled by this final strange threat, the Ulstermen and their wives warily make their way to Bricriu’s hall for the feast.

Nevertheless, once at the feast, Bricriu succeeds in quickly embroiling the three top heroes of Ulster in a contest for supremacy. Even when the heroes are temporarily calmed, Bricriu then incites their wives to take up the same contest amongst themselves. The resulting briathar-cath na mban (“women’s war of words”), is a boasting contest wherein each woman speaks of herself as the greatest lady in Ireland for various
virtues. Among these virtues is her affiliation with her husband, and each therefore argues for her husband’s preeminence among the warriors. Though too often removed from its context within the tale of *Fled Bricrenn*, the *bríatharcath na mban* episode has been featured in several important discussions about early Irish women. It is the focus of a chapter of Joanne Findon’s work on Cú Chulainn’s wife Emer, as well as a highly influential article on women’s honor by Philip O’Leary. Both authors view the *bríatharcath na mban* as essentially “straight”: as a proxy for the temporarily allayed male competition that reveals the basis of female honor and its dependence on a woman’s male counterpart. Lisa Bitel similarly discusses this episode in her study of women in early Ireland, but attributes the unusually active role of the women to a satire on women’s ability to compete in the way men do (159). Yet, in their discussions, Findon establishes that the contest we see between the women in *Fled Bricrenn* appears to be unique in all of early Irish literature (68), and Bitel points out that women merely “drifted through the shadowy background” in the vast majority of saga tales involving feasts and gatherings, usually serving the beer to the men (157).

I find it difficult, therefore, to read this episode in a straight fashion. In the *bríatharcath na mban* the women boast of many stock positive features possessed by women in the saga tradition, such as grace and beauty, as well as the high-born lineage, familial status, and quality of marriage partners that the legal tradition suggests to have been significant aspects of medieval Irish female identity (Kelly 69–73). Yet, the boasts cannot be intended to portray a normal or acceptable way in which women participated in the honor code. Emer’s boast, in particular, progresses to venomous insults against the general male and female population of Ulster:

iss i richt mná siúil
sedda Ulaid uli
ci rrici mo chélese Coin Culain . . .
is i rtrechtaib bó & dam & ech
settaí mná Ulad uli conom thicisea. (*LU* lines 8357–59, 8367–68)
The Ulstermen sit
as if women in childbirth
except for my husband Cú Chulainn
The women of Ulster sit like cows and oxen and horses
except for me.

Prior to this, Emer also suggests to the Ulsterwomen that she could easily sleep with any of their husbands should she wish to and, per-
haps, that she has had the opportunity to do so in the past: “glé di-
ammbése báeth fiad etarlu / nimmar mbith ben úadib lía céle/on trath
sa co alaile” ‘Clearly, if I were wanton when the opportunity was there/
hardly a single woman here would be with her husband / by this time
tomorrow’ (LU lines 8332–34). I doubt that such content was intended
to be perceived as acceptable public discourse by women.

Moreover, while such a verbal contest between women is unique
to *Fled Bricrenn*, the women’s behavior in the *briatharcath na mban*
does bear a close resemblance to the manner in which insults are cast
in other male boasting contest tales, such as *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó*
(*The Tale of Mac Da Thó’s Pig*), where pointed and scathingly insults and
boasts are the basis of the competition. In this tale, the Crúachan war-
rrior Cet embarrasses all the Ulster warriors in succession with pointed
insults attacking specific shortcomings until he is finally defeated by
the arrival of Conall Cernach. To a challenge issued by Celchair mac
Uthechar, for instance, Cet replies, “Ro-lécus-sa gaí n-aill cucut-su co-
ndechaid tret slíasait ocus tre húachtar do macraille. Atáí co ngalur
fúail ónd úair-sin, nicon-rucad mac na ingen duit. Cid dot-bérad cu-
cum-sa?” ‘I threw another spear back at you, going through your thigh
and through the top of your testicles. [Because of] the urinary disease
this caused, you have fathered neither son nor daughter since. What
would bring you [to stand] against me?” (SMMD lines 170–72). The
insult here functions on two levels: Cet is ostensibly recounting a series
of events in which he defeated Celchair in an encounter. However, the
implied sexual nature of an attack that penetrates the victim’s thigh
and testes clearly contributes to the force of Cet’s insult, as does the
further emasculation caused by Celchair’s subsequent impotency,
demonstrating the role that sexuality can play in such contests.

In short, the *briatharcath na mban* is a deliberately parallel con-
struction to the heroes’ contest for the champion’s portion. When the
argument is quelled between the men, Bricriu passes the very same
contention on to their wives. The women take up the masculine com-
petitiveness to such an extent that they act as a mirror of the men. This
is truly a competition among the women for superiority, and is not so
much a proxy for the concurrent male competition as it is a parody of
it. The story even hilariously highlights the women’s full immersion in
the competition as the three wives race to the hall door with their skirts
hiked above their knees: “Is samlaid ruc ruc cach ben dia seitche ar écin &
	tuargabsat a lénte co mellaib a lárac do imchosnom dul isa tech
	ar thus úair” ‘Each woman needed to keep close with her fellow [com-
petitor] and lifted her tunic up to her buttocks in order to strive to get
into the house before the others’ (LU lines 8256–57). The tale adeptly
draws the eye of the audience in for a tantalizing “peek” beneath the
ladies’ skirts as if we need to be reminded that it is indeed women that we see so ruthlessly pursuing the right to be called champion. What this amounts to is a clever sleight of hand on the part of the tale’s composer. The competition of the women is a scene which, internally to the tale, is designed to enhance the honor of the male characters. The wives flatter their husbands through their boasts, and Emer, with the lengthiest and most rousing speech, contributes to the ultimate victory of her husband. Yet, at the very same time, it externally undermines the masculinity of the male honor code by aligning the competition for the champion’s portion with the squabbling of women.

Yet, this begs the question, is the *briatharcath na mban* simply a joke at the expense of women? Bitel’s analysis has suggested that the scene be read as a farcical portrayal of women who, in their effort to play at a man’s game, are merely making “feeble boasts in imitation of men” (159). Yet, while the women are thusly embroiled in competition, the men are portrayed as comparatively passive. The heroes’ main contribution to the *briatharcath na mban* episode is to react to their wives’ speeches and punch holes in the wall for them to enter the hall (granted, Cú Chulainn does destroy Bricriú’s hall in his effort to let Emer and her retinue enter!). When Emer takes up the cause of boasting once again, Sencha attempts to silence her with a few typical misogynistic accusations, “ar is dia mbrígaib báesaib, bés dóib dofur-cbat nad íccat, imsuídet nad rairget” ‘For it is through their force and folly that [women] always disrupt what they do not mend and attack what they cannot have’ (*LU* lines 8434–36). In response, Emer simply continues on, completely dismissive of Sencha’s accusations, as if she had barely even heard him. When Emer finally completes her second lengthy speech featuring Cú Chulainn’s many heroic abilities, attention is drawn to Cú Chulainn’s comparative silence when Conall requests that he, in essence, be cross-examined to bear out Emer’s high praise. “Nathó,” replies Cú Chulainn to the challenge, “am scith aith-bristi indiu” ‘No, I am tired and broken down today’ (*LU* line 8456). Findon remarks that Cú Chulainn’s slovenly response “undermines everything that his eloquent wife has been trying to establish through her words” (82). While this is certainly true, Cú Chulainn’s behavior is also indicative of an upset in stereotyped gender roles. His response appears distinctly passive by comparison to Emer’s active competition and suggests that the women are not simply being mocked for an ineffectual imitation of their men, but are fulfilling their role while the men appear as entirely out of the game.

On the other hand, reading the *briatharcath na mban* straight—that is, as essentially about women’s honor—requires removal of the episode from the context of the tale as a whole, which continues on
with scene after scene in which gender roles are manipulated to upset expected patterns. After the scene at the feast is brought to a close, the judging of the contest is outsourced to the neighboring kingdom of Crúachu. The prominent role of female sexuality that peppers the scenes at the feast truly comes to the forefront in this next episode, as the troop of heroes approaches Ailill and Medb’s court. The ladies of Crúachu are shaken by the tumult and Medb requests that her daughter Findabair report on the approaching warriors to her like a scout. This series of observational introductions fills 122 lines (LU lines 8590–712) of the tale as the male warriors are described in great physical detail by daughter to mother resulting in a summoning of the women to appear bare-breasted before the charging warriors:

Mná finna fornochta fríu ol Medb. aurchíche aurnochta etrochta. co llín n-ingen n-aurlam n-inchomraic liss aursloc-thí. Búirg fáenbélá. (LU lines 8713–15) “Fair naked women against [them],” said Medb, “bright, unsheathed breasts. A full complement of willing, marriageable girls; let the courtyard be open, the fortifications lying open.”

Medb’s terse, commanding language in the scene reminds one of a general ordering a battlefield response, with women as warriors and naked breasts as weapons. The “willing” girls are aligned with the “open” court and fortifications in what should almost surely be read as a deliberate double-entendre. Further, the term aurnochta, here referring to bare breasts, in other contexts refers to unsheathed weaponry, diving home the militaristic imagery of the passage. This scene also provides us with a striking parallel to the role played by bare-breasted women in halting Cú Chulainn’s attack on the Ulaid when overtaken by his rias-trad in the boyhood deeds of the Táin, and how the task of “civilizing” the maddened hero was left to the women. A very different tone is struck here, however. The former act succeeded due to the embarrassment caused to Cú Chulainn as a young boy, whereas now the same activities function as a sexual invitation. When the heroes arrive, the bare-breasted Crúachan women accompany them to bedchambers.

At the same time, the audience is already aware that, unlike the situation in Cú Chulainn’s boyhood deeds, Medb’s court need not actually fear the approach of the warriors who are seeking their counsel instead of battle. When compared to the boyhood deeds, it is a comic overreaction. Medb even prepares the three vats of water, just like the ones that Cú Chulainn was successively dunked in to cool his ardor in the boyhood deeds episode, but it is not clear that they are used. The men are not in battle mode, and Cú Chulainn does not display the
frightening transformations associated with his riastrad. In Findabair’s
detailed description, Cú Chulainn’s chest heaves beneath the opening
in his tunic and his eyes shine like gems, but no facial distortions, flam-
ing head, or bulging eye are mentioned (LU lines 8674–76). Rather,
Findabair’s descriptions focus on the more alluring aspects of the
men’s physical appearance and dress. Still, as in the boyhood deeds
episode, the women provide the vector into the social setting of the
court through a display of sexuality—the significant change here is that
their sexuality is effective due to its appeal to men rather than the hu-
miliation of a boy.

While at their court, Ailill attempts to issue the verdict that Cú
Chulainn be granted the champion’s portion and Emer precedence
over the women of Ulster, but Lóegaire and Conall refuse to accept it.
Medb then steps to the forefront and at once takes over the roles of two
men. She quickly assumes the role of judge from the ineffectual Ailill
and she also acts as a second Bricriu in stirring up trouble by secretly
promising the champion’s portion to each of heroes in turn. While we
are quite accustomed to seeing Medb bowl over her less bombastic
husband, the portrayal of the pair in this particular scene stands out as
unique. Ailill is depicted as overtly emotional in his response to being
charged with judging the contest of heroes. When in private, he ap-
ppears hysterical: with his back pressed against the wall, his mind is
nību sāim ‘greatly disturbed,’ and he is unable to either sleep or eat for
three days (LU lines 8774-76). Medb’s response is, by contrast, cold and
emotionless. She calls Ailill’s manhood into question by accusing him
of being midlachda (“unmanly”) and dismisses his statement on the
difficulty of the task as she quickly whisks the responsibility out of his
hands (LU line 8776).

The details of the scene again provide cause for comparison with
Scela Mucce Meic Dathó. In this tale, Mac Da Thó also finds himself the
unhappy judge of a conflict that threatens his own safety. Ailill and Mac
Da Thó are both afflicted by worry over adjudicating for potentially
hostile parties and display the same symptoms of their condition, each
being unable to eat or drink for three days or to sleep at night (SMMD
lines 26–27). In each case, an intimate conversation about the cause
of their condition takes place behind closed doors, between husband
and wife. While a detailed examination of the relationship of the two
tales is beyond the scope of the present study, the similarities suggest
either direct knowledge of one tale by the other, or origination in a
common predecessor or common traditional stock. In either case, Fled
Bricrenn upends the role of the wife in the scene to elicit a very different
outcome from what the audience might have expected. In Scela Mucce
Meic Dathó, Mac Da Thó’s wife appears concerned for her husband’s
situation and implores him to listen to her counsel in an effort to alleviate his anxiety: “Táthut airle lim-sa fris / ní olc fri íarmairt n-indi” ‘I have advice for you / there will not be an evil consequence from it’ (SMMD lines 59–60). In evidence of the supportive nature of her intervention, her husband happily accepts her advice. Gregory Toner has discussed Mac Da Thó’s wife as related to a broader motif of “the helpful woman” who is able to assist a male hero through the possession of hidden knowledge (271–72). Mac Da Thó is also goaded by his wife; although he at first refuses to accept her input, she presses him until he relents and listens to her counsel. In Fled Bricrenn, however, Medb turns the conventional role of the goading wife exemplified by Mac Da Thó’s wife on its head. She makes no effort to advise her husband. She also does not seem to utilize the deeply-laden term midlach for its conventional purpose of incitement: she is not trying to convince Ailill to act, but rather declaring his inability to do so and doing it herself.

In her solution to the problem at hand for the court of Crúachu—that is, ridding themselves of the quarreling heroes—Medb also cannot resist causing further difficulties for the men. In this, she is clearly intended to mimic the role of Bricriu. Medb flatters each hero in succession and presents him with a chalice meant to signify that the verdict has gone in his favor. The heroes are all temporarily satisfied as each believes himself to be the winner of the champion’s portion. Just as Bricriu had in the opening scene, however, Medb has in reality set a time bomb intended to detonate at an upcoming feast, this time back in the court at Emain when each hero attempts to announce his victory. Like Bricriu, Medb establishes situations which will result in conflict later, when the author of discord is at a safe distance. Bricriu, as the classic trickster archetype, does this solely for his own amusement. Medb’s motive is to rid her province of the potentially dangerous presence of warriors who are at each other’s throats—though she does not seem completely unamused either. At the same time, like Mac Da Thó’s wife’s advice to her husband, Medb’s plan has worked: while the heroes themselves may remain in contention, the courts of their hosts emerge relatively unscathed. In this, both figures are presented as ambiguously duplicitous, but not wholly negative. Their actions are tricky, but comprehensible to the audience, who is made aware of all of the factors even though all of the participants are not. Further, the plans are successful. The heroes are even clearly presented as complicit in their own undoing due to the ease with which they are misled by their own vanity.

The actions of Medb and Mac Da Thó’s wife might be read as simplistically misogynistic in the sense that they seem to convey the idea that women, like tricksters, are duplicitous. However, being du-
licitous is far from a consistently bad trait in early Irish literature, wherein heroes frequently utilize misdirection or outright lies to meet their ends. One need only think of Fergus, who leads the Connacht troops astray in the Táin, or Cú Chulainn’s repeated use of deception. Deception often plays an ambiguous role but is not an entirely negative force. In the context of Fled Bricrenn, I suggest that the intent is to have Medb repeat the actions of Bricriu himself, and to cast her as assuming his role even as she has just assumed that of her husband. Her role is clearly similar to that of Mac Da Thó’s wife in Scela Mucce Meic Dathó, but, unlike Mac Da Thó’s wife, Medb does not attempt to influence events simply by playing the role of the “helpful woman” and persuading the actions of her husband. This shift in tone, whether the audience would have perceived it as directly referencing Scela Mucce Meic Dathó or simply some more conventional theme, again indicates how the author of Fled Bricrenn elects to produce his comic themes through the manipulation of gender expectations.

As the temporarily satisfied heroes begin their return to Emain, an additional contest interrupts their journey when they are sent by Samera to do battle with the *geniti glinni* ‘female sprites of the glen’ ([LU lines 8872]). In this battle, Lóegaire and Conall are both bested and forced to leave behind their belongings. Lóegaire is said to leave behind his arms and clothing ([LU line 8873]). Conall loses his spear, and barely escapes with his *arm laich* ‘warrior’s weapon’, or sword, intact ([LU lines 8874–75]). Even Cú Chulainn suffers to have his spear and shield shattered and his clothing rent by these feisty females. It seems fair to understand the event to have been emasculating in nature. This is not the first contest in which the heroes were forced to surrender their belongings. In an earlier encounter with vicious cats at Ailill and Medb’s court, Conall and Lóegaire left behind their meals and hid in the building’s rafters while Cú Chulainn did without sleep to protect his. In the *geniti glinni* episode, however, the tearing of clothing and shattering of spears, all of which are subsequently surrendered at the scene as the heroes flee seems to fully express this theme. In short, the men seem to be sent off from this contest with their tails between their legs (and little else). The figurative castration of the men at the hands of expressly female opponents is a humiliation that strikes directly at heroic machismo. Cú Chulainn is only able to triumph after being incited to a rage when called by the distinctly emasculating term *midlach* by his charioteer Láeg ([LU line 8878]).

The term *midlach* crops up on several significant occasions throughout this tale with very different connotations at each instance. *Midlach* is an especially loaded term in early Irish saga, too serious to be commonly leveled by one man against another even in the most violent of
boasting/insult contests (O’Leary, “Fír Fer” 27). As O’Leary has pointed out, this term is truly a direct affront to masculinity due to the affinity of the two terms, láechda (“warrior-like”) and ferda (“manly”), with midlach thus coming to mean not just “coward,” but literally “less than a man” (27). One particular use of the term in Fled Bricrenn may provide us with an even more nuanced understanding of its nature. While in Crúachu, Sencha implores Ailill to speed his verdict because the absence of the heroes will put the midlachaib at risk. Though the term in this instance has been translated before as “timid folks” (Fled Bricrend §56), given the context it seems not to be employed as an insult, but rather indicates that midlach, here appears as a generalizing term meaning at once “those who are not warriors” and “those who are not men.” That is to say, it refers to those who are unable to provide for their own martial defense, most especially women and children. Thus, in a very fundamental way, midlach, when used as an insult, undermines the very essence of masculine status and identity.

When Láeg levels this term at Cú Chulainn in the scene described above, he is using it in its most common function among warriors: to incite action through shame and rage. While Láeg’s intention is essentially benign, the effect of the term is heightened due to the conflict at hand being against female sprites who have already stripped the other contestants of their masculine raiment. Further, although Cú Chulainn is able to ultimately disprove the accusation by rallying to Láeg’s incitement, the implication is that the insult holds true for the two defeated warriors. When Medb, on the other hand, accuses Ailill of being midlachda neither the intent nor the effect of the insult is benign, as argued above. The repetition of this loaded term, coupled with the uncommonly pointed use of it by a woman against her husband, underpins the theme of gender role reversal by establishing the term as antithetical to masculinity, and then aligning the male characters with that term.

Once all three heroes finally have arrived at Emain, the Ulstermen sit down for a feast. At last, the seed of conflict planted by Medb’s gifts comes to fruition, as each warrior presents the chalice given to him as proof of his being chosen for the champion’s portion. Just as Bricriu did at the start of the contest, Medb has provided each of the heroes with a reason to claim victory, and thereby reignited the dispute. Unfortunately, the Dun Rudraíge-Ailill recension of Fled Bricrenn lacks a satisfying conclusion. Whatever close to this version may have once existed was replaced by integration into the episodes involving Cú Roi. Henderson perceived the proper close in the “solemn pledges” that are exacted of Conall and Löegaire by a figure named Uath and then Cú Chulainn himself, indicating that the heroes’ final acceptance of the
verdict was assured and honor-bound, only to be upset by the plans of the compiler to instead continue the tale (xli). However, Slotkin has argued that this entire episode should be read as the invention of the scribe $H$ who reconstructed the $LU$ manuscript after it received damage (72). Jacqueline Borsje has extended this theory by seeing the origin of the episode in a variant version of the tale, derived from a genre of “horror tales,” or $uatha$ (178). In either case, it is likely that this episode was not originally a part of the Dun Rudraige-Ailill recension prior to its integration into the current text of $Fled Bricrenn$. The original closing of the gender comedy contained in the Dun Rudraige-Ailill recension, therefore, is likely forever lost.

The theme of gender role reversal is made even more pervasive by the presence of several minor scenes that appear in the transitions between the major plot points of the tale. For instance, while departing from Crúachu to return to Emain, the three heroes pause to undertake some sport with the male and female youths of Crúachu. The boys are secretly laughing at the performances of Lóegaire and Conall, but the audience knows that they are legitimately impressed by Cú Chulainn’s feat. Cú Chulainn, however, is not able to distinguish between the derisive and genuine cheers of the boys and decides to switch tactics. Feeling himself to have failed to sway the boys, he takes up instead the distinctly feminine “weapon” of the girls’ needles, and performs a juggling feat with the tools of women’s work. Similarly, following the battle with the $geniti glinne$, Cú Chulainn departs to return to Emain but he is unknowingly pursued by Buan, the daughter of Samera. Buan became smitten with Cú Chulainn at first sight of him in her father’s court. She hunts Cú Chulainn down by following the tracks of his chariot, and makes one desperate leap towards him before her hopes end in tragedy and she falls to her death. Cú Chulainn, by contrast, is comically unaware that he is even being pursued. Although likely present in the tale, primarily as $dindshenchas$, the misadventure of Buan also contributes to the theme of active (or overactive) sexuality in the women. Additionally, Buan’s method of pursuing Cú Chulainn seems deliberately selected to mimic one of his signature feats, the “salmon’s leap.”

In this humorous tale, we have seen that women are frequently depicted as acting like men, and the men in turn often occupy the more passive role expected of women. This switching of gender roles provides one of the most consistent sources of humor throughout this interesting farce. Beyond this, the women who argue like men, tell off their husbands and take over their duties, strip down the heroes and break and steal their weapons, and even chase down their desired mates to the death create the sense of a world upside-down that permeates this tale. Through both of these effects, the women of $Fled Bricrenn$...
serve the broader interest of the tale, which questions the heroic ethic through farce. Unfortunately for them, this is accomplished through the implicitly negative comparison of men to women, and through the use of the feminine to disrupt, undermine, and mock the masculine heroic ideal.

Toner has analyzed the tale *Noíden Ulad* [The Debility of the Ulstermen] demonstrating the use of Macha as a wise female figure whose purpose is to show the rightful place of natural law over a martial heroic ethic that is depicted as arrogant and petty. Macha is depicted as a paragon of reasonableness that stands in “contrast to the lack of compassion and good sense” on the part of the Ulster warriors (97). The same cannot be said of the women of *Fled Bricrenn*. While still certainly discernable as strong female characters, they are not cast in a comparatively positive light to the self-involved, arrogant men in their company. Rather, they act as mirror images of them that throw an unflattering reflective light on the inadequacy of the heroic honor code. The role of the feminine as device thus changes even as the effect is much the same: to cast martial ethics as crass, trivial, and ineffectual.

It is difficult not to read the tale as comic if only for the fact that it can hardly be denied that the heroes are presented to the audience as easily duped and vainglorious to the point of absurdity. Humiliation is a theme that appears throughout the tale, from the opening feast which ends with Bricriu cast on his own garbage heap to the recurrent theme of the heroes being stripped of their belongings. The frequent juxtaposition of pridefulness and humiliation alone makes it difficult, if not impossible, to read the tale as simply ‘traditional’ or as anything like a straightforward celebration of the heroic past. The Dun Rudraíge-Ailill recension of *Fled Bricrenn* portrays a world turned upside-down where expectations based on gender are reversed and manipulated, resulting in scene after scene of comically incongruent outcomes. It is very different from that of the Emain-Cú Roí recension, which, as Hellmuth argues, seems to be a much less subversive celebration of the figure of Cú Roí (69).

The misogynistic function of the gender role reversal theme need not, however, foreclose all feminist discussion of the very active female characters that we find in *Fled Bricrenn*. Findon has applied a feminist analysis to Emer’s speech acts, concluding that Emer’s voice can be seen as a force of resistance to the misogynistic suppression of female speech, even if any effect of her role in the actual narrative of the contest is negligible (82–83). While Emer’s ability to speak so freely and brazenly in this tale is, as I have argued here, rooted in her temporary and illusory claim to masculine authority through a theme of gender role reversal, the critiques that she issues on, for example, Sencha’s
misogynistic rebuke of the women are there and present in the text for all to see (or potentially hear in a performance). *Fled Bricrenn* is a complex text and, particularly due to its comic nature, the responses of male and female audience members may have been correspondingly complicated. Lisa Perfetti has discussed the multivalent function of the cuckoldling woman, or “woman on top” figure in medieval comic literature and has pointed out that:

... [A]lthough gender may have caused men and women to interpret a comic text differently, they could both respond with laughter. When a woman outwits her husband, a man in the audience can laugh because he judges himself to be superior to the man who has let a woman usurp his authority or because he recognizes that his own fears about his masculine role are not his alone. Women, observing what the heroine gets away with, release, through their laughter, the frustrations built up by the limitations they experience but cannot express so directly. (25)

Our understanding of the role of gender in early medieval literature, such as *Fled Bricrenn*, must therefore be equally prepared to regard its various thematic functions. The theme of gender unites this tale and provides the intentional foundation for much of the humor that it contains. Beyond enhancing our understanding of the nature and purpose of *Fled Bricrenn* itself, noting the clever manipulation of social norms that takes place here is further indicative of the tremendous sophistication of the early Irish literary tradition.

Appendix: Significant characters mentioned from *Fled Bricrenn*

Ailill: The husband of Queen Medb, and king of Crúachu (the province of Connacht), which neighbors and frequently comes into conflict with Ulster.

Bricriu: The trickster archetype of the Ulster Cycle and malevolent host of the initial feast in *Fled Bricrenn*.

Buan: The daughter of one of the contest judges, Samera, who falls in love with Cú. Chulainn and pursues him to her death.

Conall Cernach: A major hero in the Ulster Cycle and one of the competitors for the *curathmír*.
Cú Chulainn: The preeminent hero of the Ulster Cycle, generally distinguished for his youth, superior ability, and the ferocity of his battle furor.

Cú Roí: A noble man associated with Munster, he is usually portrayed as a magician or semi-supernatural figure. His figure is central to the portions of the tale contained in the Emain: Cú Roí recension, but he is entirely absent from the Dun Rudraíge-Ailill recension discussed here. See Hellmuth, “The Role of Cú Roí in Fled Bricrenn” for a full discussion of his appearance in this tale.

Emain: The central court of the province of Ulster.

Emer: The wife of Cú Chulainn.

Láeg: Cú Chulainn’s charioteer. In Irish tradition, charioteers have a very significant relationship with the heroes they serve, and Láeg appears throughout the cycle as Cú Chulainn’s closest associate.

Lóegaire: A major hero in the Ulster Cycle and one of the competitors for the curathmír.

Medb: Queen of Crúachu, she appears elsewhere in the Ulster Cycle as a domineering woman.

Sencha: Chief druid of the court of Emain, he attempts to calm the contentions between both the men and women in Fled Bricrenn.

Notes
1. The works of Posidonius are lost, but survive in fragment as quoted in later authors. See Athenæus, IV.40.

2. As will be discussed below, this contest belongs to a part of Fled Bricrenn that seems to represent a separate and distinct version of the tale from that which will be discussed here.

3. Lebor na hUidre, Egerton MS 93, Trinity College MS H.3.17, and the Leiden Codex Vossianus.

4. Textual references to Fled Bricrenn in this article have been taken from the Lebor na hUidre version of the text, as edited by Best and Bergin. Hereafter, it will be referred to as LU. The translations are my own.

5. One additional manuscript, Edinburgh Gaelic MS XL, preserves only the final episode missing in the other four.

6. obit. 1106.

7. The date at which the scribe H was working is not known. Thurneysen placed his work in the thirteenth century (31); Best and Bergin see the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as possible (LU xvii–xviii); and Oskamp sees his work
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as having been concluded prior to the raid on the monastery of Clonmacnois in 1178 (135).

8. The “Ulster Cycle” is a modern appellation that refers to a group of tales in which many of the same heroes relating to the Irish province of Ulster appear.

9. For this difficult passage, I am relying on the unpublished working edition provided by Proinsias Mac Cana and Edgar Slotkin through the Irish Text Society online for both the text and translation.


11. Textual references to Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó (hereafter cited SMMD) have been taken from Rudolf Thurneysen’s edition of the text. Translations are my own.

12. Citing the boyhood deeds of Cú Chulainn in the Táin and this passage of Fled Bricrenn, the Dictionary of the Irish Language (DIL) translates the term as “stark naked” or “naked in front,” but goes on to specify that the term is used in other contexts referring to weapons, where it should be translated as “unsheathed” (30).

13. The riastrad describes a physical distortion experienced by Cú Chulainn in response to his particularly intense battle fury.

14. Táin Bó Cúailnge is generally regarded as the centerpiece of the Ulster Cycle, and is the tale that most firmly establishes Cú Chulainn as the preeminent hero of the tradition. In this scene, a young Cú Chulainn returns from his first battle experience unable to contain the warrior’s rage he has aroused. He poses a great threat to his own people until the women shame him into submission by exposing their breasts en masse. See the translation by Thomas Kinsella for an accessible version of the text.

15. These are characteristics of the strange physical distortions that overcome Cú Chulainn during his riastrad.

16. See O’Leary, “Fir Fer.”

17. The identification of these figures as female is confirmed by a gloss in the hand of H indicating that the term genaiti at line 3520 “i. mna” ‘that is to say, women’ (LU i11na). For a full list of glossary support for reading the term gen as referring to women, see Borsje 177n23.

18. “Recamni a les ém ar curaid’ ol Sencha, ‘ar is mór do midlachaib a llóg.” (“We require our heroes,’ said Sencha, ‘for their worth is great to the women and children’; LU lines 8753–54).

19. This is what the DIL suggests may have been the original sense of the word, though “the general sense in lit[erature] appears to be a coward, weakling” (463).

20. Dindshenchas are tales of place-name origin and are widespread in the Early Irish tradition. In this particular instance, the episode is said to explain the origin of the name Úaig Búana (“Buan’s Grave”).
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Burnellus Speaks: Beast Books and Beastliness in Late Twelfth-century Canterbury

Diane Heath

Introduction

Traditionally the popular medieval beast poem *Speculum Stultorum* [Mirror for Fools], by the late twelfth-century Benedictine monk Nigel Wireker of Canterbury, has been regarded as a general satire on monastic abuses, based upon the fable *The Ass and the Lionskin*. Its anti-hero Burnellus is an ass that desires a long tail to match his long ears, and after a series of adventures he ends up with a shorter tail and shorter ears. It has more recently been suggested that the long-running dispute between Christ Church cathedral monks and their archbishops, after the martyrdom of Becket, also influenced the poet and his work and Ziolkowski noted Nigel’s “active participation in the controversies” (Lawrence 38).

This article builds on this recent scholarship to discuss the political, literal, and cultural context of the *Speculum Stultorum*. Firstly, it argues that the *Speculum Stultorum* was not merely passively influenced by the dispute between the Christ Church Cathedral Priory monks and their archbishops, who were also their abbots. Instead, this essay argues that Nigel actively used his poem for sharply political ends: to persuade the Norman-French Bishop William of Ely, Richard I’s Justiciar of England, to drop his candidacy for the Canterbury archbishopric.

Secondly, it reveals a wealth of contemporary Canterbury beast art and literature, widening the poem’s source base. Evidence, not previously discussed, includes a Canterbury reference to an early form of the beast epic *Ysengrimus* and an *Aviarium*, and an extant, unedited bestiary, Paris BnF NAL 873, owned by Nigel’s contemporary Adam, sub-prior of the neighboring St. Augustine’s Abbey. This bestiary provides important context for the character of Nigel’s hero, Burnellus.

Burnellus is a talkative little donkey, and he speaks to the tensions of his times. He is the asinine and foolish hero of the *Speculum Stultorum* or *Mirror for Fools*, a late twelfth-century Latin poem, 3,900 lines long (Mozley and Raymo). The poem was written by Nigel Wireker,
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A Benedictine monk and almoner at Christ Church Cathedral Priory in Canterbury, Kent, sixty miles south-east of London (Rigg, *Name*). Canterbury cathedral was the site of numerous reported miracles at the shrine of St. Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, murdered at mass in his own cathedral on December 29, 1170 by soldiers seeking the goodwill of King Henry II (Barlow 225–49). Nigel may have known Becket, and some of his brethren witnessed the martyrdom (Mozley and Raymo 124). They hallowed the memory of Thomas, forgetting their differences with him, and maintained and “suffered for the liberty of the church of Canterbury” (Ziolkowski, *Lawrence* 37).

Nigel’s poem was popular in England and Europe as attested through over forty surviving manuscripts and incunabula produced throughout the medieval and into the early modern period (Mozley and Raymo vi). Its popularity was due to its satirical descriptions of clerical and monastic life and the gentle humour of its comic hero. Chaucer mentions in his *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* of Chanticleer that “I have wel rad in ‘Daun Burnel the Asse,’” “Daun” or “Dom” being the honorific title for a monk (*Riverside* 259; line 3312). Nigel’s poem traditionally has been seen as based upon Avianus’s fable *The Ass and the Lionskin*, unsurprisingly since Nigel himself mentions and paraphrases it in his prologue, “[R]egna licet teneat sceptrumque leonis asellus, / Juraque det populis, sempaer asellus erit” ‘[A]n ass may reign and hold the lion’s sway; And judgment give; he’ll always be an ass’ (57–58; Regenos 31). This view of the poem as a general satire on ecclesiastical abuse built upon the Avianus fable has been nuanced by investigations into how the dramatic historical context affected the Christ Church monks. There was a series of long-running conflicts over power and authority between Christ Church monks, their archbishops, and their kings, from Becket’s martyrdom in 1170 to the Translation of his body in 1220. Ziolkowski noted that these frictions “guided monastic writers in their choice of topics and in their handling of themes . . . many of them were directed to polemic connected with the archiepiscopal feuds” (*Lawrence* 35–36). These Christ Church writers included not only the poet and almoner Nigel but also the historian and sacrist Gervase and Reginald the sub prior, who collated the letters concerning the dispute. Research by Jill Mann re-dated the *Speculum Stultorum* from 1179–1180 to the 1190s and led her to argue that Nigel was seeking favor and personal promotion to another monastery from the Justiciar, papal legate, and Bishop, William of Ely (d. 1197), to whom the poem was sent (*Author* 34). This promotion would be in William’s gift; Mann posited, centering her argument on a meticulous reading of contemporary works, that Nigel expected William to become the next Archbishop of Canterbury (*Author* 20). Mann’s contemporary sources include Nigel Wireker’s works: *Speculum Stultorum* (Mann has emphasized Burnellus’s despair at “the
neglect of true merit” [3435–58; Author 10–12]); Nigel’s prefatory *Epistola ad Willelum*; and Nigel’s later prose work called the *Tractatus contra curiales et officiales clericos* (c. 1192–1194; Boumetry). In addition, Mann consulted the *Epistolae Cantuariensis* (Stubbs), Gervase of Canterbury’s historical works, and other contemporary chronicles.

This article argues with Cotts (140) and Ziolkowski (Lawrence 40) that Nigel Wireker was not seeking William as a patron, as neither the timing of Nigel’s texts nor their contents support the notion that Nigel viewed William as a potential personal benefactor. Instead it suggests that Nigel sent the poem and its accompanying epistle to William in a plea asking him not to pursue his bid to become Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Political Context of *Speculum Stultorum*

Although Burnellus the Ass wanders around Europe, visiting Salerno, Cremona, Lyons, and Paris, Nigel’s poem is very much about Canterbury. In the late twelfth century Nigel’s monastery was the site of not only martyrdom but also intimidation, inferno, and imprisonment. Becket’s horse was mutilated, its tail docked in a symbolic emasculation a week before the archbishop’s bloody martyrdom in the cathedral on December 29, 1170 (Thomas). On September 5, 1174, just before Becket’s successor, Richard of Dover, arrived in Canterbury, a fire destroyed the cathedral choir. Peter Kidson has suggested that the fire might have been arson by the monks themselves, but Draper and Hearn have disagreed with this view. In 1188 the next archbishop, Cistercian Baldwin of Forde, had the monks imprisoned in their own cloisters to try to starve them into submitting to his authority. The arguments and disputes continued even after Baldwin’s successor, Hubert Walter, was appointed. Pope Innocent III resolved the issue in 1201, only for arguments concerning regal and papal authority to break out again in 1207 over the appointment of Stephen Langton, which led to the papal interdict on England and the exile of the Cathedral Priory to St. Bertin from 1207 to 1213. To sum up, Nigel lived in interesting times.

The main dispute was between the archbishops and the priory. The Archbishop of Canterbury was also the abbot of Christ Church Cathedral Priory and the monks had been granted the right to elect their archbishop, who was also the primate of England, thus making the priory the most important monastery in England. The heritage, history, and honor of the cathedral priory, founded by St. Augustine at the beginning of the seventh century, were thus intimately connected to its archbishops, who were buried in the cathedral on their deaths, their memories lauded and their tombs tended by their monks.⁴
However, medieval archbishops needed an increasingly large entourage of trained clerics to run their growing ecclesiastical administrations and often for their duties as secular statesmen too, and these clerics needed salaried church positions. As the cathedral priory was a monastery, no such positions were available for an archbishop to bestow upon his staff. Naturally, the monks did not want to pay for the archbishop's non-monastic clerical staff and archbishops did not have the wherewithal to furnish these positions from their own resources (Mann, Author 15–16). To solve this problem, Archbishop Baldwin (1184–1190) started building a huge new cathedral just outside Canterbury to house Becket's relics and to be run by secular canons, who the monks despised. The plan separated the archbishop from his monks, took away their beloved St. Thomas, and rendered them unimportant; they forcefully opposed it (Mann, Author 24; Sweetinburgh 193).

What has this background to do with a poem about a donkey with a short tail? Mann considered the poem was written either in 1190–01 after Archbishop Baldwin's death or in 1194–05 after Hubert Walter's appointment (Author 34n133). It is possible that the poem was written over a long period, beginning in the 1170s when Louis VII was still king of France (line 201; Mozley and Raymo 2, 145) and extending to Richard I's reign, since it mentions returning from the king's court as Nigel did himself in 1189 (2638). Some of the descriptions of various religious orders might have been added later as Mozley and Raymo thought, dating the Grandmontine case to 1187–88 (167), and Mann provides some evidence that the inserted tale of the Grateful Animals was written between 1194 and 1195 (3561–3862; Author 34n133). This article proposes a more focused point to parts of Nigel's poem and Epistola. Kidson's detailed investigations have revealed that Gervase's Tractatus de combustione et reparatione Cantuarensis ecclesiae, a work recording the fire at the cathedral and the subsequent rebuilding of the quire, was a propaganda piece on behalf of the priory against their archbishop. Carol Cragoe Davidson's research has indicated that the same tract was aimed at the papal investigators sent in 1199 to assess the validity of the monks' arguments against their archbishop, while Marie-Pierre Gelin (455–56) has linked the tract to Gervase's Actus pontificum and has seen both works as presenting the same argument by the monks on the necessity of keeping archbishop, priory, and cathedral together. These works by architectural historians are important because they have established specific dates and reasons for Gervase's polemical works.

If the rhyming prologue directed to William was added in 1191, when Mann thinks the poem might have been written (Author 34), then the explanatory letter may have been sent shortly afterwards to back up
Nigel’s points. This would suggest the *Speculum Stultorum* was used, like Gervase’s *Tractatus* and *Actus*, for a specific, practical, and political purpose and was sent to William de Longchamp after the news of Baldwin’s death at Acre in November 1190 had been received in early 1191. William was, as Mann pointed out, a man of “high position”; he was not only Bishop of Ely and a papal legate but was also Justiciar in 1190-1191, ruling the south of England in Richard I’s absence on crusade. He was an able and loyal administrator who held the confidence of his king, and he sought to become the Archbishop of Canterbury (Turner, *Longchamp*; Mann, *Author* 21n81). However, Richard I’s brother John, Count of Mortain was against the Justiciar; by letter in September 1191, he specifically warned the monks not to support William’s candidature (Stubbs, *Ep. C.* letter 474). William de Longchamp’s loyal and active but tactless government, lowly birth, and huge retinues had quickly offended not only John, eager to rule in Richard’s absence, but also the barons (Balfour). The immediate problem was how to succeed in keeping William’s goodwill to preserve Christ Church Cathedral Priory from the further ire of King Richard, while not necessarily supporting William’s bid for the archiepiscopate and thus incurring John’s rage and enmity. The answer was a funny, affectionate poem about shortening tails with an appropriate sting in the tail, made clear in the dedicatory letter, “non attendentes faciem scorpionis, sed caudam. Hi sunt qui in adversis / patienter impatientium impulsiones tolerant” ‘watching not the scorpion’s head but his tail. These are the men who are tolerant of the impulsive acts of others in times of adversity’ (Mozley, *Epistola* 18, lines 76–77; Regenos 26). On the one hand, the letter delights in an old affection for William and begs for understanding of the monks’ predicament “in times of adversity,” while on the other hand the prologue to the poem makes unsubtle remarks about an ass wearing a lionskin—unsubtle because low-born William was running the country in Richard the Lionheart’s absence. It was also not particularly complimentary to Richard to depict him as an empty, and indeed for the most part of his reign absent, lionskin rather than as the Lionheart.

If the opening prologue to the poem has been seen as favouring William, the later parts of the poem are very much against proud, secularised bishops and their retinues, as Nigel’s disparaging couplet from *Speculum Stultorum* about money-grabbing and splendidous bishops makes clear: “[P]raesul amat marcam plus quam distinguere Marcum, plus et amat lucram quam facit ipse Lucam” ‘the prelate loves marks better than Mark and profit better than Luke’ (2743) sums up his disgust at their inappropriate pride, greed, and worldliness. Whereas Stubbs, William’s later biographer David Balfour, and Mann considered that the monks would have wanted William for their archbishop, he might not have necessarily been the best choice for the Priory. An important reason for Christ Church
brethren not to support William's candidacy was reported widely, including by Gerald of Wales and Ralph of Diceto, who note the involvement of William's sister, Richeut. Chroniclers describe the pursuit and violent arrest in September, 1191 of Richard I's half-brother Geoffrey, Archbishop of York, who had taken sanctuary in St Martin's Priory, Dover. Richeut sent soldiers to arrest Geoffrey who was acting as castellan of Dover Castle in her husband's absence. After a five-day siege, the Archbishop of York, still in his full regalia after celebrating mass, was dragged from his sanctuary and imprisoned by William de Longchamp's brother-in-law Matthew de Clere, who had returned to Dover Castle. Although William denied he had ordered this sacrilege, he had certainly ordered Geoffrey's arrest; it was enough for John, the barons, and the citizens of London to force him to flee into exile in October, 1191 (Bartlett 34; Clanchy 97).

This shocking incident was of the greatest significance to the Christ Church monks. The attack by soldiers was a violation of sanctuary. This violation was perpetrated on an archbishop while he was celebrating mass in Dover Priory, the daughterhouse of Christ Church. The attack was a vivid reminder of the sanctuary-breaking involved in the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket, their own and most highly-revered saint (Lovatt 27, xli–ii). It was these resonances of the martyrdom that this essay considers to have given the death-knell to the monks' support for William's candidacy. Nigel wrote his Tractatus contra curiales et officiales clericos addressed to William between 1192–94, datable by a reference to Richard I's captivity in Germany, when William had recovered from his spectacular fall and was on various diplomatic missions throughout Europe on Richard's behalf (Baxter 148–49). Despite his friendly address in the Tractatus, Nigel stressed that William had failed in all nine of his episcopal duties, which he had sworn to do, and that he should follow Becket's example and give up the chancellorship if he sought the archbishopric (Boutemy 187–94; Baswell 135). This was not a likely scenario for William, a king's man to the core. By asking "nonne ante consecrationem tuam coram Deo et hominibus primo promisisti quod omnem prudentiam tuam" 'Did you not at your consecration promise before God and all men your discretion?' and mentioning he had had to flee to France just as Becket had endured exile, Nigel was also reminding William of his poor judgment over the arrest of Geoffrey, Archbishop of York (Boutemy 187, 200). As Cotts pointed out, Nigel damningly called William a "double man" because he was both a bishop and a chancellor (10) and quoted Psalms 49:20—"Man when he was in honour did not understand: he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them"—which is the same passage used to describe the dual nature of the Onocentaur in the First family
The Bestiary and Other Beast Literature in Twelfth-century Canterbury

Both Avianus’s *The Ass and the Lionskin* and to a lesser extent the beast epic *Ysengrimus* are recognized as major sources for Nigel’s poem ([Ziolkowski, Animal Symbolism; Mann, *Aesop* 126]). Apart from the fables of Avianus, the Bayeux Tapestry, and the decorated initial of the Fox and the Stork in the Dover Bible, Mann has called the extant sources for beast literature in later twelfth-century Canterbury “meagre” (*Aesop* 100), and she has not considered the allusions to beast literature in the extant reliefs in the cathedral crypt and infirmary. Furthermore, the bestiary has not been considered as anything other than a very general influence on beast poems or beast literature (Mann, *Aesop* 23; Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals* 35), and Hugh du Fouilloy’s *Aviarium* or *Book of Birds*, which was based upon the bestiary, has not been considered at all. However, the bestiary and the *Aviarium* may have shaped aspects of the *Speculum Stultorum* to a greater degree than previously thought, not only for Nigel’s choice of an ass for his animal hero, but also in the shaping of the moralizing backdrop for his beast poem. This is because the bestiary was part of the *sensus spiritualis*, or search for spiritual meaning essential to monastic life, and the *Aviarium* was developed from the bestiary; both books were owned by monks at Christ Church in this period 1170–1207 (Ohly; Lubac).

The medieval bestiary was a spiritual work that discussed animals as *exempla* and employed rhetorical devices and mnemonic techniques as part of its teaching. It developed from the late third century *Physiologus*, with added references from Isidore of Seville’s seventh-century *Etymologiae* and other sources (besides the Bible) such as Solinus, Ambrose, and later, the *Aviarium* (James Bestiary). In the *Speculum Stultorum*, Burnellus the Ass has characteristics that resonate with chapters in the various bestiary versions or families that research indicates were then current in Canterbury. For example, the chapter on the Tame Ass (*De Asino*) was added to the Second family bestiary, just before the Wild Ass (*De Onagro* or “Onager”) (chapters 42 and 43) noting the Tame Ass is slow and lacking in reason but tolerates hard work and neglect: “tardum et nulla ratione . . . laborem tolerat, et neglentiam” (Clark, *Beasts* 155). These characteristics are noticeable in Burnellus, who learns nothing from his seven years studying in Paris (not even the name of the city), even when his teachers punish him.
cruelly for his failure to learn (1503–1570), and who also willingly works hard for his master once Bernardus has recaptured him (3560–01).

There is no chapter on the Tame Ass in the First family bestiary, only one on the Wild Ass (*De Honagro* or “Onager”), which emphasizes scriptural and patristic exegesis (M. F. Mann; C. White; Clark *Beasts*). Nigel was interested in exegesis and the allegory of the fourfold senses, which taught the literal, allegorical, moral, and spiritual meanings of words in Scripture, and was an intrinsic part of the *sensus spiritualis* of monastic culture. For example, Nigel owned books of distinctions on the Old and New Testaments (James No. 1077) and the Psalms (Ibid No. 1078). He also owned Peter Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica*; an allegorized history of the Bible. It was in his copy of Comestor (now TCC B.15.5) that he wrote several poems and notes including on fol. 78r “[I]n asino stultorum ue cordia figuratur,” ‘the stupidity of the ass is a figure for the [human] heart’. Ziolkowski noted Nigel’s enthusiasm for “nomen” and “res” to “correspond” (Lawrence 269).

Of course, the differences between the bestiary and Nigel’s beast epic are easy to spot; in beast fables and epics, the animals like Burnellus, or Bicornis and Brunetta (two cows that become stuck in frozen mud) are characters that speak. Geert van Dijk noted that Nigel’s use of forenames for animals and also his use of animal and human interaction was innovatory (Adrados, Ray, Dijk, *Fables* 702), whereas in the bestiary the animals are used as *exempla* of the natural world and do not speak (Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals* 3). As in the First family bestiary, the chapter on the “Wild Ass” is called “the Onager,” and as Nigel used the term *asinus*, the link with the Onager chapter has not yet been explored. However, the connection between monk and wild ass was well-known in the medieval period from the Bible and patristic works as Leclercq pointed out (36). Nigel’s hero, Burnellus, may derive in some part from the specific bestiary tradition in that he becomes a masterless ass (*indomitus*), in other words an *asinus agrestis*, when he leaves his master Bernardus and travels on his own around Europe. This is implied in line 3560, which tells that when he returned home, “Intrat et est domino subditus ipse suo” ‘He entered and was subject to his lord.’ The bestiary chapter on the wild ass connects the bestiary to Burnellus since it provides the reason for making him both a short-tailed ass and a monk, a connection clearly made by Nigel in his dedicatory letter to William de Longchamp, Bishop of Ely:

Asinus iste monachus est, aut vir quilibet religiosus in claustro positus, qui, tanquam asinus ad onera portanda Domini servitio est mancipatus, qui non contentus conditione sua, sicut nec asinus cauda sua. (Mozley, *Epistola* 17)
This ass represents a monk or any religious person who lives in a monastery who, like the ass, is obliged to bear burdens in the service of the Lord. He is dissatisfied with his lot as the ass with his tail. (Regenos 24)

It might be said that in this passage Nigel is discussing asinine discontent rather than monastic life and that carrying burdens (onera portanda) would indicate a tame rather than a wild ass. However, Cassian compared the onager to the hermit and used the reference to onagers in Job 39:5–8 (Petschenig 512). Constable noticed that “that the onager as a symbol of the hermit and of spiritual freedom” was found both in Cassian and Eucherius of Lyon (117). Abelard also used the onager as a metaphor for monastic life in his Rule or Institutio:

Onager quippe quem siluestrem asinum uocamus monachus est qui secularium rerum uinculis absolutus ad tranquillam uite solitarie libertatem se contulit et seculum fugiens in seculo non remansit. (Luscombe 372)

Now the wild ass, which we call the ass of the woodland, is the monk, who is freed from the chains of worldly things and has taken himself off to the peace and freedom of the solitary life; he has fled from the world and not remained in it. (Luscombe 373).

Furthermore, the onager was mentioned in the Rule of St. Isidore as a metaphor for a monk: “[O]nager enim liber dimissus monachus est, sine dominatu et impedimento saeculi Deo serviens” ‘the monk is a wild ass set free without a master and the hindrances of secular life to serve God’ (Regula Monachorum 103 558B). The First family bestiary chapter on the Onager uses Isidore’s description taken from his Etymologies (XII.i.38; Barney 129), so this connection between monk and onager in the bestiary is no coincidence. A reading of the First family bestiary chapter on the wild ass according to the precepts of the allegory of the fourfold senses, which Nigel knew well, bears out the connections made to the monastic life.

The text for this essay is taken from an unedited manuscript that belonged to a contemporary of Nigel, a Canterbury monk named Adam the Sub prior of St. Augustine’s Abbey. It is likely that Nigel knew Adam, as the adjacent Abbey’s medieval library catalogue shows that Adam not only owned three bestiaries but that he also copied Nigel’s Epistle and Speculum Stultorum (BCBB 2263). Although not definitive, this suggests that the two men were acquainted, even friends; they were fellow Benedictines who shared similar interests and similar monastic
Diane Heath
duties. Adam had been chamberlain in 1200, and sacrist in 1215, as well as sub prior (Baxter 197; Emden 5, 27139), while Nigel was almoner in 1215–1217 (Greatrex 320–21).

In Adam’s First family bestiary (BnF NAL 873, s.xii/xiii; MLGB3), the Onager literally brays or roars (rugit) at the Spring equinox (fol. 46r line 4) and three lines later it is described allegorically as a creature of the Devil—“[O]nager igitur figuram habet diaboli”—because the Devil also roars for someone to devour when souls turn from the shadow of death to the light of God and equal the faith of the patriarchs, as night equals day at the Equinox (lines 8–12). This allegory might seem incompatible with the Onager as a figure for a monk, yet medieval exegesis allowed the animal or thing to bear different meanings in a different context; for example, the Lion is also presented as a figure for the Devil here (line 13; I Peter 5:8), although in Chapter 1 of the bestiary, it is a figure for Christ. Line 14 of the Onager bestiary chapter offers another allegorical meaning derived from a different context, Isidore’s Etymologies, on the animal’s name, which means “wild one”: “Onager; interpretatur asinus ferus”; on line 15 it wanders through the desert “in deserto vagantes.” The Onager living in the desert was compared by Cassian via references to Job 39:5–8 to the hermit or monk who left the civilized world for the cloister. In lines 16–17 the biting off of the colts’ testicles by jealous older males—“Nascentibus masculis zelant. et te / sticulos morsibus detruncant”—symbolized the moral of monastic celibacy. And in line 17, the mother onagers hide groups of their young colts in the desert from the older males: “quod caventes matres; eos in secretis occultant”. These mothers provide the final spiritual lesson of the chapter symbolizing the enclosed monastic life where Mother Church protects her sons. This section of the First family bestiary chapter, taken from Isidore’s Etymologiae, was a metaphor for monastic life governed by the Divine Office and the rigors and virtues of monastic celibacy, which took biblical and patristic sources and wove them together to allow further memory hooks to be associated with the word for onager. Nigel’s Epistle to William remarked that the ass represented a monk or other religious official who hankered after secular promotion (in what may be termed a devilish pride) and wanted an abbey for himself, with a trail of relatives behind him like a tail: “abbatiam posset sibi apprehendere, ubi parentum suorum sequelem . . . quasi caudam” (Mozley, Letter 17, lines 36–38). This might be said to imply a view of the wild ass as a figure for the devil. Yet Nigel saw that such frivolity and stupidity was against the nature of a monk—“contra naturam sibi” (line 22)—who can only gain salvation from perseverance in his cloister no matter how weary he is of it: “quia vitam claustralem in qua cebet in finem perseverare ut salvus” (lines 32–33).
The third relevant creature that Nigel would have read about in a First family bestiary, such as Adam’s extant copy (now Paris BnF NAL 873), was the hybrid Onocentaur or Ass-centaur. This creature has the limbs and torso of a wild ass but the upper parts of a man: “Onocentaurus duabus naturis constare; phisiologus asserit id est superior pars hominis similis. inferioris vero partis membra; sunt / nature valde agrestis” (BnF NAL 873, fol. 42 r). These “upper parts” include the head of a man, which means the Onocentaur has human speech and reasoning (like a centaur). The creature is not only compared (using James 1.8) to duplicitous hypocrites, outwardly pious although inwardly sinful, but also to unintelligent and foolish beasts of burden: “iumentis insipientibus” (Ps. 49.20). The ass-centaur, like its feminine counterpart the singing siren or mermaid, is linked to Babylon and thus to evil in Isaiah (Is. 34.13–14).

As Burnellus is a talking ass, he is a form of Onocentaur (part human and part ass) and harbors the very human failings attributed to this creature in the bestiary: the two natures, inconstancy, and having only the appearance of godliness. As mentioned with regard to the political context, Nigel draws on the same quote in his Tractatus to describe the cleric serving both the king and God (Boutemy 176). Rather than a fable-inspired animal on the trope of asinine stupidity, pride and greed, Burnellus carries a much heavier moral, spiritual, and political burden, as a figure for the human heart, which is especially relevant to a “monk or other religious” whom he mentioned in his letter to William.

We have established that there are some analogies between the bestiary Ass, Onager, Onocentaur, and Burnellus. Yet how do we know if Nigel ever read a bestiary? These are rather general references after all. Nigel did not own a bestiary and there are no direct quotes from the bestiary in the poem. More evidence is required to make a convincing case. In First family bestiaries the Onager chapter is followed by the chapter on the simia or Ape, whereas in the Second-family bestiary they have been separated. Both the Onager and the Ape are linked to the devil, the former by braying, the latter by ugliness and also, interestingly, by the lack of a tail. The reference to the ape's tail and the devil is made because both devil and ape have a head (that is a “beginning”) and neither has a tail (or an “end”): “Simius caput quidem habet, caudam vero non habet” (Curley 39). As T. H. White explained, these are wordplays on cauda (“tail”) and caudex (“[block]head”) and codex, for “Scripture”; that is the Devil has no cauda or codex, (White, Beasts 34). The bestiary chapter then adds that some kinds of apes also have tails (BnF NAL 873 fol. 46v lines 4–10). Ends, tails, or the lack thereof, and the Devil are very much part of this First family bestiary’s chapter’s theme, just as they are in the Speculum Stultorum.
The comment on the long and luxuriant queues or tails of relatives and hangers-on trailing behind abbots and priors, “Asinus iste monachus . . . cauda sua,” which Nigel mentioned in his letter to William, links these men of high Church status to the sin of devilish pride (Mozley, Epistola line 17). Nigel also used similar word plays about heads and tails when he attacked the corruption of the Papal Court, in the following lines:

Sed conversa retro rediit, fideique prioris
Immemor in caudam fecit abire caput
Si caput a capio vel dixeris a capiendo
Tunc est ipsa caput, omnia namque capit. (2510–12)
But having turning round, without regard
To faith and name it made its tail its head
If caput you should claim from capio
Then it is caput since it captures all (Regenos 119)

Nigel continues with puns on caput and capio (“to take”), rather than cauda, and these are tropes in anti-papal writings of this period. Nevertheless, the idea that the onager and the tail-less ape are associated with monasticism is strengthened by the bestiary’s strong opening image, which connects braying with praying—the monk called by the bell as the onager brays to the equinox. Nigel criticizes the Cistercians by comparing Fromund’s slow ass-like speed when called by bells to mass instead of meals: “[S]ed pede spondaico gressu gradiens asinine / Ut solet ad laudes nocte venire” (883–84; Regenos 63).

This association of ideas between monks and tails and among the Ass-centaur, Onager, and Ape from the bestiary has not previously been considered. Yet bestiary teachings were a vital part of the monastic culture of Christ Church; Honorius Augustodunensis had written a series of sermons including bestiary references specifically for the priory called Speculum Ecclesiae (Flint 112). These bestiary chapters nuance the Speculum Stultorum as a beast epic solely dependent on beast epic and fable. Adam’s extant bestiary is a significant, valuable, and contemporary source for Nigel Wireker’s poem. The bestiary comparisons serve to emphasize how the poem, as part of the sensus spiritualis of the Benedictine rule, involves the search for the divine in all of nature, not only in the animal.

In the Christ Church library two bestiaries were shelved in the Physica section next to lapidaries and herbals, which because of their early numbering are likely to date from Becket’s time (James xxxix, BC4.483 and 484). Furthermore, cross-matching the medieval library catalogue with the priory’s biographical register (compiled by
Greatrex) has revealed that Nigel’s fellow monk Aaron, conveniently the only monk so named at Christ Church, owned a *Libellus de naturis quorumdam auium moraliter expositis*, in other words, excerpts from an Aviary (James 99; Greatrex 66). This is an interesting find, even though the book is not extant, because “The Raven’s Opinion” section of the *Speculum Stultorum* has similarities to chapter forty of the *Aviarium*, “On Ravens.” For example, the Raven’s black plumage represents talkative preachers and sinners (2923–3076; Clark, *Birds* 755). The Cock’s reply (3077–3200) reveals Nigel’s dislike of black-robed secular canons just as clearly as his description of their Order (2315–70; Mann, *Author* 24–25), accusing ravens of being treacherous, gluttonous, vain, disloyal carrion eaters (3100–04); these condemnations are also found in the *Aviarium* (lines 3078–3200; Clark, *Birds* 755). This is important evidence of another source for the *Speculum Stultorum* related to the bestiary.

There is other evidence from both Christ Church Cathedral Priory and St. Augustine’s Abbey that points to a rich vein of beast art and literature in Canterbury in this period. Christ Church library had a twelfth-century copy of Isidore’s *Etymologies* (BC1.196), an important source for the bestiary, as well as an *Avianus* (BC1.164) and the *Fabule Ysopice* (BC4.495). Some Christ Church books with decorated initials have depictions of an ass playing a musical instrument, a trope called *asinus ad lyram* derived from Phaedrus (Riley 443), which Boethius used in his *Consolationes* (of which Christ Church held seven copies [BC1.80–86]). This trope results from Philosophy asking, “Do you listen as the dull ass to the lyre?,” meaning with incomprehension at the beauty of the music (Adolf 53). Cleaver has shown that these images of asses were used to refer to the ignorance of students, and she sums up the Phaedrus tale as “[it is] useless to try to do things one is unfitted for” (76), which is rather appropriate given *Speculum Stultorum*’s concern with accepting what nature has given (Mozley, *Epistola* 17) and given Nigel’s depiction of the English students at the Schools of Paris (1502–70). An *asinus ad lyram* allusion is found in the remnants of a magnificent twelfth-century Christ Church *Passionale* (CCA Lit E. 42, f.35v). In the late eleventh-century carved crypt capitals of the cathedral, there are several examples of this trope, with fantastical goats and donkeys playing musical instruments, breaking boundaries and conventions (like Burnellus), as animals can neither play nor understand music, and pointing to human imagination being a poor imitation of God’s Creation (Heslop 153–54). The Abbey library also held an undated copy of various twelfth-century satirical texts, including *De Wlpe et lupo*, an early form of *Ysengrimus*, which is a source of some episodes in Nigel’s *Speculum Stultorum* (BCBB 908). This indicates Nigel may have borrowed this book from St. Augustine’s
Abbey and naturally gives added weight to the notion that he also lent and borrowed books from Adam.

Conclusion

Nigel had a variety of potential sources at his disposal to take his short-tailed ass on a journey that of course should have been a spiritually-focused *peregrinatio* but remains a steadfastly self-centred *curiositas*—mundane and prosaic but also humorous and picaresque. As Nigel shows, this humble and lowly ass initially literally longed for a luxurious tail and wanted to become allegorically as powerful as a regal lion, or, with his equally long ears formed into a mitre, like a proud bishop. Yet, finally and morally to the point, Burnellus has his ears shortened to match his docked tail and returns to his beginning but not his end—his *caput* but not his *cauda*. In this he achieves a spiritual simplicity that pokes gentle fun at those of his brethren who achieved high office, such as Benedict who became Abbot of Peterborough, Alan of Tewkesbury, and Roger of St. Augustine’s. Nigel may, as Mann argues, have experienced the bitterness of disappointed hopes for his own advancement (*Author* 34). However, while Burnellus hankers after promotion, he is as Nigel made him—that is, as a stupid ass whose desires are *frivola* (“frivolous”) and *fatua* (“foolish”) (Mozley, *Epistola* 17, lines 40, 115). More telling is the fact that when the little donkey returns home to his master, he does not speak again and silently takes up his burden afresh as humble monks should do. This reading contextualizes the historical and literary evidence to enhance the understanding of Nigel’s work as a poem with a much more nuanced, highly-charged political argument that was nevertheless formed from a deep understanding of Benedictine identity and the monastic *sensus spiritualis*.

Nigel Wireker’s *Speculum Stultorum* is rooted in Canterbury, rooted in the Benedictine *sensus spiritualis*, and rooted in the vicious and bloody politics of its author’s time, which saw an archbishop martyred in his own cathedral and monks later threatened and imprisoned by their own archbishop. To forge from this a playful, wordy ass looking for a longer tail might seem to emphasize monastic weakness rather than strength. Yet Burnellus lives on, becoming a more human (and handed) hybrid monster in fifteenth-century woodcuts, continuing to direct his *Mirror for Fools* and his monstrous braying laugh at the powerful, rich and greedy. This essay has sought to re-frame how beast literature spoke to political and monastic tensions in late twelfth-century Canterbury by adding the bestiary to the beast fable and beast epic as sources for the *Speculum Stultorum*. In doing so, it nuances the poem with an understanding of the philology developed from St. Augustine
of Hippo, Isidore of Seville, and the bestiary. These all taught a spiritual understanding of the whole of the natural world. These works make monsters and marvels not unnatural but rather the portents of God’s will. Burnellus is a monstrous hybrid of monk and beast, the willing bearer of Christ, equating honor with onus: an apt pun to end the tale of short-tailed monks.

Notes
1. I should like to thank the Grants Committee of the Canterbury Historical and Archaeological Society for their financial support towards the research and writing of this article. I am very grateful to Professor Louise Wilkinson, Dr. Sheila Sweetinburgh, Dr. Patricia Stewart, and the anonymous reader for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. Naturally, all errors are my own. For Nigel’s biography see A. G. Rigg, “Canterbury, Nigel of (c.1135–1198?)” and Greatrex (320–21). There has been much discussion on what to call Nigel, as in A. G. Rigg’s “Nigel of Canterbury: what was his name?” (304–07). Jan Ziolkowski preferred Nigel of Canterbury (Lawrence 1). Jill Mann chose Nigel Longchamp (Aesop 100), and William Urry considered Witeker the most likely surname (159), as did Bruce C. Barker-Benfield (BCBB 1471). Joan Greatrex preferred Nigel Wireker (320–21), and although this is almost certainly an error introduced by the antiquarian John Bale, it is still the most common and recognizable name for him; accordingly Nigel Wireker is used in this article.

The scholarly edition of the Speculum Stultorum is by Mozley and Raymo and line references are to this edition; however, Jill Mann is preparing a new one. An earlier scholarly edition by T. Wright (Anglo-Latin) includes the prefatory “Letter to William” (Epistola ad Willelhum), but a more scholarly edition of the letter is given by Mozley (Epistola); both texts are translated by Regenos.

2. Speculum Stultorum, lines 1–80. Lines 57–58; the fable appears in Hervieux (267): “At mihi, qui quondam, semper asellus eris”; it is Fable H.199 in Hausrath. G. van Dijk discusses the Speculum Stultorum (Adrados 702–04) and notes Nigel’s innovatory use of forenames for animals and also humans engaging with the animals. See also Mann, Aesop 102.

3. Stubbs edited this letter collection in Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I: Epistolae Cantuarienses; hereafter referred to as Ep C followed by the referred to letter’s number.

4. Nigel Wireker’s poem, listing and praising the Archbishops of Canterbury, finished with Richard of Dover (Boutemy 1001–03); Archbishop Richard died in 1184 and the poem generally has been assigned to this date. However, Ziolkowski (Lawrence 38–39) thought the poem might be “an attempt to shame Archbishop Baldwin into living up to his predecessors.” The lines 72–73 “Plantet et expellat tua dextera, uimque repellat / Viribus, excellat ne uir, qui nigra nigellat,” may be a reference to Archbishop Baldwin’s attempt to
5. Mann summarizes the key events but has discussed neither Peter Kidson’s article nor M. Gibson’s edited chapter, “Normans and Angevins 1070–1220” (38–68), which is especially relevant from 63–68, a section on the monks’ pyrrhic victory, since the archbishops moved eventually to Lambeth.

6. Neither Kidson, Cragoe Davidson, nor Pierre Gelin mention Nigel Wireker or the recent scholarly articles on him; none of the scholarship on Nigel mentions recent work on Gervase by architectural historians, and yet their work is pertinent to an understanding of the context of the Speculum Stultorum.

7. Jean Flori notes that Richard “earned the nickname ‘Lionheart’” during his campaign in Aquitaine in 1175 (42). This is much earlier than Gillingham’s reference to “coeur de lion” used by Ambroise in lines 2310–20 concerning Richard’s exploits at Acre in the First Crusade (3).

8. Letter ccclxxi and Stubbs, Richard I 344; See Balfour: “The failure of Longchamp’s brief and tumultuous regency (1190–01) was not due primarily to his own shortcomings as an administrator, but to the scheming of the powerful Prince John” (1).

9. Mann lists the contemporary chronicle reports (Author 16 n49); N. Karn, (EEA 31 lxxxii–xc). Gerald of Wales (Galfridi 388–89), and Ralph of Diceto (96–97) both mention Richeut, William’s sister, and I am very grateful to Professor Louise Wilkinson for these references.

10. Bartlett describes a factional coup against William de Longchamp; M. T. Clanchy considers the event to have had a more popular character.

11. Mann links the lines where Bicornis and Brunetta are stuck in the frozen mud in Speculum Stultorum (205–594) to the beast epic Ysengrimus, where the tail of the eponymous wolf is frozen in the river (126).

12. Mann is principally concerned with beast poems and beast epics but notes, “The bestiary has, however, a minor role to play at various points in my argument” (Aesop 23). Ziolkowski considers that the bestiary via the Physiologus “may have affected beast poetry indirectly, through the allegorical approach to animals that it embodied” (Talking Animals 35).

13. Lubac begins his series on medieval exegesis with the distich that sums up the fourfold allegory: “Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria / Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia” ‘The letter teaches events, allegory what you should believe / Morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for’ (1).

14. Adam the Sub prior owned three bestiaries, two of which are not extant but are listed in the library catalogue as BA1.869 (BCBB 811) and BA1.1557 (BCBB 1471) both called Liber Bestiarum. Baxter used the secundo folio references in the St. Augustine’s medieval library catalogue and traced both (deret in and feminas) to First family bestiaries (173). However, Baxter’s attri-
bution of BA1.869 rests on a scribal error, “videret” for viderit, but “deret in” is found in “patre descenderet in uterum virgini” from the second paragraph of the primo natura section of the Lion chapter. This could apply to both illustrated Transitional and Second family bestiaries, but more closely matches extant versions of Transitional bestiaries. Furthermore, only in Transitional and Second family bestiaries does the word feminas appear early enough to be a secundo folio where it is found in the phrase “In viros potius quam in feminas seviunt” in the first chapter on the Lion and its third nature. It is not possible to be definite but the secundo folio is closest to other extant Second family bestiaries. These secundo folio re-readings indicate that Adam the Sub prior owned at least two and probably three different types of bestiary: the extant First family BA1.783; what was possibly a non-extant Transitional bestiary (without a prefatory cycle), BA1.869; and what was possibly a non-extant Second family bestiary, BA1.1557.

15. Physiologus editions are in Carmody and translated in Curley. The Etymologies are in Lindsay and translated in Barney. Baxter discusses bestiary development from the Physiologus (29). The only edition of the First family bestiary is London, BL Royal 2 C XII in M. F. Mann (37–73), but there are scholarly editions of the Second family bestiary, Willene Clark (Beasts) and the contemporaneous Transitional version by Cynthia White (Ark). The scholarly edition of the Aviarium of Hugh de Fouilloy is also by Willene Clark (Birds).

16. Extant First family bestiaries include the following: Brussels, Bibl. Royale 10074; London, British Library Royal 2 C XII; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 602, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 247 and Paris BnF NAL 873. The latter was owned by Adam, sub prior of St. Augustine’s Abbey.

17. Isaiah 34.13–14: “[Babylon] shall be a habitation of sirens and a courtyard of ostriches. [v.14] Demons shall meet with donkey–centaurs [onocentaurs] and call one to another; there donkey–centaurs shall repose for they have found for themselves a place to rest” (Septuagint).

18. James 99, BC4.1041 Sermo, Parate viam domine, included the libellus de naturis quorumdam avium moraliter expositis. These books of Aaron’s were listed on f.141r of the medieval library catalogue while Nigel’s were on f.141v; the closeness is an indication that Aaron died only a short period before Nigel.

19. Helen Adolf pointed out the idea was “to extol the unplayed music in the harp, not to disparage the donkey” (53).

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Victories Foretelling Disgrace: Judicial Duels in the Prose *Lancelot*

*David S. King*

Much of the thirteenth-century French Prose *Lancelot* glorifies the love between Lancelot and Guenevere. On that point, critics agree. In the early twentieth century, scholars saw the final third of the romance, the *Agravain*, as denigrating that love and turning toward the ascetic concerns of the next installment in the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle, *La Queste del Saint Graal*. In 1986, Elspeth Kennedy, informed by her work as editor and translator of the non-cyclic version of the romance, *Lancelot do Lac*, proposed an earlier moment of transition in the cyclic romance. She notes a “major change in direction” beginning halfway through the narrative that “helps prepare the way for the very different attitude towards the moral value of Lancelot and Guenevere’s love to be found later in the cycle” (257). In a more recent volume, Annie Combes concurs, indicating the same juncture as the beginning of Lancelot’s “stagnation éthique et guerrière, que ne boulverse pas même son passage au château du Graal” ‘ethical and martial stagnation that even his visit to the Grail castle does not perturb’ (366). But some have questioned whether there is any meaningful transition at all. Carol Dover downplays the importance of the “denunciations of the hero” that “come from monastic or hermit figures” (67). The latest to weigh in on the debate, David F. Hult, claims that even in the *Agravain*, “l’amour est exalté par-dessus tout” ‘love is exalted above all else’ (62). Other recent scholarship has done little to alleviate these doubts. Those addressing the harmony of spirit between the two romances focus their attention on overt references to the Grail adventure of the sort that Dover and Hult dismiss as interpolations alien to the concerns of the original author(s) of the Prose *Lancelot*. Demonstrating a “change in direction” integral to the romance requires instead an examination of elements in the narrative with no apparent connection to the Grail story.

The romance’s judicial duels provide just such material, and a careful reading of them affirms Combes’s and Kennedy’s judgment about the moment of transition. As in other medieval romances, the narrator suggests and characters assume divine participation in these duels, provided certain procedures are followed. Lancelot serves as champion in five of the romance’s eleven trials by combat, yet only one of his duels conforms to the tradition of oaths and pledges. In that instance, the romance’s last judicial contest, Lancelot defends a knight falsely
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accused of attempting the very transgression he himself commits—sleeping with another man’s wife. The acquittal bears the imprimatur of immanent justice, while the facts of the case draw attention to Lancelot’s sin with the queen. His four other duels, the first of which takes place at the romance’s midpoint, either involve Guenevere directly or arise from his protection of her. Although the causes are dubious, he emerges victorious in each contest. However, these results suggest neither a failure of the judicium Dei nor divine sanction for the lovers’ adultery. Because the trials deviate from customary procedures, the narrative annuls any suggestion of immanent involvement. As a consequence, we must understand Lancelot’s victories as stemming from his virtue alone. With these unaided triumphs, the romance simultaneously underscores Lancelot’s moral superiority over others and his moral distance from the Almighty. The four duels thus prefigure his eventual disgrace more faithfully than do the prophetic voices in the romance that lay the blame solely on his lust. In the Queste, long after renouncing his sin with the queen, Lancelot endures repeated humiliations. The very self-sufficiency that serves him well in the more natural circumstances of the Prose Lancelot proves to be his undoing in the supernatural realm of the Grail adventure.

Generally speaking, judicial duels in medieval literature serve a simple purpose. They draw a bright moral line between hero and villain. All trial by combat in the Prose Lancelot performs that basic function. The first two duels in the romance highlight the perfidiousness of King Claudas who disinherits Lancelot and his cousins, Bors and Lionel. In each case, Claudas encourages a seneschal or man who would become seneschal to fight against a loyal vassal of the defeated King Ban or King Bors. In the first duel, Banin, godson of Ban, accuses the seneschal of betraying his king, a crime of which the reader knows the seneschal to be guilty. In the second, Pharian, a knight earlier disinherited by King Bors, denies betraying Claudas by harboring Bors’s children. Following the swearing of oaths, the combatants then offer their gages, a token pledge that they will appear at the appointed time and place for the duel, and someone on each side expresses confidence in immanent justice. Pharian’s nephew presents an expression of this belief, one that implies God’s role in the judgment. He says of the champion: “s’il en a droit, si se desfende seurement contre le millor chevalier del monde, car desloiautés fait au besoig de boin chevalier mauvais et loiautés fait bon chevalier et seur de cheli qui onques ne l’avra esté” (7:50) ‘if he is in the right, he should defend himself with confidence against the finest knight in the world, because disloyalty turns a good fighter into a bad one, and a knight who is true fights well and confidently even if he has never done so before’ (3:25). When
the nephew explains how his uncle, who still owes loyalty to Bors, can protect the children without betraying Claudas, the accuser “ne se tint pas si aigres com il avoit avant fait” (7:51) ‘lost his earlier vehemence’ (3:25). He senses the faultiness of his cause but cannot retract his oath without disgrace. He, like Ban’s seneschal, meets with a quick end. The description of each battle amounts to a single sentence indicating the triumph of Banin in the first instance and that of Pharian in the second ([7:21; 3:12], [7:52; 3:25]). This brevity underscores the conflict’s narrative function, that of drawing moral distinctions. For these first two duels, there is no need to insist on the prowess of the combatants—as the author does with the romance’s next pair of duels involving Hector and Gawain ([8:294–302; 3:366–71], [8:348–62; 3:393–400]). The circumstances leading up to the trials rather than the fights themselves point to the real villain, Claudas. Banin and Pharian are foils for his evil, and the vanquished champions are mere proxies of king.

The moral distinctions in Lancelot’s duels are less categorical. His first judicial combat arises in the False Guenevere episode where the queen’s half-sister persuades King Arthur that she, rather than Guenevere, is his lawful spouse. To prove that Guenevere is in fact Arthur’s wife and to spare her from a sentence of mutilation and exile, Lancelot offers to fight three knights. Near its conclusion, the non-cyclic Lancelot do Lac features the same imposture and ensuing conflict. In this much briefer narrative that closely resembles the first half of the cyclic romance, the duel follows the pattern established in the previous four trials, though with greater detail devoted to the process. Both sides offer their gages, and then “li rois fait aporter les sainz, si jurerent li chevalier tot premieurement que il savoient que la reine avoit faite cele traïson. Et Lanceloz jura aprés que issi li aïst Dex et li saint com il sont parjuré de ce sairement” ‘the king had relics brought out; the knights swore first that the queen had committed that treason; Lancelot swore after them, on God and his saints, that they had just sworn a false oath’ (1:604). He then kills his three opponents in quick succession. In the cyclic version, both sides also present their gages. However, an argument erupts about the unequal burden Lancelot has assumed, distracting all concerned from what would ordinarily come next: the swearing of oaths. Only after Lancelot has dispatched the first two opponents do the barons who support the false Guenevere notice the omission. At this point, they call for oaths to be sworn, but Lancelot’s friend Galehaut circumvents their effort by having a horn sounded to begin the third combat “por ce qu’il cremoit encore que la roine eust tort et que li juge mens fust droituriers” (1:141) ‘because he had some lingering fear that the queen might be guilty and the condemnation just’ (4:63). The text leaves uncertain whether Galehaut believes Guenevere to be an impos-
tor or not, but such precision is unnecessary; putting the thought in his head points clearly enough to another transgression. He arranged the meeting between Lancelot and Guenevere that allowed the young, bashful knight to express his affection for the queen. The two lovers have consummated their adulterous passion by this point, so Galehaut knows, as does the reader, that if the queen has not committed “cele traïson” ‘that treason,’ she has committed another. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the flawed quality of the process translates into an equivocal result for her. In the non-cyclic romance, Lancelot’s triumph leads immediately to the execution of the false Guenevere and of her accomplice Bertelay the Old. The true Guenevere and Arthur resume their relationship as before. In the cyclic romance, on the other hand, Lancelot’s victory spares the queen mutilation but not exile. Arthur remains with the imposter as his spouse, and Guenevere leaves with Lancelot—their adultery in abeyance—until the false Guenevere and Bertelay confess their crime.

The Prose Lancelot borrows its next duel from Chrétien de Troyes’s work, the Chevalier de la charrete. Indeed, the prose author integrates, with some modifications, the entirety of Chrétien’s poem into his narrative. In both romances, Meleagant abducts Guenevere, and Sir Kay attempts unsuccessfully to rescue the queen. Lancelot then fights Meleagant in single combat to liberate her, Sir Kay, and other prisoners from Arthur’s kingdom held in Gorre where Meleagant’s father, Bademagu, reigns as king. Fearing his son will be dishonored and perhaps killed, Bademagu promises that he and Lancelot may resume the fight later. In the Chevalier de la charrete, the resumption is to occur one year later at Arthur’s court. In the Prose Lancelot, the timing is less precise. The king tells Meleagant that “de quele ore qu’il voldroit qu’il iroit a la cort le roi Artu et semondroit Lancelot” (2:67) ‘whenever he wanted, he could go to Arthur’s court and would summon Lancelot’ (4:224). In the interim, the prisoners will return to Logres. However, while all concerned are still in Gorre, cause for a separate dispute arises. Meleagant discovers blood on Guenevere’s bed and he swears on holy relics that the blood is Sir Kay’s. Lancelot, who bled on the sheets and slept with the queen, then swears on the relics that Meleagant has perjured himself. This judicial encounter also terminates prematurely at Bademagu’s request. In the Prose Lancelot, Meleagant accepts the truce “kar il puet recover a sa bataille com il velt” ‘since he could resume his battle as he wished’ and, in a rage, “dist qu’il ocirra Lancelot a ses .II. mains, ains qu’il isse del païs” (2:80) ‘swore that he would kill Lancelot with his own two hands before he left the country’ (4:231). Later, the narra-
tor tells us that “Lancelos . . . molt li tarde qu’il soit vengiés de l’home del monde qu’il plus het” (2:105) ‘Lancelot . . . was extremely eager to avenge himself against the man he hated most in the world’ (4:243). Meleagant later comes to Arthur’s court and invokes the promise made to him at the end of his first battle with Lancelot. In the Prose Lancelot, Arthur grants the missing Lancelot a forty-day grace period. In both romances, with the help of Meleagant’s half-sister, Lancelot escapes the prison where Meleagant ordered him held and presents himself at the appointed time. In light of the expressions of animus, the evocation of the promise, the timing, and the location of the final encounter, it is clear that we are to understand this third battle as a continuation of the initial single combat rather than as a resumption of the judicial duel. Meleagant dies, not for swearing a false oath, but for his perfidy in abducting the queen and imprisoning Lancelot. When Lancelot slays him, he does so by virtue of his own prowess. The prose author, like Chrétien, thus avoids the suggestion that God helps a morally fraught cause, one where the accuser perjures himself but where the accused is nonetheless guilty.

In the romance’s seventh trial, Lancelot’s third duel, he again champions the cause of a woman who has committed the act of which she is accused. Meleagant’s sister has been condemned to burn, according to her would-be executioner, “[d]e ce qu’ele delivra Lancelot por Meleagan ocirre, son frere” (2:220) ‘because she freed Lancelot so that he could kill her brother, Meleagant’ (4:301). To these words, Lancelot responds: “[s]e vos . . . osiés mostrer qu’ele eust fet traïson ne murdre, je seroie pres del deffendre” (2:220) ‘if you dare claim that she has committed treason or murder, I am ready to defend her’ (4:301). The knight who seeks her death says he has no need to fight because the accused failed to find a champion by the appointed time, but he says: “je sent ma querele a si loial” (2:220) ‘I feel my case so legitimate’ (4:301), that he will defend it nonetheless. Not only does the reader know that she liberated Lancelot so that he could fight her brother, but she admits as much in a valedictory lament given just before Lancelot’s arrival. Because Meleagant disinherited his sister, perhaps she owes him no loyalty and therefore cannot betray him. By liberating Lancelot she certainly undoes her brother’s treachery, so perhaps her champion’s reformulation of the charge makes her cause into a righteous one.

Nevertheless, we must note how the author frames the rescue scene. Lancelot does not happen upon the execution pyre by accident but learns at another location of the lady’s distress and of the reasons for it. As he comes to her aid, he stumbles upon the tomb of his friend, Galehaut who has essentially died of grief because he believes Lancelot dead. Lancelot’s thoughts then turn to suicide, until a messenger from
the Lady of the Lake intercedes and dissuades him from harming himself. Thus the author reminds us of the one who first put Lancelot in contact with Guenevere, the Lady of Lake, and of the one who made intimacy with the queen possible for Lancelot, Galehaut. The intertwining of the episodes of mourning and rescue keeps the focus on Lancelot’s attachment to Guenevere, even in her absence. Indeed, Meleagant’s sister serves as yet another facilitator of the couple’s adulterous love. She frees Lancelot so that he can protect Guenevere from Meleagant who aspires to know her in much the same way as Lancelot has succeeded in doing. The condemned sister is by all means the sympathetic party in the dispute but not a candidate for immanent reprieve, so once again, the narrative side steps the question of divine participation. Her accuser’s over-confidence means that no oaths are sworn. No one calls for holy relics, and neither champion uses the verb “jurer” in the exchange of claims. That Lancelot manages to push his opponent into the pyre meant for Meleagant’s sister assures the reader that justice triumphs, but only because the virtuous knight overpowers the wicked one.

Before Lancelot leaves Arthur’s court following his third battle with Meleagant, the vanquished knight’s cousin, Adrogas accuses Lancelot of treacherous homicide. When Lancelot protests that he killed Meleagant in front of witnesses, Adrogas explains his accusation thus: “des lors qu’il vos cria merci et vos après l’oceistes, en fustes vos desloials et malveis” (2:109) ‘from the moment he begged you for mercy and you subsequently killed him, you acted unlawfully and wickedly’ (4:245). In fact, the wounded Meleagant says nothing after Lancelot removes his helmet. Here the contrast between the poem and the prose romance proves instructive. In the Chevalier de la charrette, when Lancelot beheads Meleagant, and the poet tells us:

\[
\ldots \text{n'i a celui} \\
\text{Qu'ilueques fust qui ce veïst} \\
\text{cui nule pitiez an preïst.} \\
\text{Li rois et tuit cil qui i sont} \\
\text{grant joie an demainnent et font.} \\
\ldots \text{no one} \\
\text{who was there and witnessed this} \\
\text{deed felt any pity whatsoever.} \\
\text{The king and all the others there} \\
\text{rejoiced greatly over it. (7090–94)}
\]

When the winner of the duel prepares to execute Meleagant in the Prose Lancelot, “li rois li crie qu’il ne l’ocie pas” (2:106) ‘the king shout-
ed not to kill him’ (4:244). But Lancelot instead obeys Guenevere’s less clement instruction. Evidently, the prose author manipulates the conclusion of the duel borrowed from the poem in order to color our understanding of the duel that he invents. As in the duel with Meleagant, the accusation in this instance is defective in its letter though not in its spirit.

At Adrogas’s insistence, the battle takes place at King Bademagu’s court, and the choice of venue also colors our understanding of the trial. When Lancelot arrives there suited for battle and announces his purpose, Bademagu asks his name; Lancelot refuses to reveal it. In that desire for anonymity, there is nothing unusual for Lancelot. He likewise refuses to name himself to the knight who wanted to burn Meleagant’s sister. But in that case, we may assume that his refusal is motivated by concern for the woman’s safety. If the knight flew into a rage on hearing Lancelot’s name, he might cast her into the pyre to spite her would-be protector. However, Bademagu also asks the identity of the one Lancelot is accused of killing treacherously, and Lancelot again denies him an answer, for in naming Meleagant, Lancelot would reveal his own identity. That dilemma explains his first refusal. Naming himself would allow Bademagu to intuit his son’s death. No doubt, Lancelot takes this approach in part out of respect for Bademagu, yet we may also read a measure of shame into his unwillingness to name names. No matter how justified he is in taking the dishonorable man’s life, Lancelot knows the harm he has done to the honorable father. After the duel, he admits as much, saying to Bademagu after the king obliges him to remove his helmet: “je vos ai meffet” (2:246) ‘I have wronged you’ (4:314), still without explaining how. By having the duel take place at Bademagu’s court, the author again insists on a wrong done—killing the son—while doing right, protecting the queen. No matter how valorous her lover, their union presents a moral quandary, which the author again circumvents. Before the battle, Adrogas and Lancelot present their gages to the king. But neither party calls for holy relics on which to swear or appeals in any way to the Almighty and his saints, as the combatants did in the previous duel at that court. There is an accusation and a denial of the accusation, but no real oaths. A fourth time, Lancelot emerges victorious despite a dubious cause, one directly or indirectly linked to his love for the queen.

One can easily misinterpret the moral import of these results. Lancelot’s success despite the faultiness of the causes he champions may call to mind the near impunity the hero and heroine enjoy in Béroul’s Roman de Tristran, despite their adulterous affaire and the scandal it causes. After all, Guenevere fairs no worse in the episode with her impostor than Iseut does when cast to the lepers. Lancelot is
often wounded in battle, is twice imprisoned by Morgan, and suffers mental anguish because of the queen’s jealousy, yet he emerges from all of these travails hale and hearty. Put another way, no one makes Lancelot and Guenevere suffer for their adultery any more than the barons of Cornwall succeed in punishing Tristran and Iseut for theirs. Nonetheless, in moral tone, the two romances strike different notes.

In Béroul’s poem, Tristran more than once offers to prove his and Iseut’s innocence in trial by combat. The barons refuse to make their case by such means even though they have first hand knowledge of the lovers’ guilt: “et plusors foiz les ont veüz / el lit roi Marc gesir toz nus” ‘and several times they had seen them / lying completely naked in King Mark’s bed’ (593–94).⁶ One may attribute the barons’ refusal to cowardice, but within the context of the poem, that reluctance seems to be the wise choice, and not because Tristran is simply a fearsome warrior or because God would play no role in determining the outcome. The barons seem to understand, in the same way the narrator does, that God will not side with the virtuous cause but with the virtuous knight. When the barons find Tristran’s blood on Iseut’s sheets, and Mark attempts to punish Tristran without a trial, the hero affects a death-defying escape from a chapel window, a leap the narrator characterizes as miraculous: “Tristran s’en vet, / bele merci Dex li a fait!” ‘Tristran was gone, / and God had generously granted him mercy’ (959–60). The equivocal oath Iseut swears on holy relics to absolve herself of suspicion brings her no divine retribution. The barons are not so fortunate. According to the narrator: “Dex les venga de toz ces quatre, / qui vout le fier orguel abatre” ‘God avenged the lovers on all four of them, / for He wanted to subdue their sinful pride’ (2763–64). This vengeance includes a servant of the king who, unlike the barons, does the couple no harm: “li forestier quis encusa / mort crüel n’en refusa” ‘and the forester who denounced the lovers / did not escape a cruel death’ (2759–60). Therefore, it appears that God sides with the sinners and condones the cuckolding of King Mark, or as Norris J. Lacy puts it, “in this text, truth springs from pragmatic necessity and is unrelated to absolute or traditional moral standards. Truth is, quite simply, what Béroul’s narrator (and God) say it is” (8).

The same cannot be said about truth in the Prose Lancelot where the narrator plays a much more neutral role. In fact, this narrator does not speak ill of Lancelot’s opponents in the duels described above, with one exception. He says of Meleagant during his judicial contest with Lancelot: “molt est proz, se il ne fust traïtres et sans pitié” (2:79) ‘he would have been a very valiant knight if only he were not a merciless traitor’ (4:230), and this judgment is borne out in the character’s behavior. Otherwise, the narrator lets the outcome of the duel
reveal virtue. But as indicated earlier, the virtue revealed pertains to the relative quality of the participants rather than to the quality of the cause in question. Because these duels either exclude the oaths prior to battle or terminate before a verdict is reached, they do not imply the operation of immanent justice. The wicked who benefit from the faultiness of the duels that Lancelot fights, do not for that reason escape punishment. Although Arthur remains under the spell of the false Guenevere following Lancelot’s victory over three knights, the Pope puts Logres under interdict and “a commandé que la venjance Nostre Seignor soit espadnue par la terre” (1:153) ‘ordered then that the vengeance of Our Lord make itself felt throughout the land’ (4:69). Soon thereafter, the impostor and Bertelay are struck with a wasting disease and admit their treachery, so the proximity of the papal order and the pairs’ suffering suggest that the Almighty’s wrath restores justice. With their confessions, the legitimate royal marriage resumes, separating Guenevere from Lancelot. To be sure, that separation puts an end to the chaste interval in their love that the queen imposed, but at no point does the narrator suggest connivance between God and the lovers. Furthermore, however much the author may invite the reader to sympathize with Lancelot and Guenevere, the narrator offers no explicit endorsement of their love.

It would also be a mistake to read Lancelot’s four victories as a sign that the judicial duel itself is in crisis, in the way that R. Howard Bloch interprets the hero’s triumphs in La Mort le Roi Artu. The hero’s equivocal or non-existent oaths in the Prose Lancelot represent an interruption of the customs followed in the duels that precede his own, rather than a degradation of that pattern. Those that precede Lancelot’s tainted duels and those that follow—there are three more in the Agravain—produce just outcomes according to the causes presented. This series includes yet another cause that Lancelot champions, but one unrelated to the protection of Guenevere and by extension unrelated to the continuation of his illicit relationship with her. The case nonetheless represents an ironic commentary on their union. The narrative also interlaces this duel with another adventure intended to inform our reading of the trial, or rather of one of its champions.

In searching for Lionel, Lancelot encounters a wounded knight who offers him hospitality. The knight has an arrow in his thigh that can only be removed by Lancelot, the best knight in the world. Lancelot offers to remove it, but his host, who never asks his guest to identify himself, dismisses the offer as useless. The next day, Lancelot finds Lionel who explains his need for a champion. As he tells it, his host, a son of King Vagor, “avoit une fame moult bele et moult avenant a cui je samblai si biaux qu’ele me requist d’amors, ja soit ce que fame ne doie
pas requerre home” (5:75–76) ‘had a most beautiful and comely wife, to whom I appeared so handsome that she sought my love, though a married woman shouldn’t pursue a man’ (5:221). He rebuffed her advances, and out of spite, she accused him of trying to take her by force. The husband attacked him with a sword, but Lionel fought back and killed his host. The dead man’s brother, Marabron, accuses Lionel of treachery. Before Lionel can mount his own defense, an arrow to the thigh renders him unfit for combat. A squire lends credence to Lionel’s account, telling Lancelot: “si me consaut Diex, vos en avez le droit, si com j’ai oï dire a maintes gens, car Marabron en a le tort et Lyonniaus le droit” (5:74) ‘God help me, you have right on your side, as I’ve heard many people say, for Marabron is in the wrong and Lionel is in the right’ (5:221). The duel takes place at Vagor’s court where the two champions swear oaths and offer their gages to the king. Lancelot defeats Marabron, but spares his life, causing both Marabron and Vagor to remark on Lancelot’s great courtesy because they know that if Marabron had gained the upper hand, he would not have spared Lancelot. For once, Lancelot triumphs in a judicial duel that follows custom and therefore implies divine participation based on the quality of the cause. The cause nonetheless aims a finger of reproach at the champion who resists the charms of a married woman less well than the accused on whose behalf he fights. The arrow wounds of the two knights further highlight that paradox. Although Lancelot wins the verdict with God’s implied grace, Lionel’s wound recalls that of the knight who refuses Lancelot’s help. That knight’s failure to recognize the best knight in the world foreshadows the future moment where Lancelot will indeed be eclipsed, in part, because of his luxuriousness. Yet Lancelot’s success in aiding his similarly wounded cousin, and the astonished reactions of Marabron and Vagor at the victor’s courtesy, assure the reader that Lancelot still surpasses all others in virtue, despite his weakness for the queen.

The two other duels in the Agravain, featuring Gaheriet and Bors, resemble those fought by Banin, Pharian, Hector, and Gawain. Gaheriet and Bors champion righteous causes, swear oaths on holy relics, and defeat their opponents. Their duels distinguish themselves from those fought before Lancelot’s contests in only one way. They insist all the more on the sacral elements attendant to the trial. Bors, for example, attends mass after meeting the disinherited woman whose cause he will champion. The day of the duel, he again attends mass and prays for “Nostre Signor moult doucement que il cel jor li gart son cors de honte et de mescheance et li doinst force et vertu que il la querele a la damoisele puisse conquerre et deffandre si voirement comme ses droiz i est” (4:267–68) ‘Our Lord very piously to protect him that day from
shame and misfortune and to give him the strength and power to win
the woman's quarrel and rightfully defend her just cause' (5:130). No
doubt to heighten the impression that the battle will be an immanently
guided struggle, the narrative insists on Bors's youth and inexperience.
The disinherited woman accepts him as her champion only reluctantly
after Lancelot and Gawain prove unavailable. When the champions
take the field at the court of King Pelles, the king attempts to make
peace between the two parties, fearing that Bors cannot match his op-
ponent’s strength. After failing in that attempt, Pelles says: “cui Diex en
donra l'onor, si la praigne!” (4:268) ‘may he to whom God gives victory
seize it’ (5:131), and Bors does the seizing. That he moves from the field
honor into the castle at Corbenic and witnesses the Grail procession
further suggests that he enjoys divine favor.

The location of this trial and the role in it of one of the success-
ful questers from the next romance also imply a connection between
the duels in Prose Lancelot and the values of the Queste. This duel
takes place on the same meadow where Lancelot earlier encounters
an inscription that cryptically announces the birth of Galahad (4:202;
5:100), indicating Lancelot as his father. Other such inscriptions or
pronouncements about the Grail quest explain Lancelot’s inability to
complete the adventure based on one shortcoming—“eschaufement de
luxure” (4:211; 5:120) ‘the flame of desire’ (5:104; 5:241), or “la foiblece de
ses reins” (5:268) ‘the frailty of his loins’ (5:306). The one exception in
this series lays the blame on his father’s sin, it too a matter of sexual
transgression. From his tomb, Simeon tells Lancelot: “se ce ne fust . .
. vos accomplissié les merveilles que vostre parens acomplira et tot ce
avés vos perdu par le pechié de vostre pere, kar il mesprist une sole fois
vers ma cosine vostre mere” (2:37) ‘if you weren’t a sinner you would
have accomplished all the marvelous deeds that your kinsman will ac-
complish and that you have lost all this because of your father’s sin,
for he sinned one single time against my cousin, your mother’ (4:208).
Evidently, Lancelot’s desire sets him apart from the two most virtuous
questers: Perceval who feels temptation but does not yield to it and
Galahad who knows no temptation at all. Bors, on the other hand, fig-
ures among those who see the mysteries of the Grail first hand, despite
losing his virginity. Kennedy attributes Bors’s success in the quest to
his lack of desire for any carnal union (284–86). A magic ring induces
him to sleep with the daughter of King Brandegorre. As soon as the ring
falls from his finger, he loses interest in her. But if the author wishes
us to understand this lack of natural desire as diminishing the severity
of the sin, he undermines this notion with the quality of the offspring
that Bors and Lancelot produce. The daughter of King Brandegorre
gives birth to a future emperor of Constantinopple, whereas Lancelot
fathers Galahad with Pelles’s daughter. Whatever virtue the imperial crown may suggest, it pales in contrast with that of Galahad, whose arrival the preudomes of the Queste compare “a la venue Jhesucrist, de semb lance ne mie de hautece” (38) ‘to the coming of Christ, in form if not in significance’ (6:26).

One also cannot explain the divergent results in the quest for Bors and Lancelot through their efforts at repentance for their carnal sins. The Prose Lancelot tells us that after losing the ring and realizing how he has been deceived, Bors is “molt dolens” ‘chagrined’ and that he “soffri jusqu’al jor” ‘waited in suffering until dawn’ (2:199) (4:290). The romance shows no other contrition on his part, and the Queste maintains the same silence, accepting his tryst as a settled element of his past. Lancelot, on the other hand, undergoes a long process of repentance in the Queste. In the first quarter of the narrative, a preudome persuades him to confess, and Lancelot finally does so, saying: “je sui morz de pechié d’une moie dame . . . et ce est la reine Guenievre” (66) ‘I have fallen into mortal sin because of a lady . . . . She is the queen Guenevere’ (6:42). After a day of exhortation from the preudome, Lancelot “se repent il qu’il ot onques fole amor vers la reine, car il i a usé son tens. . . . et creante bien en son cuer que ja mes n’i rencharra” (71) ‘repented that he had ever had an illicit love for the queen and had thus wasted his life . . . . and promised with all his heart that he would never again fall into sin’ (6:46).

Yet following this point, his humiliations continue. To some critics, these post-confession frustrations suggest Lancelot’s repentance serves no purpose. It is as if, in Hult’s words “on ne peut ni gagner ni demander la grâce de Dieu car elle est mystérieusement accordée à certains et refusée aux autres” ‘one can neither win nor request God’s grace for it is mysteriously accorded to some and refused to others’ (30). But as this quest continues, it becomes apparent that Lancelot’s problem extends beyond his lust for the queen and that he does not fully absorb the wisdom offered to him. He meets another hermit who reminds him of all the virtues he possessed as a young man before coming to Arthur’s court. Indeed, such was his virtue, according to the preudome that the Devil thought it useless to assail him, until “au dar reain li fu avis qu’il te porroit plus tost mener par fame que par autre chose a pechier mortelment . . . . si tost come tu eus tes eulz eschaufez de l’ardor de luxure, maintenant enchaças humilité et atresis orgueil” (125–26) ‘he finally realized that he could best lead you into mortal sin through a woman. . . . As soon as your eyes were warmed with the ardor of lust, you banished humility and summoned pride’ (6:78). In other words, Lancelot’s sin with the queen served as gateway to a more generalized moral degeneration. According to Albert Pauphilet, “aucune
explication psychologique n’est donnée de cette filiation singulière de sentiments. Comment l’âme passe-t-elle du désir charnel à l’orgueil . . . l’auteur ne nous le dit point” ‘no psychological explanation is given for this singular succession of feelings. How the soul passes from carnal desire to pride . . . the author does not tell us’ (Études 41). If one imagines the text as proposing the succession from lust to pride as a general truth of human nature, as Pauphilet does, the causal connection is less than obvious. But the romance makes this connection between the two sins for Lancelot alone. The hermit tells the story of Lancelot’s corruption looking back on events in the Prose Lancelot. There Lancelot himself offers the explanation. When Gueneveré regrets that their love has cost him the chance to complete the Grail adventure, he denies the claim, attributing his prowess to his love for her: “ce que je baoie a vos et a vostre grant biauté mist mon cuer en l’orgueil ou j’estoie si que je ne poïsse trouver aventure que je ne menasse a chief” (5:3) ‘because I aspired to you and your great beauty, my heart was made so proud that every adventure I undertook I was able to complete’ (5:185). Although this thought may escape Lancelot during the Queste, the reader of both romances understands the rapport between the hero’s lust and his pride. Lust is at the origin of his fall from grace but it is not his only deficiency. With the preudomes’ encouragement, he adopts some gestures of contrition—wearing a hair shirt and abstaining from meat and wine—without fully internalizing the message. Encountering a tournament, he resumes old habits, at first with success, but finds that he cannot defeat his opponents, and they eventually take him prisoner. Afterward, a recluse explains the adventure to him thus: “si tost come il te sovint de la vaine gloire de cest siecle et des granz orgueilx que tu soloies mener, tu començas a fere ton duel de ce que tu n’avoies tout vaincu” (144) ‘as soon as you remembered the vainglory of this world and the extreme pride you used to take in your exploits, you began to grieve that you had not yet conquered everything’ (6:90). None of her reproach makes reference to his lustfulness or other sins.

Whereas from the beginning of the quest, Bors says “suiuz meuz en une queste dont je voldroie molt que Notre Sires me conseillast” (162) ‘I am a knight errant on a quest during which I hope to receive Our Lord’s guidance’ (6:101), his cousin sees himself as a self-sufficient creature, to which his behavior at the tournament attests. The hermit who heard Lancelot’s confession warns him: “bien sachiez que en ceste Queste ne vos puet vostre chevalerie riens valoir, se li Sainz Esperiz ne vos fet la voie en toutes les aventures que vos troverez” (116) ‘Be assured that your knighthood will prove useless on this quest if the Holy Spirit does not guide your way through the adventures’ (6:72); and the second hermit offers similar counsel (123) (6:77). But these admonitions, and the re-
cluse’s words, fail to prevent Lancelot from clinging stubbornly to the methods that served him well in the past. When he approaches the gate to the Grail castle guarded by two lions, he draws his sword to fight them until a voice scolds him for his pride, saying: “por quoi te fies tu plus en ta main que en ton Criator? Molt es chetis, qui ne cudies mie que cil en qui servise tu t’es mis ne puisse plus valoir que tes armes” (253) ‘why do you put greater trust in your hand than in your Creator? What a wretch you are not to realize that He in whose service you have placed yourself has more strength than your weapons’ (6:155). For a moment, Lancelot heeds the reproach, then quickly returns to reliance on his own strength as he attempts to force his way into the room where he sees the covered Grail. Pauphilet aptly describes the behavior as “un geste d’imprudente bonne volonté . . . qui unit châtiment à la recom pense” ‘a gesture of imprudent good will . . . that unites punishment with reward’ (Études 129). Supernatural forces immobilize Lancelot for twenty-four days, or one day for every year he “ot . . . servi a l’anemi” (258) ‘had been in the devil’s service’ (6:158). He cannot approach the Grail in the same way that Galahad, Perceval, and Bors can; however, he enjoys a vision of its mysteries. The narrative underscores the relative success of his spiritual progress with the subsequent arrival at Corbenic of his brother, Hector. The castle doors swing shut to deny him entry, and King Pelles tells him that he will never enter as long as the Grail remains there. In short, the Queste’s author would have us understand Lancelot’s frail loins as only a symptom of a broader sin, the arrogance born of his chivalric virtues, his pride. What distinguishes him from others in the Prose Lancelot—his distance from God—diminishes him in the Queste though without denying him grace.

By contrast, the efforts of other knights in the Prose Lancelot provide nothing if not greater moral clarity. Their judicial duels draw a bright line between the good and the wicked. Banin, Pharian, Hector, Gawain, Gaheriet, and Bors are virtuous knights who champion righteous causes. Both sides in their disputes swear oaths and offer pledges. We may understand these heroes as delivering justice on behalf of the Almighty who supplements their prowess. Such is the case with Lancelot’s one duel that follows custom, fought on behalf of Lionel who resists the amorous advances of a married woman. Here the righteousness of the accused surpasses that of his champion, but God aids the good cause. The verdict nevertheless casts a shadow of blame on the victor. Lancelot’s other duels serve a similar figurative purpose in that they highlight his illicit love for the queen. These causes pertain to his desire to shield Guenevere from harm. Although those for whom Lancelot fights surpass their accusers in personal virtue, the causes he champions lack the same moral clarity found in the romance’s other
judicial combats. The charge against the accused is either just or very nearly so, yet Lancelot defeats the accuser. However, his triumphs do not invalidate the *judicium Dei* as a process or suggest that God favors the lovers. All four of these contests deviate from the customary procedures believed to secure immanent involvement, or in the case of Meleagant’s trial, terminate without a verdict. The narrative thereby implies that Lancelot’s victories owe not to the quality of the causes he champions, but stem from his virtue alone. In this romance, he has no moral rival, despite his transgressions with the queen. This supremacy allows him to deliver justice independently but also distances him from the divine. In this way, his successes in the judicial duels of the Prose *Lancelot* hint at his coming failure in the quest. There his seemingly vain efforts at repentance following his confession point to the reasons for his earlier success. He falls short in the *Queste* not so much because of lust, but because of pride—his insistence on his own virtues. To find harmony of spirit between the two romances, we should rely not on the prophetic inscriptions in the Prose *Lancelot* but on the trials by combat, particularly those that escape God’s judgment.

**Notes**

1. See Ferdinand Lot 71–85; Jean Frappier 39, 121–22; and Gustav Gröber 1003–04.

2. See, for example, Patrick Moran and Combes, “Maléfices.” Bénédicte Milland-Bove explores the figurative meaning of one of Guerrehet’s adventures but she devotes only a small portion of her article to that adventure’s connection with the moral values of the Grail quest.

3. All quotations are from Alexandre Micha’s edition of the romance, indicated by volume and page. For reasons spelled out in his introduction, Micha begins his edition a third of the way through the narrative, follows it through to the end, and then returns to the initial third. Volumes 7 and 8 contain that initial third, and volumes 1–2; 4–6 the final two thirds. Volume 3 contains shorter variations of the narrative offered in 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6. Volume 9 consists of an index, glossary, and notes. All English translations of the romance are from Norris J. Lacy’s edition, indicated by volume and page, unless otherwise noted.

4. All quotations from the non-cyclic *Lancelot* are from Kennedy’s edition, indicated by volume and page, and all translations into English are my own.

5. All quotations from the romance and their translations are from William W. Kilber’s edition, indicated by verse.

6. All quotations from the romance and their translations are from Norris J. Lacy’s edition, indicated by verse.

7. See Bloch 13–62.
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8. Quotations from the Queste are from Pauphilet’s edition; translations into English, by E. Jane Burns, are from Lacy’s edition.

9. See the introduction to Hult’s edition of the Mort Artu. See also Madeleine Blaess. Jean-Charles Payen appears to recognize Lancelot’s journey of repentance in the Queste but also claims, “il y a comme des degrés dans l’élection divine, et les écrans à la grâce dans les âmes, que le péché rend plus ou moins opaques” ‘there seem to be degrees of divine election, and screens against grace within souls that sin renders more or less opaque’ (293).

10. The translation is mine.

11. Here I modify the translation, replacing “armor” with “weapons,” given Lancelot’s use of his sword and mention of his “hand” in the reproach.

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A “Foreign” Queen in King Uther’s Court: 
Fifteenth-Century Insular Xenophobia and Malory’s Portrayal of Arthur’s Mother

Sheri Chriqui

Regional borders have recently received crucial critical attention as hyphenated, tenuous spaces in Arthurian literature, galvanizing interest in localized identities and regional responses to conquering hegemonic master narratives. Malory’s treatment of blood and border tensions in particular has been closely examined, yet the critical gaze primarily privileges masculine border experiences. My reading redresses the balance by focusing on Malory’s cultural and textual treatment of King Arthur’s mother, Igrayne, a “foreign” queen who marries into the Pendragon family. Igrayne hails from what historian Frederic Maitlin and sociologist Michael Hechter have dubbed England’s “Celtic fringe” (16; 3–14). Malory’s subtle, nuanced emphasis on Igrayne’s “foreignness” at key points in his narrative has rarely been examined. Dorsey Armstrong briefly analyzes Igrayne’s gendered alterity (Gender and the Chivalric Community 44–48; “Mapping Malory’s Morte”), but her discussions do not focus on the duchess-turned-queen.

Igrayne is only present in the first section of Malory’s text, which depicts her being transferred from one man, her first husband, the duke of Cornwall, to another man, her second husband, the king Uther Pendragon. Her primary textual function is to give birth to Uther’s son, Arthur, yet her presence unsettles Uther’s and Arthur’s courts. Igrayne’s gender and geographical affiliation disrupt Arthurian homosocial normativity. By applying postcolonial and gender theories to Malory’s presentation of Igrayne, I will consider how far the instability that Igrayne brings to the Pendragon kingdom is contingent upon her “foreign” status. I will also examine Malory’s relationship to his sources to determine how he uses Igrayne to communicate contemporary anxieties towards the Cornish border.
Threats from the Margins

As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen observes, “England,” “Scotland,” “Wales,” and “Cornwall” are “not natural or even especially obvious partitions” of the island, but “the culmination of centuries of antagonism and alliance that could very well have produced a profoundly different configuration” (Cultural Diversity 5). Armstrong elaborates that “[a]lthough as Geoffrey of Monmouth we see Brutus dividing the territory in three general regions for his sons,” the dissections of Wales, England, and Scotland “themselves contained discretely defined territories, and the larger borders were prone to significant shifting—or even disappearance—from time to time” (Armstrong and Hodges 162). The Welsh and Scottish marches were home to powerful families with opaque allegiances, and these border regions became historically important sites of insurgence. Malory’s depiction of characters from the geographical margins of King Arthur’s realm is potentially informed by these insular border tensions.

Malory portrays Arthur’s “England” as comprised of distinct regions that, “transcending contingent political boundaries,” are ideally united under the king’s “English” rule (Hodges 146). He situates Camelot, King Arthur’s court, in Winchester (92; line 2), but the breadth of Arthur’s realm extends beyond England’s borders. Eugène Vinaver comments that “[a]ll that we have” to clarify the composition of King Arthur’s dominion “is a statement at the beginning of The Book of Sir Tristram” to the effect that ‘at that tyme kyng美味 Arthur regned, and he was hole kyng of Ingelonde, Walys, Scotlonde and many other realmys” (1288m8, 371; lines 10–12). Malory further clarifies that “there were many kynges” who ruled over “many contreyes,” but that they “helde their londys of kyng美味 Arthure,” thereby presenting Arthur as an overlord who rules over regional kings, who in turn rule over their own dominion under Arthur’s oversight (371; lines 12–14). P. J. C. Field states that Malory perceived King Arthur’s realm as having boundaries similar to the Holy Roman Empire, especially after the king had conquered Rome (Morte, vol. 2 254n289), and Kenneth Hodges reminds readers that Malory’s Lancelot is not wholly French, as he hails from the duchy of Guyenne, which from 1152 until 1453 had been under English rule (136). King Arthur’s “England” therefore extends beyond English borders. As Armstrong posits, Malory’s politically savvy Arthur uniquely attempts to circumvent internal threats by solidifying homosocial relationships around the Pentecostal Oath and the Round Table fellowship, turning insular “otherness” and distinct geographical affiliations into unity and hegemonic fidelity (Gender and
Malory also moves Arthur’s Roman war and conquest of Western Europe from the climax of Arthur’s kingship, as it is presented in his main source, the Alliterative Morte Arthure, to much earlier in his career, as it is presented in the Vulgate Suite de Merlin (Nall 207). Catherine Nall argues that this shift in chronology dissociates external warfare from Arthur’s downfall, as “external war, far from creating internal division, in fact led to domestic peace” (208). Nall suggests that this shift allows Malory to connect civil war with internal division and with Arthur’s downfall. Crucially, this decision to foreground civil war also enables Malory to focus on exploring relationships between Camelot and its insular border regions.

Blood loyalties complicate allegiance to Camelot’s central power. Most individuals in Arthur’s realm are, inevitably, insular foreigners—including Arthur, the son of a Cornish mother and a British king and a blood relation of his half-sister’s Scottish sons. In such a hyphenated milieu, allegiances can be as unstable as were late medieval borders. It is therefore not surprising that rebels consistently challenge Arthur’s vision of transborder affinities from England’s geographic edges. Some of these rebels play a minor role in Malory’s story, as does “kyne Royns of Northe Walis,” who “brente and slew” Arthur’s “trew lyege people” (61; lines 8–10). However, a number of rebels are crucial to the plot and, even more disturbingly, are closely connected to King Arthur. For example, the Scottish/Orkney King Lot, who is married to Morgause, Arthur’s half-sister, “helde ever agaynst Arthure” for impregnating his wife (77; line 7). Aggravayne, Lot’s “opynne-mowthed” slanderous son (1045; line 21), is also a rebel, as is Morgause’s son, fathered by her half-brother Arthur, the “passyng envious” Mordred (1204; line 10). The edges that harbor these men are not clearly defined spaces, but contested territories with slippery demarcations, both in Malory’s fifteenth century and in the fictive universe about which he writes. Late medieval English society understood and lived culturally interpenetrated realities, yet a measure of insular xenophobia, exacerbated by increasing political tensions, saturates Malory’s Le Morte Darthur.

Malory seems keenly aware of England’s border territories as potential sites of resistance. He opens the tale of Balyn Le Sauvage by stressing that Arthur had “grete” wars in his pursuit of kingship over “all Inglonde,” as “there were many kyngis within the realme of Inglonde and of Scotlonde, Walys and Cornuwayle” (61; lines 2–5). It is interesting that Cornwall, which often seems subsumed into England, is treated in a similar way to these other spaces. Cornwall has “always existed on the margins of Englishness, both a country of England and a foreign country” (Vernon 153). It is frequently depicted in English chronicles as “the place to which the traitor flees and where he raises an army”
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(Weiss 94), and the Cornish people acquire a reputation for their lawlessness and independence, eventually breaking into open rebellion against Henry Tudor at the end of the fifteenth-century. Malory’s text “begins and ends with Cornwall, and its middle portion is firmly rooted” in the region, presenting a “powerful tension . . . between the English and Cornish attitudes toward Arthur’s realm” (Armstrong, “Mapping Malory’s Morte” 20, 21). Despite taking place almost thirty years after Malory writes, the Cornish rebellions of 1497 attest to brewing Cornish hostilities against the English crown and to the danger that they posed.

Critical Grounding

Michael Hechter’s Internal Colonialism stimulated interest in reconstructing submerged perspectives from within the British Isles, citing the land’s successive waves of conquest and pointing towards the “Celtic fringe” as the only cultural group that has not since dissipated through assimilation, as have the Anglo-Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans (47). The “Celtic fringe” encompasses Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall, although Edward Lhuyd, in the first formal study of what he dubbed “Celtic” languages, also includes Brittany (1–2). Critics have developed more cultural sensitivity since Lhuyd, as evidenced by Steven Ellis’s acknowledgement of the “ideological baggage” of “cultural imperialism” associated with the label, which many “Celts” find “offensive” (221, 227). Border peoples are simultaneously insular and foreign; they represent “the other” against which mainstream society defines itself even as they interact and interpenetrate with such hegemony. Alternative perspectives residing in border regions are in a constant state of nuanced friction with English master narratives, solidifying distinctions between cultural groups, but equally importantly, complicating polyglot identities and (hi)stories. Such alternative perspectives may derive from the margins, but they are by no means powerless; “Celtic” belief that King Arthur will return to restore their sovereignty and rebellions against the English crown helped to designate fringe territories as real and present dangers to late medieval England (Rouse and Rushton 70).

Hechter’s work on internal colonialism opened perceptual critical doors. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explain that “post-colonial . . . does not mean ‘post-independence’, or ‘after colonialism’, for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process” (117). They clarify that “[p]ost-colonialism, rather, begins from the very first moment of colonial contact,” as a “discourse of oppositionality” to colonization (117). Patricia Clare Ingham, who also under-
stands the postcolonial as a discursive opposition to hegemonic power, cites this definition of the “post-colonial,” observing that it “moves its signification from a temporal chronology to the spaces of opposition” (Sovereign Fantasies 12). Linear temporal structures ineffectively communicate the postcolonial experience because they suggest a time “during” and “after” colonization, whereas a discursive understanding collapses time-bound distinctions, enabling expression of colonialism’s indelible presence. Colonialism and postcolonialism thus run concurrently; their discourses of hegemony and resistance overlap, stretching one another to sometimes become more resilient, to collapse, or to maintain a tense middle. Cohen suggests “midcolonial” as a more apt term designating an epistemological state that resists temporal placement (The Postcolonial Middle Ages 3), and Ingham asserts that her objective is traversing this “difficult middle” (Sovereign Fantasies 12). She believes that medievalists “have not examined . . . what traumas, losses . . . or contradictions fuel historic medieval legends” (Sovereign Fantasies 2), a view upheld by Bruce Holsinger, who has yet to see a medieval impact on postcolonial studies (1197).

Yet valuable strides have been made. Drawing upon Edward Said’s Orientalism and Gayatri Spivak’s conception of the subaltern, Cohen calls for “supposed margins . . . [to] be rethought, so that ‘peripheral’ geographies . . . become their own centers” (The Postcolonial Middle Ages 7). To this, Warren adds an emphasis on the “cultural trauma” of Norman Conquest, asserting that the “ghosts of colonized Britons haunt subsequent formulations of imperial Britain,” especially in Arthurian “border writing” (xi, ix). Ingham argues for Arthurian romance as a “sovereign fantasy” of insular unity that is “important” to Welsh, Scots, and English claims as “rightful heirs of Britain’s crown” (Sovereign Fantasies 3). A polyvocal, multicultural discourse, the fantasy acts as a palimpsest inscribing ownership over the landscape and nostalgia over its loss. Synthesizing these ideas, Ganim describes the Arthurian chronicle tradition as “[t]he revenge fantasy of a conquered indigenous people” that is “redployed” to “support the claims of new conquerors,” locating the fantasy’s crux at “the border areas that complicate full assimilation and offer resistance to an imposed identity” (“Postcolonialism” 399). Thus, postcolonial scholarship offers a useful framework for reading Malory’s treatment of border areas and border characters as sites of resistance to Arthurian hegemony.

Although gender in Malory’s text has received an enormous amount of critical attention, discussions of Arthur’s mother remain scant. Simone de Beauvoir’s conception of women in The Second Sex as a gendered “other” produced within a Hegelian master-slave dialectic, and (post)colonial perspectives that subjugated bodies are simultaneously
colonized and (even if latently) defiant, inform my reading of Malory’s portrayal of King Arthur’s mother. I read Igrayne as doubly “othered” and therefore doubly “foreign” to the conquering patriarchal Arthurian society that Malory constructs around the Round Table. She is Uther’s queen, but she is an insular outsider to the Pendragon’s English society and she is a gendered outsider to the men who dominate its social fellowship. Armstrong discusses the performativity of gender in Malory’s text, contending that women, as “subjugated” others, offer an antithesis that enables Malory’s male characters to solidify their normative homosocial roles in Arthur’s court (Gender and the Chivalric Community 1). I extend Armstrong’s astute observation to incorporate cultural subjugation alongside gender. Fusing an understanding of the “Celtic fringe” with postcolonial theory and gender studies, I will consider the trauma of “sovereign fantasies” on the sovereign and “foreign” female conquered body. In doing so, I endeavor to move closer towards meeting Cohen’s call for postcolonial reconceptualization.

A Queen on the Ontological Edge

Cornwall is a muted periphery even among discussions of the “Celtic fringe,” as most critics discussing insular borderlands tend to focus on Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. The medieval Cornish response to English hegemony is distinctive; Saxon and Norman conquests subdued the region, and simmering hostilities did not flare into large-scale rebellion until the turn of the sixteenth century. Mark Stoyle elucidates that the Saxon king, Athelstan, “may have brought the Cornish under English rule,” but the Cornish were never fully “subjugate[d]” and “continued to hold a grudge against the Saxons,” and, presumably, the Normans too (22). The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw a growing rapprochement between England and Cornwall, in part due to Cornwall’s “aura of semi-independence” and the tin-mining industry, which enriched both sides of the border (Payton 243). When tin production dropped, internal disputes stirred animosity towards England, whose political agenda profited through Cornish resources. Hostilities led to Cornwall’s support of Henry Tudor against Richard III during the 1480s, as the Welsh-born Henry became associated with an eschatological Arthur returned to assist the British. As the English king, Henry VII, however, he “suspended” tin mining privileges and raised taxes to fund war with Scotland, instigating a Cornish rebellion in 1497 (Stoyle 25).

Malory subtly presents Cornish-English relations through the duke and duchess of Cornwall and the British king Uther. Igrayne is dwarfed
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in comparison to Malory’s attention to Arthur’s generation, the fellowship knights, and even Gwenyvere and Morgause. Readers are not privy to information regarding her background. She is the duke of Cornwall’s wife, but whether she herself is Cornish or married into the Cornish nobility remains ambiguous. Arthur’s mother takes the Malorian stage in five scenes, all of which occur very early in the story. She is present when Uther first sees and desires her, when Uther deceitfully begets Arthur upon her, when Uther enquires about her child’s paternity, when Uther dies, and when Arthur summons her to court to meet him. She is presumably also present at her wedding to Uther, although her voice and perspective on the event remain silenced. Malory describes the king as a “lusty knyghte” going into his marriage (10; line 2), suggesting he is motivated by a militarized desire for conquest that is striking because Uther has already possessed Igrayne. Conquest seems insufficient to slake Uther’s desire; he wants to relocate and assimilate Igrayne into his English life. Igrayne’s will, or lack thereof, is left out. Uther “assent[s]” to the marriage, which is conducted “in alle haste” . . . “with good wille” and “grete myrthe” (10; lines 2–4). Malory justifies Uther’s greedy “haste” by calling it “good wille.” He does not explicitly relate Igrayne’s assent to the marriage or her partaking of its “myrthe.” Passive and voiceless, England’s new queen physically represents the subjugated “other” to Uther’s court, reflecting and disquieting English dominance. Her presence as a cultural and gendered “other” strengthens English masculine identity, but it also threatens disjunction by physically embodying alternative perspectives. Once noted, her voicelessness casts an uneasy shadow over the nuptial festivities. Although her silence points toward a more nuanced communicative tension, Igrayne’s marriage to Uther uncomfortably silences her once independent voice. Applying Peggy McCracken’s premise that the queen’s body is symbolic of male royal power and dynastic lineage reveals that, as the mother of the future king, Igrayne’s body becomes her strength (23, 51). Igrayne’s silence at her wedding contrasts her earlier vocal rejection of Uther (7; lines 10–13). Whereas Geoffrey of Monmouth does not reveal Igrayne’s personal response to Uther’s love signals, Wace indicates “Ygerne issi se conteneit / Qu’el n’otriout ne desdiseit” ‘Ygerne behaved in such a way as neither to consent nor refuse’ (216–17; lines 8595–96). Malory rejects her culpability for inviting Uther’s attention, left ambiguous in these earlier renditions. Instead, he follows the French Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin (also known as the Merlin Continuation). The Post-Vulgate incorporates the Vulgate’s Merlin to depict the relationship between Uther and Igrayne, but it departs from the Vulgate in the Merlin Continuation, which begins one month after Arthur’s coronation. The Post-Vulgate presents Igrayne as “unmoved” by Uther and
“reject[ing] his suit,” establishing her virtue (Vinaver, “Commentary” 1284). She “avoided [Uther] if she could,” as she is “utterly faithful to her husband” (Merlin 65). Yet, while the Post-Vulgate’s duchess sits through two of Uther’s feasts and accepts a goblet from him before telling her husband of the king’s advances, Malory’s Igrayne is less hesitant. Malory gives Igrayne the first words of dialogue in his text, making her rejection immediate and explicit to her husband and to readers. Igrayne tells the duke of Cornwall, “I suppose that we were sente for that I shold be dishonoured” (7; lines 15–16). Igrayne’s voice sets a frustrated tone. She does not welcome Uther’s advances, and she is brazen enough to directly reject the king and to voice her disapproval to her husband when he, observing the king’s advances, remains silent. Her resisting voice is evocative of the resisting Cornish region from which she hails, and “the exchange of her body” is therefore reflective of “negotiations of power and sovereignty” (McCracken 23, 150). To Uther, acquiring and silencing the duke of Cornwall’s wife is symbolically invested with acquiring Cornish land and taming Cornish opposition.

Malory portrays Cornish men disparagingly, reflecting English assumptions of Cornish cowardice, which suggest English anxieties about Cornish potential. He also negatively depicts Igrayne’s first husband, the duke of Cornwall, as well as King Mark, who rules over Cornwall a generation later. Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace both relate that the duke of Cornwall becomes enraged by Uther’s unwelcome displays of affection, immediately taking his wife from the English court. Geoffrey writes that the duke of Cornwall “confestim iratus ex curia sine licentia recessit” ‘angrily stormed out of court without permission’ (184–85; lines 460–1). Similarly, Wace states that “De la table u il sist sailli, / Sa feme prist si s’en cissi” ‘[h]e sprang up from his seat at the table, took his wife and went out’ (216–17; lines 8603–04). Both of these accounts stress the duke’s fury and his immediate departure. In the Post-Vulgate, Igrayne initially “ma[kes] no sign” to acknowledge Uther’s affection and keeps it from her husband (Merlin 65). However, when, after the unsuspecting duke bids her to accept the king’s gift, she, weeping, informs her husband of the king’s advances (68–69). The duke of Cornwall becomes enraged and the pair stealthily leave court in the middle of the night (69). Although he truncates these two feast scenes into one occasion, Malory depicts the duke of Cornwall and his wife stealing away from Uther’s court “soddenly” and “ryd[ing] all nyghte” to Tintagel rather than openly leaving (7; line 17). The duke’s decision to secretly depart under the cover of night exemplifies Malory’s tendency to associate cowardly qualities with Cornish men. King Mark, the next Cornish ruler at Tintagel, is presented as a cuckold and a coward. His wife Isode has a long term affair with Trystrames,
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and when Gaherys defeats him in battle, he cries “[s]ave my lyff [. . .] concider that I am a kynge anointed” (549; lines 13–14). Malory also includes further general statements about Cornish men, having Kay reference them as “false knyghtes” (547; line 18), and Dynadan note that they “ar no men of worship” (581; line 29).

As Robert Rouse elucidates, by projecting anxieties and defects onto “insular Others,” Malory “remov[es] discordant elements from the image of Englishness presented” (92). Uther may be deceitful and desire another man’s wife, but as England’s king, his actions are socially accepted and threatening behavior is projected onto the periphery. Malory’s portrayal of the duke of Cornwall as already engaged in a long war with Uther as the text opens further supports this projection (7; lines 3–4), as his Post-Vulgate source depicts the duke as one of Uther’s loved barons and explicitly states that the war between them sparks from Uther’s anger at the duke for stealthily leaving court with Igrayne (Merlin 65, 69, 71). Presenting Cornish men as weak and “false” helps bolster English political claims on Cornwall, and presenting resistance in the gendered figure of Igrayne minimizes regional threats. The Cornish men appear even weaker when a woman is the only figure of resistance. As a woman, Igrayne is positioned within the homosocial system as a malleable object of exchange, revealing to a phallocentric gaze her gendered capacity for being conquered and silenced (Armstrong, “Malory’s Morgause” 153). Moreover, the duke of Cornwall’s sneaky departure from Uther’s court sets a precedent for Uther sneaking into Tintagel disguised as the duke of Cornwall, as Malory presents treachery and cowardice as permissible in Cornwall.

Despite occurring in the most critically scrutinized of Igrayne’s scenes, the textual moment at which Igrayne’s voice is silenced, between Uther’s initial desire and his marrying her, seldom receives attention. Igrayne is usually discussed by scholars in the context of her illicit seduction by Uther Pendragon, and Arthur’s conception remains the central focus. Carolyne Larrington points to Armstrong’s “foreground[ing] the theme of adultery” in “Malory’s Morgause,” in which she:

draw[s] a contrast between the virtuous Ygraine—who resists adultery, is duped into sleeping with Uther and whose reward is the hero, Arthur, as child—and the sinful Morgause—who agrees to adultery, sleeps with her brother and who gives birth to the anti-hero Mordred (134).

Malory’s Igrayne is virtuous: he emphasizes that “the duke [of Cornwall] hymself [i]s slayne” before Uther arrives in Tintagel (9; line 20), and
that Uther begets Arthur “more than three hours after” Cornwall’s death (9; lines 22–23). Malory’s Arthur, therefore, is begotten on a widow and is not illegitimate. In this way, Malory diverges from his Post-Vulgate source, in which the duke dies “after Uther’s departure” (Vinaver, “Commentary” 1285; Merlin 76). Malory’s Igrayne’s response to this conception scene is crucial. Upon learning of her husband’s death, that “he was dead or ever kynge Uther came to her,” she “marveilled,” then “mourned pryvely and held hir pees” (9; lines 26–30). Igrayne negates her voice and emotional response. Though astounded by her illogical seduction, she quietly accepts its occurrence and genuinely, privately “mourn[s].” She separates her private and public selves. Her silence is simultaneously a response to conquest and a willed withholding of herself. Marginalizing her voice actually amplifies her resistance, as she refuses a transparent embrace of her new life as queen.

Igrayne’s body, like her land, becomes a subjugated, dispossessed body in pain, and although she performs her new role, her silence and lack of public response unsettles her displays as Uther’s queen. For example, when Uther approaches her to inquire about her child’s paternity, she is described as “sore abasshed to yeve ansuer” (10; lines 16–17). Her voice is not forthcoming; she is uncomfortable. When, upon answering truthfully, she learns that Uther seduced and impregnated her, Malory does not reveal her private response. Instead, he relates a display, stating that “the quene made grete joye” ([my emphasis] 10; lines 31–32). In contrast, in the Post-Vulgate, Uther does not tell Igrayne the truth about her child’s paternity, making it easier to part her child from her (Vinaver, “Commentary” 1285; Merlin 83). Similarly, when the newborn Arthur is taken from her and given to Merlyn, Malory only mentions Igrayne when stating that “the lady was delyverd” (11; lines 9–10); her reaction is notably absent. This is a departure from the Post-Vulgate, in which Igrayne calls one of her attendants and gives the order to deliver her newborn to the first man who asks for him (85). Malory removes Igrayne’s agency, instead depicting Uther as pronouncing the order (11; lines 10–13). Igrayne’s feelings are also concealed at Uther’s deathbed, where she displays appropriate behavior to the occasion and her ascribed role. Malory writes that Igrayne “made grete sorowe” ([my emphasis] 12; line 10). She seems aware of being a spectacle gazed upon by Uther’s court; the genuineness of her sorrow, being “made” in the company of Uther’s barons, is external. The seamlessness of Igrayne’s integration into Uther’s court, and the degree of her acceptance of it, are therefore left ambiguous, inviting readers to infer (as do Uther and his court) their desired reading of her contentment in England.
Submerged tensions surface with Igrayne’s presence after Uther’s death. It is only after Arthur becomes king and sexually transgresses that he and his court learn his mother’s identity, making her an easy scapegoat for England’s—and, if we understand the king as embodying his nation, Arthur’s—civil and moral lapses. Arthur has already fathered a child, Borre, upon the lady Lyonors (38; lines 27–34), and unknowingly fathered Mordred upon his half-sister, Morgause (41; lines 19–20), before learning that Igrayne is his mother and that his incestuous relations will “destroy” him (44; line 18). Instability is deployed in Arthur’s court before his mother arrives. It is therefore striking that as soon as Igrayne enters, Ulphuns lambasts her, accusing her as “traytoures” and blaming her for the kingdom’s instability (45; lines 10–11).

Lydia Fletcher explores the connotative nuances of “treachery” in the fifteenth century, linking it with “disloyalty” and “murder,” or an “injur[y]” that “strikes at the heart of public authority” (76–78). Unpacking Ulphuns’s language in his diatribe and Igrayne’s defensive response in light of Fletcher’s distinctions uncovers latent hostilities against Uther’s queen and, finally, her own perception of the injustices performed upon her.

Malory’s Ulphuns reveals anger as he attacks Igrayne, ignoring propriety and speaking to the former queen as if she were the basest of England’s subjects and “the moste traytoures unto the kynges person” (45; lines 10–11). The degree to which he ascribes Igrayne’s threat to England unveils his fear. Her voicelessness had unsettled Uther’s court, but her reemergence after years of civil strife kindles Ulphuns’s resentment. Speaking directly to Arthur, Ulphuns exclaims, “thys quene Igrayne ys the causer of youre grete damage and of youre grete warre” (45; lines 16–17). By not revealing Arthur’s existence, Ulphuns charges that Igrayne is responsible for war. His use of pronouns creates a distinct binary. Igrayne, whom he objectifies as “thys,” is positioned on one end of the spectrum. Arthur is positioned on the other end, being referenced by the “youre” that Ulphuns duplicates in his accusation to emphasize his grievance. Ulphuns positions himself and Arthur’s subjects as a communal portion of the “youre” that sustains “damage[s].” His closing remarks highlight Igrayne’s falsity to “you [Arthur] and to all youre realme” (45; line 26), establishing a dialectic that surfaces hostility against Igrayne’s “otherness.”

Igrayne’s response to Ulphuns constitutes her first recorded speech since she tells Uther that she does not know who fathered her child (10; lines 20–27), and her only other direct speech is her initial rejection of Uther (7; lines 15–18). She is aware of the debilitations of her gender, stating, “I am a woman and I may nat fight” (45; lines 28–29), and she is cognizant of her foreignness, reminding the court that “Uther com
to me into the castell of Tyntagyl” (45; line 32). Igrayne’s use of pro-
nouns establishes a dialectic that answers Ulphuns’s: her “me” resides
in Tintagel, where Uther arrived “in the lyknes of my lorde” ([my em-
phasis] lines 32–33), actively begetting Athur “upon me” (line 34) and
“wed[ding] me” (line 35). Igrayne reminds Ulphuns that she was not the
active agent in causing England’s political woes, discreetly pointing to
Uther’s activity instead. She reveals her perceived injustice and points
to Cornwall as her home. Ulphuns, who remembers Uther’s reign, may
understand her accusation, as he uncomfortably deploys a red herring
fallacy, redirecting attention onto Merlyn’s complicity instead. In this
way, Malory diverges from his source, as the Merlin Continuation pres-
ents a “terrified” Igrayne who feels “guilty of what he had said,” shifting
the blame on to Merlyn instead of actively defending herself (15–16;
Vinaver, “Commentary” 1299n45). Whether Igrayne’s embrace of her
son at the end of this scene is genuine or performative is left ambigu-
ous, but it is noteworthy that she does not appear again and that she
brings her daughter, Morgan le Fay, with her.

Morgan remains silent as she observes Ulphuns condemn her
mother, but her witnessing this scene potentially fuels her later jeal-
ous and vengeful hostility against Arthur and his knights. Her later
behavior includes plotting to murder her half-brother Arthur as well
as her husband, King Uryence, and placing Accolon, her lover, on
Arthur’s throne, which would potentially make her the queen (145–46;
lines 29–37, lines 1–4). She also attempts to reveal Lancelot’s affair
with Gwenyvere, Arthur’s queen, by sending a drinking horn from
which only a woman who is “trew to her husbande” can drink (429;
lines 30–33), but Lamerok redirects the horn to King Mark’s court (430;
lines 4–5). When Isode, Mark’s queen, and all but four of her ladies are
unable to drink from the horn, even the knights of Cornwall denounce
Morgan as a “false sorseres and wycche” (430; lines 12–14, lines 20–21).
Consequently, even in the peripheral region of Cornwall, Morgan is
marginalized for resisting homosocial normativity. Morgan’s alterity is
exponentially higher than Igrayne’s, as her explicit oppositional behav-
ior poses a real threat to the Arthurian social order. Observing Igrayne
vocally resist Ulphuns’s vitriolic condemnation may have had a forma-
tive influence upon Morgan, as it exposed her to injustice at Arthur’s
court as well as to the possibility of vocally opposing it.

Cornwall, with its resistance to as well as assimilation in English
culture, is evoked by Malory’s characterization of Igrayne, whose pres-
ence in Uther’s and Arthur’s courts rouses English anxieties and leads
to accusations of treachery. Her Cornish associations inflect her be-
havior. Whether she chooses to vocalize her dissent or to remain silent,
she unsettles Arthurian hegemony, revealing the fragility of its unity.
Fellowship bonds are important because they uphold the Arthurian dynastic structure, but they are vulnerable because they are grounded in individuals with distinct regional affiliations. Armstrong observes that Malory and his “contemporaries were much more likely to identify themselves first in terms of their local affinities rather than their national ones” (“Mapping Malory’s Morte” 24). If loyalty shifts from the centralized “English” dynastic vision, then regional affinities would overtake Arthurian affinities, leading the fellowship to crumble. Such logic tends towards a slippery slope, but it exposes a great weakness at the heart of Arthurian idealism, and Malory’s Igrayne embodies this growing danger, revealing its presence from the first page of his text. Igrayne’s female body and her Cornish associations make her doubly “foreign” in the homosocial Arthurian court. She is Uther’s queen, but she is also a Cornish widow, and her body is simultaneously a site of conquest and a site of Arthurian dynastic continuation.

Notes
1. This paper derives from an essay written as a component for the M. Phil. in medieval English studies at the University of Oxford in 2012. Kate McClune supervised my writing process, and I am very grateful for her guidance and patience. I am also indebted to Carolyne Larrington, Catherine Nall, and Kathryn L. Smithies for reading and offering thoughtful feedback on my work. I have presented versions of this paper at the Leeds International Medieval Congress (Session 224: Gendering the Empire: Arthurian Women in Medieval and Victorian Literature), University of Leeds, 7–10 July 2014, and at “The Margins of King Arthur’s World,” sponsored by the American Comparative Literature Association, Victoria College, University of Toronto, 4–7 April, 2013.
3. See Mapstone, McClune’s “The Vengeaunce,” and Rushton.
4. References to Malory will be from Vinaver’s edition. I also consult Field’s newer edition, and indicate when I cite from it. For consistency, I am using the first given spelling in Vinaver’s “Index of Proper Names” (1665–1701) when referencing characters.
5. Different scholars contrarily capitalize formal titles. I am following Malory’s format (e.g., the duke of Cornwall).
6. The original manuscript of *Le Morte Darthur* has not survived or, potentially, not yet surfaced, leaving two archetypal stemmatic variants: the Winchester manuscript, a scribal copy dated between 1471 and 1483, which was uncovered at Winchester College in 1934, and purchased by the British Library in 1976, and William Caxton’s 1485 printing, of which one complete copy survives, purchased by Pierpont Morgan in 1911 and since housed in the Morgan Library.
A second copy of Caxton’s 1485 print survives and is held by the John Rylands University Library, but this copy wants eleven leaves.

7. For more on northern border families, see King, Lomas, Brown, and Mapstone. For focus on Welsh borders, see Lieberman as well as Walker 139–185. For a discussion of border regions in the context of the Wars of the Roses, see King 43–44.

8. Late medieval insular borders were unstable. Scotland’s borders had vacillated in the fourteenth century, when Edward Balliol gave southern Scotland (Lothian), including Edinburgh, to King Edward III in exchange for Scotland’s throne. For more on this, see Daniell 41. For examples that are more contemporaneous with Malory, see McClune’s “Malory, the Orkneys, and the Sinclairs.” McClune relates that the 1468 marriage treaty between the Danish/Norwegian princess Margaret and King James III of Scotland gives Orkney and Shetland to Scotland as Margaret’s dowry, compensating William, the Earl of Orkney, for his loss with a castle in Fife and debt forgiveness (174). Shifting allegiances are further compounded by Scotland’s alliance with France during the Hundred Years’ War, as the region harbors Margaret of Anjou and her son in 1460. For more, see McClune’s “Malory, the Orkneys, and the Sinclairs” 170, and Mapstone 113.

9. McClune’s “The Vengeaunce of My Brethirne” also examines Arthur’s attempt to overcome blood ties with chivalric fellowship.

10. For more on shifting borders, see Daniell.

11. For more on the Cornish rebellions of 1497, as well as the violence and disorder that led up to them, see Payton, Stoyle, Kleineke, and Weiss.

12. Further, see Bromwich, Jarman, and Roberts’s edition The Arthur of the Welsh as well as Barron’s The Arthur of the English, which reflect escalating interest in localized versions of Arthurian characters and stories.

13. See Pittock for more on “homogenizing ethnic idealism” (2).

14. Although structuralist and somewhat reductive of cultural differences, mid-twentieth century critic Roger Sherman Loomis, building upon the work of Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell, famously highlights the influence of “Celtic” mythic stories on Arthurian literature.

15. For academic engagement with the medieval postcolonial, see Ingham and Warren’s Postcolonial Moves, Kabir and Williams’ Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages, Altschul’s “Postcolonialism and the study of the Middle Ages,” and Lampert-Weissig’s Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies.

16. See Ingham’s “In Contrayez Straunge” for more on her stance on the postcolonial as an oppositional discourse.

17. Ganim also cautiously warns that when “imagining a postcolonial Middle Ages, we must at the same time avoid trivializing or metaphorizing the experience of the displaced and oppressed peoples of our own moment in history.
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who live in the postcolonial reality that postcolonial theory seeks to explain” (“Postcolonialism” 410).

18. For more on this theoretical framework, see Beauvoir 13–28 and Hegel 113.
19. Also see Caughey’s “Virginity, Sexuality, Repression.”

20. For example, see Cohen’s Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages (5–7). Cohen’s omission of Cornwall in his discussion of the “Celtic fringe” is surprising, as he is usually attentive to cultural nuances, evident in his careful scrutiny of conflated labels (4).

21. Rouse points to the earl of Cornwall in Havelok the Dane as “a veiled criticism of Henry III’s brother Richard, who was earl of Cornwall from 1227 to 1272,” and who “rebelled against his brother in 1238” (86–87). Richard’s resistance exemplifies surging Cornish tensions leading up to 1497 rebellion.


23. At its height, tin mining enabled Cornish semi-autonomy, but, as Buckley asserts, it also financed English wars against France, Wales, and Scotland (47). Kleineke highlights internal disorder, arguing that the Cornish wealth accruing from the tin mines stirred greed and violence, which contributed to the mid-fifteenth century’s Courtenay-Bonville dispute (93).

24. The bulk of criticism devoted to Malory’s treatment of Cornwall follows Dorsey Armstrong and Michael Anderson, who focus on King Mark’s court as a “satellite colony” to Arthur’s Camelot (Armstrong, “Postcolonial Palomides” 189; Anderson 42–57). To my knowledge, Malory’s duke of Tintagel and his Cornish milieu have not yet been central subjects of study.

25. Vinaver’s “Commentary” reveals that Malory has reduced Igrayne’s role, truncating the initial feast scene at Uther’s court (1284), the “elaborate negotiations” that take place to justify Uther’s marriage as making “amends” for Cornwall’s murder (1285), the detailed “arrangements” made for Igrayne’s arrival at court (1299), and offering “a very brief summary” of her speech to Ulphuns (1299).


27. For Malory’s portrayal of King Mark, see The Book of Sir Tristram De Lyones (371–846).

28. In contrast to Malory and his Post-Vulgate source, the Vulgate Merlin relates that Igrayne dies before Arthur is crowned, leaving Merlyn to recount the tale of Arthur’s conception and Ulphuns to verify its details (88, 100–101).
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Immersive Environments for Medieval Languages: Theory and Practice

Lynn Ramey and Steven Wenz

I. Introduction

One of the major challenges facing medieval studies today is linguistic in nature. While students enjoy reading and analyzing medieval literature, they are rarely prepared to access these sources in the original medieval languages. Since they are not learning these languages as undergraduates, students are not prepared to study medieval literatures in depth at the graduate level, and we may soon find that these older works are no longer read at all in the original. In addition, while language pedagogy has progressed in new and exciting ways, the learning of medieval languages has remained, well, medieval. Books contain dry explanations of how Old French derived from Latin (as if that would help today’s students better learn the language!), and the only cultural context given is the story that the students are to translate. The ability to actually read these languages aloud is quickly becoming lost, as training in pronunciation and practice speaking is nonexistent. As most medieval literature is rhymed, proper pronunciation is key to understanding the puns, plays on words, and meaning of the texts.

Surely technology promises immersive experiences in fantastic or historical environments, immersive experiences that are rapidly erasing the line between virtual and real worlds. These experiences can be harnessed to improve interest in earlier periods, as well as facilitate language and culture acquisition. Video games and digital simulations offer a type of immersive experience. In addition, language and culture acquisition is highly suited to video gaming. Games, digital and otherwise, are often used in language learning because in theory they are fun, and they lower the inhibition of the language learner (Derrington; Holden and Sykes; Sykes, Oskoz, and Thorne).

In this article we describe our experience creating a video game for learning Anglo-Norman. Our work was based on current research in 1) video games and learning, and 2) second language acquisition and immersive practices. Thus we review the literature in these two fields and indicate where there are gaps in research. Finally we point toward future directions both in the development of video games such as
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ours as immersive environments for learning dead languages, along with needs for assessing outcomes and best practices for developing these games.

II. Video Games and Learning

As Kurt Squire notes, “video games create what the psychologist Eric Erickson has called a psychosocial moratorium—that is, a learning space in which the learner can take risks where real-world consequences are lowered” (Squire and Jenkins 59). This is particularly true when, as is often the case, the learner assumes a new identity embodied in an avatar that varies considerably from the learner’s real-world identity. In a good video game, the gamer/learner builds a personality for the avatar, complete with a set of values and goals. While these goals and values may be rooted in a player’s real-world persona, they are also shaped by the virtual world of the game. Squire defines a “projective identity” for the gamer, which is where real-world and virtual identities intersect. The gamer can escape limitations of either real-world or virtual-world identities (Squire and Jenkins 62–63). Real-world identities that limit learning, such as a belief that “I am not good at learning languages,” no longer hold. Within this framework, learning through video games is enhanced as the learner sometimes expends considerable effort reaching virtual-world goals even though the learner may begin the game with a negative attitude about the material. In response, a good game must provide rewards to the player who puts forth this effort (Squire and Jenkins 57–58).

Games are also quite useful at teaching cultural situations and values. A game differs from a prose-based analysis of cultural rules in that the player does not grasp the rule-set synchronically “from above.” James Gee points out that learning the rules, how to play the game, is no different from learning how to “do” another academic subject, like biology (Gee, Good Video Games and Good Learning 4). Understanding of the game system, and thus the culture it represents, emerges diachronically, through a process of choices and consequences linked to a sense of agency and a (virtual) body that seems to interact with its world. For instance, in terms of medieval travel it is one thing for a reader/learner to understand the challenges, but it is quite another for a gamer/learner to experience from a first-person perspective, even in a speculative way, how access to materials and food sources might have been negotiated through extended networks. Who must visit and talk to whom? How does this happen over long and difficult terrain? The process of system discovery through embodied agency has immense
potential value for research and teaching through critical empathy (Gee, *Learning and Games*).

3D modeling has become commonplace in certain academic fields like archeology and art history because of the ability to safely explore and share fragile or inaccessible artifacts and environments. Literary and language studies have not embraced the use of 3D media to the same degree, perhaps due to continued appreciation for the printed page. In addition, literary scholars and avid readers are long used to constructing imaginative worlds in their minds as they read, so some may find that a 3D model of the environment falls short of what the brain can construct, or they may not wish to impose a monolithic reading via a 3D reconstruction of a literary world.

However, a game engine diverges in fundamental ways from 3D platforms designed primarily to capture and analyze data, such as the impressive 3D virtual walk-through models of medieval Paris and certain cathedrals. In contrast to the objective orientation of these platforms, a game engine is designed primarily to create games, which typically construct a sense of subjective agency through interactive mechanics and narrative. So while the gamer gives up some of the ability to fully construct the literary world in his or her own imagination, this control is traded for the power to change the virtual world and the outcome of the game narrative through choices and decisions made by the player.

A key potential of the video game medium lies in its ability to explore cultural rules through narrative and game play. Game engines have the ability to represent cultural systems as they unfold across space and time, giving the game systems themselves a central role. Game systems function by applying certain rules to various game situations rather than determining in advance every choice and movement. As Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman put it, “this special class of representations, experienced as procedures, sets of behaviors, or forms of interaction, is the raw material from which simulations are constructed. We call this form of depiction procedural representation” (Salen 422). Procedural representation is necessarily selective, since it is impossible to capture through a game’s rules and mechanics every aspect of the “reality” the game simulates. So the game system cannot be “thick” in that it attempts to capture every aspect of the culture in question. Rather, its thickness lies in its explanatory intent, in the way that the rules can be applied to new situations and interactions. This flexibility makes the procedural representation of cultural systems through game systems necessarily rhetorical, in that the game system makes an argument about how the culture in question might have worked through the way it selectively models its rules (Bogost 125).
In sum, games (computer-based or not) can be used to promote learning, and video games are particularly useful in modeling cultural systems because they teach players the rules of engagement in a particular aspect of a culture, allowing players to draw conclusions about how these rules might work in other, non-scripted, situations and further give the possibility to test these conclusions in a simulated environment where failure has little real-world consequence. Video games allow immersion in an environment that may no longer exist or may never have existed. A review of research on the application of immersive environments to the specific field of language acquisition comprises the next section.

III. Language Learning and Immersion

Within studies on language acquisition, “immersion” generally refers to the teaching of an academic subject in a second language (L2) within a formal school environment. The students are generally native speakers of a common language (L1). Johnson and Swain identify eight characteristics of such immersion programs:

1. The L2 is a medium of instruction
2. The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum
3. Overt support exists for the L1
4. The program aims for additive bilingualism
5. Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom
6. Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency
7. The teachers are bilingual
8. The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community (Johnson and Swain 15; Cummins 2).

For example, a group of students in the United States whose first language is English would receive instruction and perform work in a school subject, such as Math or History, in French with a bilingual instructor. This approach contrasts with the traditional format, in which students use French only in French language classes and take all “content courses” in English. The underlying rationale for immersion programs is that, by using the second language for all or a part of each school day, students will become “bilingual,” demonstrating similar levels of proficiency in both languages.

We are using here a modified definition of “immersion.” Our use of the term refers to the sensation a player has that he or she is part of the videogame world, which entails the perceived ability to interact
with its inhabitants and to change its environment. This notion of immersion depends on a feeling of telepresence, which Jonathan Steuer defines as “the experience of presence in an environment by means of a communication medium” (6). In theory, students who play our videogame will receive the impression that their use of the language, together with their actions through the avatars of Benedeit and Brendan, will produce certain outcomes within the virtual landscape. Steuer identifies two central components of telepresence: vividness and interactivity (10). In designing our game, we sought to achieve vividness, “the representational richness of a mediated environment as defined by its formal features” (Steuer 11), by paying careful attention to both the graphical quality of our materials and the level of visual detail in each scene. In contrast to many pedagogical games, in which objects exist in the game world exclusively to educate the player, we attempted to feature an excess of realia, as if the player were experiencing a real-life setting. Deer wander in the forest, butterflies gather among a cluster of bushes, and characters who have nothing to do with Benedeit’s quest haggle with merchants at the marketplace. We opted for a first-person perspective in the game, in which the player “sees” and “hears” the world through the eyes and ears of the avatar, in order to enhance this feeling of vividness.

Our game likewise attempts to achieve interactivity, “the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time” (Steuer 14), by offering multiple opportunities for players to affect their surroundings. Townspeople not only speak with the player but may change their actions as a result of the player’s decisions: a certain villager becomes much more willing to help Benedeit after receiving a gift of food, while another reconciles with his neighbor once the player intervenes in the argument. The natural environment likewise promotes a feeling of interactivity by responding to mouse clicks or keyboard input. Benedeit can gather herbs, fill a jar with water, or consult books in the library as directed by the player. Our videogame landscape is not a lifeless background but rather, as in the real world, helps to construct the player’s understanding of space and the cultural practices that occur within it.

Partially as a result of the great variety of experiences that videogames can offer, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on their benefits for language acquisition. Margaret de Jong Derrington has studied the possibility of teaching English as a second language through immersion in the virtual world Second Life. Students in the program complete language lessons but primarily use English to perform a variety of authentic tasks, such as communicating with fellow users and designing a home in the game world (Derrington 146). While Derrington con-
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cluded that the immersive possibilities of Second Life allowed her students to take on new personas and progress rapidly in their learning, a study by Jonathan deHaan, focusing on students’ ability to notice and recall words in Japanese, found that players of a game recalled fewer vocabulary items than their peers who merely watched (deHaan 104). He explains, however, that the videogame he used (*Parappa the Rapper*) did not require language use for the completion of in-game tasks, as players needed only to press buttons along with the rhythm as song lyrics were displayed (deHaan 109). DeHaan concludes that “[p]rojects should continue to look at the various technological features of video games and the instructional strategies of game designers in order to build a more complete understanding of how video games can help or hinder second language acquisition” (119).

IV. Current State of Medieval Language Learning

Learning medieval languages, from Latin to Classical Arabic to Old French, generally uses the grammar-translation approach, where students read in their native language about a particular grammar point and then translate passages from the target language into their own language. This method has been used for centuries, allowing students who excel in this approach to become fluent readers of the target language. While some students appreciate the solitary nature of this sort of learning, others do not respond well and find the approach boring (Rivers 14–18).

The grammar-translation method has fallen out of vogue in most modern language departments today due to the many drawbacks of the method. In addition to student boredom, communication with native speakers is poorly facilitated because of the lack of pronunciation modeling and practice. However, this method remains the primary one for medieval languages under the supposition that communication is unimportant and therefore the oral aspects of the language can be eliminated.

In a valiant attempt to “keep dead languages alive,” the University of Texas at Austin hosts an “Old French Online” textbook that illustrates the grammar-translation method (Bauer). Each lesson consists of fragments from well-known Anglo-Norman works, such as *La Chanson de Roland* and *Le voyage de St. Brendan*. After a general overview of the text, the website offers a translation and detailed grammatical analysis of each word, using metalanguage like “third person singular pretérite” or “second person plural subjunctive imperfective.” The lesson then provides the full Anglo-Norman text of the selection, followed
by a translation into English. Finally, students receive explanations in English of various grammatical points, and the last lesson includes an in-depth bibliography of grammars, dictionaries, literary criticism, and manuals on linguistics or medieval culture, some of which are written in French or German. This online textbook thus contains a wealth of useful scholarly resources but may intimidate or discourage all but the most determined students. Likewise, the textbook’s pedagogical approach conceives of language in terms of reception of established meanings: students are expected to translate each word into English and check their comprehension against the accompanying translations from the textbook’s authors. Although students who complete each lesson will acquire a great deal of knowledge about the grammatical system of Anglo-Norman, no opportunities exist for sharing their personal views through the language.

Yet the middle ages, around the world, were a time where writing certainly existed but oral communication was by far the most common way of exchanging culture and ideas. Most of the texts that students are aspiring to read were communicated in an almost exclusively oral transmission route, and understanding these texts through the written remnants leaves out vital information.

V. The Immersive Approach

But immersion in medieval life would not simply mean navigating the space and society of a time where people spoke differently and lived in a different landscape and used different tools. While that is a part of what we can try to reproduce, the very meaning and experience of that space we are navigating was likely very different one thousand years ago. Robert Tally, following and modifying the work of Bertrand Westphal, Leonard Goldstein, and others, suggests that perceptions of time and space changed radically about the time that linear perspective arose in artistic works (Tally 18). In a medieval illumination, for instance, one might have snapshots of past, present, and future within one framed block. Foreground and background rest in the same plane. Starting with perspectival drawing, Goldstein suggests that space became experienced as:

1) continuous, isotropic, and homogenous; 2) quantifiable; and 3) perceived from the point of view of a single, central observer (20–21).
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As a contrast, if we look at a medieval map such as the 1375 Catalan Atlas (see Fig. 1), a different notion of time and space emerges, at least in terms of visual representation. The map simultaneously includes the Queen of Sheba, the three wise men, and the Great Khan from vastly different eras (Old Testament, New Testament, and thirteenth century). Distances and landmasses are not measured to a modern sense of scale, though meaning can be induced from the relative sizes given to different areas and cities. Furthermore, we cannot know from

Fig. 1
which end the viewer was meant to see the map, as the writing and images are oriented in all directions. Space could comprise multiple times and places, and the lack of orientation toward a particular viewer indicates that perhaps multiple perspectives were expected. In this sense of space, medieval maps share many traits of video game maps, including the sense relationship between place and object, where time, distance, and proportion vacillate between being important and irrelevant. For Mario in *Super Mario Bros.*, distance on the map is not proportionate to the difficulty of the task of reaching the next point (Rowland 197). On the Catalan Atlas, Sheba and the Three Wise Men are a part of the map because they share space and time since Creation, showing that time unites us (we are all post-Lapsarian and part of the map of Christian history) and separates us (we can never meet up since we do not exist at the same moment).

Medieval literary works evince similarly disorienting notions of time and space for the modern reader and viewer. In the story of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, the Irish monk Brendan takes a group of men with him as he sets sail in search of an earthly paradise of which he has heard tell. Brendan’s voyage is a text well suited for examination of medieval travel and notions of space, as the spiritual goals of the voyage are intertwined with the material realities of pre-modern travel. To further complicate the matter, the space that Brendan and his group occupy is somewhat linked to what we would call real-space, but it is also fantastic and seems to have no physical beginning or end.

According to Irish annals and genealogies, Brendan lived in Ireland from about 484 to 577. Though he started his spiritual life as a hermit, he went on to found important monasteries throughout Ireland and served as Abbott of Clonfert. A patron saint of navigation and travel, Brendan is said to have set forth on a multi-year voyage in a hide-covered boat in search of an earthly paradise, which, according to legend, he eventually reached. Much of what is known about Brendan comes from two story traditions—the *Vita Brendani* (*Life of Saint Brendan*) and the *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis* (*Voyage of Saint Brendan*). As was often the case with saints’ lives, the vita was most likely written long after the death of the saint, as the cult of Brendan grew more popular. The *Voyage* is a longer, more complex text that was likely composed in Latin centuries after Brendan died. The oldest versions of the *Voyage* date from the ninth or tenth century, and the large number of surviving manuscripts in Latin and various vernaculars indicate a wide readership all over Europe. An Anglo-Norman adaptation of the Latin text appears to have been penned in the early twelfth century by Benedeit, whose name appears in the prologue, and his work was popular enough that, in addition to being the most widely spread vernacu-
lar version of the Voyage, parts were even translated back into Latin at some point. All of the many linguistic versions of the Voyage are relatively homogeneous in certain ways, not to say that they are identical, and this has generally been understood to indicate that they all come from a common original Latin manuscript. The story is episodic, as the monks travel from island to island for several years before returning home. Each manuscript varies at least a little from the others, and some leave out entire islands and/or encounters.

Brendan’s travels have been subjected to spatial analysis before. Most notably, Tim Severin built a replica of Brendan’s boat using medieval tools and materials and sailed it to the New World according to a path that he mapped out by meticulous close reading of the Voyage, linking one of the hellish islands to a volcanic region near Iceland, for example (Severin). Other scholars have joined in the search for equivalent spaces. Margaret Burrell and Carston Wollin have looked to specific times and places of volcanic activity both to date the text and to situate the voyage in modern geographical space (Burrell; Wollin). Geoffrey Ashe equated the Faroes Islands, which means “Sheep Islands” in Danish, to the island that Brendan chances upon that is also replete with sheep (Ashe 86), and the presence of whales off the coast of the Faroes convinced Ashe that Benedeit could have been describing one of these creatures as seen on Brendan’s voyage. Likewise, the crystal towers that Benedeit mentions could be actual icebergs, and so forth.

These studies are fascinating, and without discounting them in any way, we would like to suggest that this impulse to geo-rectify the medieval world with our modern world might cause us to forget that medievals may well have (and probably did) understand space in a very different way. Sarah-Jane Murray has suggested that the voyage is a tale of longing for knowledge, where Brendan finds he must leave his homeland in order to apprehend the fullness of what Paradise entails (Murray). The travel that the monks make is in a seemingly endless circle until the moment that they trust God and react with faith rather than fear when the whale upon which they have celebrated mass seven times starts to swim away, for the seventh time. Travel is complete not when a particular destination is reached but rather when a state of spiritual understanding is achieved.

With our video game, our goal is not to reproduce the voyage or retell the story as Benedeit did with his Latin model. Rather, we believe that a video game is an ideal medium to explore the notion of medieval travel. Much as the touted 2010 game Braid allowed for manipulation of time, our video game allows for the interweaving of different times and spaces. The game cannot be “finished” until certain deeds have been accomplished and the player makes the correct decision to allow a
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A seemingly hopeless situation unfold. Travel is both circular and linear, and the material needs of the travelers, and even Benedeit himself, are mixed in with the spiritual progress of the crew.

VI. Process

So how does a humanist go about creating a game about medieval travel, and what does this bring to our understanding of the medieval text and culture? Just as with any academic analysis of a medieval text, we sought out secondary literature and examined various editions of the text. Once we settled on an edition (Burgess), we read the text carefully line-by-line. We drew maps of how we imagined the islands and split the story into scenes with each student taking an island to develop. A script was written that included dialogue largely but not entirely drawn from the edition.

From a linguistic point of view, teaching methods and needs for the Anglo-Norman are paramount. We identify a set list of vocabulary for each scene. While some words might not appear in the text, they are common to everyday medieval life and they are key elements of the scene, and therefore we have the ability to teach those words in context. Pronunciation of Old French, which poses a teaching challenge, is part of the vocabulary acquisition from the outset. Grammar constructions are a bit trickier, but the teaching practice is to first introduce the grammar point in the context of the story and then to extrapolate and present more formally. We have discussed the notion of quizzes punctuating the scenes because, while this game is meant to be pleasurable, its purpose is to facilitate the instruction of medieval culture and Anglo-Norman reading and speaking skills. However, one of the main values of learning through games is precisely the fact that it does not feel like learning, so we will have to make decisions about effectiveness and next steps when we test the game with real students.

The program was developed in Unity3d, which is a free download and runs on Mac OS X as well as Windows. The games that are created can be run on just about any system, including android and iphones, macs and pcs, and even game consoles. There is also a web player via browser plug-in that can run in Windows and OS X. Unity is used by many professionals, was used to develop Assassin’s Creed Identity, and is now the default software for development for the Nintendo Wii U game system. While it takes some amount of time to get used to the interface, many free tutorials are online to help get new users up to speed, as well as a design community forum in which to ask questions. The objects in the game can be created using the computer graphics
programs Photoshop and Blender, and Unity offers many pre-made objects as well. Sound files (voice and background music and sounds) are mp3 format and added where appropriate. Most characters were made using Mixamo. The movements and gameplay must be scripted, or programmed, in JavaScript or C#, though there are some automated or visual scriptors available to facilitate this, and we used the popular Unity3d plugin Playmaker.

The user begins the game as Benedeit, who is speaking to Adeliza, the first wife of Henry I of England. An example of one of many decisions we made while designing the game, we chose Adeliza as the patroness though several scholars have made a good case for the text actually having been written for Matilda, Henry’s second wife. We settled on Adeliza because she is mentioned as the patroness in our base manuscript. The goal for this opening scene is to place the user into the environment as a first-person character who will experience the cultural phenomenon of patronage. During this and all other dialogue scenes, the Anglo-Norman text is read aloud and appears in the subtitle box with options available for modern French or English.

We have constructed Brendan’s Voyage as a frame tale, beginning with Benedeit (the author of the Anglo-Norman version mentioned in the base manuscript) in the twelfth century. In order to make language learning make sense in the context of the game, the player’s avatar is introduced as a modern-day university student in the library who finds a strange book about a medieval traveler. When the traveler opens the book and begins to read, he or she is mysteriously transported into the court of Henry I where Adeliza is commissioning a book from Benedeit. New to the Anglo-Norman court, the traveler is curious about the culture and needs help mastering the language. As the traveler watches Benedeit work on the manuscript, the book again draws the traveler into the story, this time to the tenth century, where the traveler must accompany Brendan on his voyage. This change of time period in the game serves to highlight to the player/traveler/student that the twelfth century story is a version of a tenth century tale that refers back to events that supposedly took place in the sixth century when Brendan lived. We surmised that Adeliza and her court imagined a mythical and non-specific past that looked much like their own present, and they did not have what we would consider historical data about architecture, clothing, and practices except for what was passed down in tales like this one.

Benedeit’s portion of the game provides an example of how we attempted to fulfill our learning objectives through specific design decisions. After accepting Adeliza’s challenge in the opening sequence, the traveler and Benedeit go in search of the materials he
will need to make his book. These include a Latin text from which he will translate, some parchment, and different inks. The player must use Anglo-Norman to complete a series of tasks within the virtual world. Free to roam around the monastery and the surrounding village, the player interacts with various members of the community, who share their knowledge of the bookmaking process and explain where to find certain materials. Whenever the player approaches a non-player character, a dialogue begins in Anglo-Norman, played as an mp3 file and displayed in subtitles (Anglo-Norman, French, or English) at the bottom of the screen. Information obtained through such conversations is saved and can be consulted on the pause screen, which lists, for example, the ingredients that Benedeit still needs to find in order to make his book. The pause screen also features an inventory grid, inspired by the “backpack” or “equipment” windows of commercial adventure games, where the player can view all of the items gathered thus far. We designed the inventory grid as a kind of in-world visual dictionary.

The Benedeit sequence likewise rewards players who put forth effort in order to understand the language and culture of the virtual world. At the beginning of this portion of the game, the player knows only that Benedeit needs to make a book; no explanations are provided of how to complete this task. Only through communication with the townspeople do the answers begin to emerge. Even so, the game is not a mere journey from point A to point B in which the player is a passive spectator. Each inhabitant of Benedeit’s world has information to offer, but the player must decide whom to trust in each case, as we have designed the game to further not only linguistic competence but cultural competence as well. For example, monks in the library possess a wealth of information on the bookmaking process, but townspeople may have greater day-to-day experience with the natural world and thus superior knowledge of where to gather certain herbs or berries. In similar fashion, merchants in the marketplace are willing to sell Benedeit materials but are not always the best option. Some offer ingredients that Benedeit can obtain for free elsewhere, while others attempt to
sell him ingredients that he does not need to produce his book. Since Benedeit possesses limited funds, the player must consult a variety of characters and think critically before making decisions. This aspect of our game design promotes awareness of cultural situations and teaches players about the virtual environment through a series of choices and consequences.

Although designing a videogame to teach language, literature, and culture is a rewarding experience, there are several questions to keep in mind before beginning such a project. The process of making the game provides unique and detailed insight, as close reading and analysis are imperative for imaginative construction of this world. However, instructors who wish to design games for their work must either invest time in learning the system and in finding the required materials or assemble a design team and delegate responsibilities. Given the budgetary constraints at many institutions, it will often be preferable to build this team through undergraduate or graduate student volunteers, who benefit from the opportunity to produce a “deliverable” academic resource, capable of being used by students around the world, instead of a traditional term paper that only the professor will read. Working in a group gives additional advantages as game designers discuss ideas and problems in a group (we did this on a daily basis) before splitting up to work on individual aspects of the game. Forming a team not only accelerates the design process but also draws upon the strengths of each member. Students with a background in music, for instance, can compose the game’s soundtrack, while their peers in visual arts programs can create 3D models or 2D graphics. A further advantage of collaborating with students is that their perspective helps to shape the product, avoiding games created exclusively by instructors and, therefore, possibly out of touch with the needs and preferences of the intended audience.

Instructors must also address the tension between meeting pedagogical goals and encouraging student engagement. At the most basic level, our objective is for students to hone their linguistic abilities and acquire cultural knowledge through immersion and interaction. Nonetheless, as student motivation plays a key role in language learning, we attempted to stimulate interest through an attractive interface and appealing characters. When designing the menu screens, dialogue boxes, and in-game objects, we used as a model the aesthetics of successful commercial videogames such as Assassin’s Creed and The Legend of Zelda. We took a similar approach when scripting the behavior of non-player characters. Whereas many pedagogical games are explicitly didactic, creating the impression that the virtual world exists only for the player’s (educational) benefit, we attempted to promote
learning in more subtle and organic fashion. Our non-player characters interact among themselves and introduce conversational topics that go beyond the player’s quest. The illusion that we seek to create is that the player is negotiating the culture of an autonomous world, whose inhabitants hold a variety of beliefs and strategies for making sense of their surroundings. For example, the monk in the library who gives Benedeit the parchment, having fulfilled his narrative function in the game, continues to provide opportunities for communication, sharing gossip about his peers or complaining about the recent weather. This “excess of meaning” engages players in the virtual world and, though not explicitly didactic, introduces vocabulary and grammar not found in the source text.

Finally, tensions may arise between a desire for scholarly accuracy and the limitations of the software or digital materials. As academics and instructors, we strive for precision and “faithfulness to the source.” When designing a video game, however, this mindset can prove counterproductive, generating frustration and preventing completion of the project. Unless instructors are working with a highly skilled and diverse team, it will likely be difficult to represent certain aspects of the text. In our game, for example, we soon ran across the problem of historical accuracy in character wardrobes and architectural styles. It would be possible, in theory, to replicate the textual descriptions, but such an undertaking would consume time and funds either unavailable or better used elsewhere. We eventually reached the conclusion that our primary goal was not to reproduce perfectly the physical reality of the text, but rather to promote learning through participation, which allowed us to overlook some of the details. Of course, we are not proposing that St. Brendan appear with wings and green skin, or that Benedeit’s monastery resemble an Egyptian pyramid. We do suggest, however, that instructors maintain a certain degree of realistic flexibility in order to carry the project to its completion.

VII. Conclusions

Video games provide an exciting new area for instruction, as research shows that students engage with games, enjoying playing them, and can take advantage of avatar construction to create a learning space where mistakes can be made without embarrassment or serious consequences. Research remains to be done on the best kinds of games to learn foreign languages, and further studies are needed to assess the outcomes on student learning. For our own purposes of learning Anglo-Norman through an immersive environment, we have already
seen the excitement and depth of engagement with the material on the part of those who make the game. Our next step will be testing the game and determining which aspects of the game are most effective and which need to be changed. At that point, the general method could be used to make further games to learn and teach dead languages through immersion. As gaming technology continues to develop and resources like the Oculus Rift allow greater sensations of immersion, the time will come when students of medieval languages can indeed “study abroad” in both time and space.

Notes
1. The perception of colors was also different in medieval culture. Unlike the modern-day system, based on pigments or light values, medieval color theories involved the categories of hue, depth, and luster (Meredith 83–84).

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Constructing Identity in Anglo-Saxon Literature: Review of Current Scholarship

Lindy Brady

Introduction

Recent scholarship on identity in Anglo-Saxon literature has shed useful light on the numerous, and by no means mutually exclusive, categories through which the Anglo-Saxons conceptualized their own identities and those of other early medieval peoples. Identity might be understood as geographical, religious, cultural, political, heroic, class- or occupation-based, educational, or gendered. Yet while many facets of individual identities have been recovered from Anglo-Saxon texts, the process through which some of the people living in early medieval Britain came to see themselves as “English” is not yet fully understood. What it meant to be “Anglo-Saxon” or “English” emerged in one of three ways in the texts of the period. Identity could be articulated in opposition, as when the Anglo-Saxons as a people defined themselves against others, largely the Britons, Danes, or Normans. It could be formulated in solidarity, as when the Anglo-Saxons placed themselves on equal footing with other peoples and cultures, such as Roman Christianity or Charlemagne’s court on the continent. Finally, Anglo-Saxon identity could be envisioned in singularity, as something exceptional in its own right without the need of comparison to other peoples, as in the Anglo-Saxon origin myth of migration, or awareness of Britain’s insular geographical status and position relative to the rest of Europe. In order to better comprehend the process through which an “English” or “Anglo-Saxon” identity was constructed, this essay synthesizes recent scholarship on those Anglo-Saxon texts that articulate an identity in opposition to that of other peoples, namely the Britons, Danes, and Normans. In so doing, this article hopes to pave the way for a better understanding of the process of formation of an “English” or “Anglo-Saxon” identity in future scholarship on the period.

Understanding the numerous ways in which the Anglo-Saxons formulated a cultural, ethnic, and national sense of identity in opposition to other peoples—both within the British Isles and throughout the early medieval world—has been a fruitful area of scholarship in recent decades. Synthesizing these studies on the articulation of
Anglo-Saxon identity at individual historical and textual moments offers the chance to more clearly comprehend the formation of an English identity across the Anglo-Saxon period as a whole. Work on an Anglo-Saxon sense of national identity grew in large part out of a frustrated response to Benedict Anderson’s influential claims that nationalism developed only in the modern era (Imagined Communities). As scholars of medieval literature and history have demonstrated, a range of textual traditions reveal a burgeoning sense of Anglo-Saxon or English national identity long before the Norman Conquest. A seminal article by Patrick Wormald had early identified Bede as a key inventor of “the English” ("Bede, the Bretwaldas"). Moreover, an important article by Susan Reynolds added nuance to the modern use of the word Anglo-Saxon. Reynolds concluded that there was no such thing in early Britain as a “hyphenated or compound kingdom of Anglo-Saxons” but rather that “the English people were a people because they formed a kingdom” (414).

Building on these early studies, work by Sarah Foot and Kathleen Davis demonstrated that there is textual evidence for a burgeoning sense of national identity during the Anglo-Saxon period. In particular, the political agenda and vernacular translation program of Alfred the Great was very important in creating this sense of English identity. Foot argued that “there are grounds for seeing an increasing sophistication in the development of a self-conscious perception of ‘English’ cultural uniqueness and individuality towards the end of the ninth century, at least in some quarters, and for crediting King Alfred’s court circle with its expression” (25). As she concludes, “through his promotion of the term Angelcynn to reflect the common identity of his people . . . King Alfred might be credited with the invention of the English as a political community” (25).

Davis directly questions the underlying assumptions behind Anderson’s claims that the idea of “the nation” is a modern construct. As she writes, “I am not suggesting that the medieval nation is the same as the modern nation, but rather that imagining national identity is not restricted to one set of historically specific conditions such as print culture, democracy, and secularization” (613). Davis also links an increasing awareness of England as a nation in the Anglo-Saxon period to the production of literature in the vernacular. In doing so, she calls attention to the importance of Alfred’s promotion of the idea that the English shared a common language, a common land, and a common religion in forming this sense of national identity before the Norman Conquest. Nicole Guenther Discenza has further explored this sense of Englishness during Alfred’s reign by contextualizing how his translation programme positioned the geography of Britain in relation to
the rest of the medieval world ("A Map of the Universe"). Additionally, Stephen J. Harris’s recent monograph traces the development and articulation of particular group identities during key moments in Anglo-Saxon literary history, focusing on Bede, Alfred, Wulfstan, and Norman stories of origin introduced after the Conquest (Race and Ethnicity).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of those primary texts which raise the question of what it meant to be “English” or “Anglo-Saxon” construct that identity in opposition to others. Over the course of the Anglo-Saxon period, this “identity in opposition” construct was directed largely against the three main groups of peoples with whom the Anglo-Saxons found themselves in most frequent military conflict. In chronological order, those peoples were the Britons, the Danes, and the Normans. This review article draws together some of the most interesting work that has been done on those surprising textual moments where what it meant to be Anglo-Saxon or English was constructed, primarily, as not being someone else.

I. The Britons

The Britons were the original inhabitants of the British Isles. A sense of lingering difference between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons can be found in texts written throughout the period, despite the fact that the lived reality of encounters between these two peoples was vastly more complex and nuanced. As Bryan Ward-Perkins has noted, “when they recorded their past, the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons presented themselves as races apart” despite the abundance of historical and archaeological evidence that this was not the case (515). Likewise, Ward-Perkins notes that while there is a great deal of historical evidence for political and military cooperation between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons, the written records of both peoples present a consistent narrative of two discrete and antagonistic peoples fighting in opposition over the same territory (516). Indeed, recent scholarship on the history of the early Anglo-Saxon period has called attention to the fact that the lived reality of Anglo-British interactions was likely to have involved much more cooperation than conflict (Bassett; Higham; Sims-Williams; and Yorke, Kings and Kingdoms). However, work on the literature of the period has tended to focus on the exceptional moments, where Anglo-Saxon identity is positioned against that of the Britons.

Bede’s Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (alongside the vernacular Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, discussed further below) is one of our two most important surviving sources for understanding Anglo-Saxon history. It is also, as Harris has argued, “perhaps the most important
text to propose ethnic identity to the Anglo-Saxons and the English,” a “story of ethnogenesis” which “shaped Anglo-Saxon ethnic identity into an authoritative, textual kernel of tradition” (45, 83). As Allen J. Frantzen notes, “for Bede, Anglo-Saxon origins supply a racial identity that permits harmonious relations with the Church in Rome and the lasting conversion of the English” (32). However, this narrative of Anglo-Saxon Christian identity is constructed in opposition to that of the insular British peoples. As Clare Stancliffe reminds us, “Bede is often regarded as a reliable historian, but recent research has revealed the gulf that lies between his conception of history, and ours,” a gulf which is particularly evident when it comes to his negative portrayal of the Britons (1). As she further explains, “Bede is concerned to show the destiny under God of the English people,” and one of his central messages is thus that the Britons sinned in their failure to convert the Anglo-Saxons and it is the Anglo-Saxons who were the “chosen people” to inherit the island of Britain (5).

This is, as Barbara Yorke has pointed out, because Bede is following the classical and medieval understanding of a gens, namely, a people who shared a common language. In so doing, he “appears to indicate that English identity was in part formed by a consciousness of difference from other peoples in Britain,” one which was in large part predicated upon an awareness of language difference (“Political and Ethnic Identity” 71). As Nicholas Brooks has argued, for Bede, Anglo-Saxon control of southern Britain was justified by the simple fact that the Britons had proven unable to hold it. Bede “depicted the English after their conversion as, by contrast, a godly people, who cultivated their links with Rome and prided themselves on their Roman rectitude in matters of ecclesiastical controversy” (“From British to English Christianity” 5). Understanding Bede’s articulation of an English Christian identity in opposition to that of the Britons helps make sense of such surprising moments in the Historia Ecclesiastica as Bede’s account of the Battle of Chester, in which he reports the killing of unarmed British monks from Bangor by the Anglo-Saxon king Æthelfrith (Bk. 2, Ch. 2; Colgrave and Mynors 140–43). Yet at the same time as the eighth-century Historia Ecclesiastica constructs a Christian Anglo-Saxon identity in opposition to the British, Sharon Rowley has trenchantly demonstrated that the anonymous Old English translation of Bede’s text “omits a substantial amount of material that depicts the Britons as unworthy of possessing the island” (78), suggesting that the passage of a few centuries between the two texts had softened criticism towards the Britons.

The surviving recensions of the vernacular Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, while more terse and fragmented in their narratives, also display a
sense of Anglo-Saxon identity constructed in opposition to the British. Such difference is perhaps most striking in the origin myths of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that the manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* preserve, which were incorporated into the *Chronicle* most likely by its ninth-century compilers (Yorke, “Political and Ethnic Identity” 77). As Yorke notes, the origin legends that survive for each Anglo-Saxon kingdom are quite similar. They depict a pair of related warriors (father/son or two brothers) who arrive in Britain by ship with a small band, defeat the Britons, claim the land for their own, and found various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and royal dynasties. As Yorke notes, “although this is not always explicitly stated, these accounts were probably meant to embody the foundation of the whole *gens*” (77).

A small sample of fifth-century entries from the Parker Chronicle (MS A) of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* illustrate this point well. In 449, two brothers, “Hengest and Horsa, invited by Vortigern, king of the Britons, sought out Britain in the landing-place which is named Ebba’s Cree, at first to help the Britons, but later they fought against them.” By 455, “Hengest and Horsa fought against Vortigern the king in the place which is called Aylesford, and his brother Horsa was killed. And after that Hengest, and Æsc his son, succeeded to the kingdom,” demonstrating the beginnings of an Anglo-Saxon royal dynasty. In 457, when “Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons in the place which is called Crayford, and there killed 4,000 men; and the Britons then abandoned the land of Kent and in great terror fled to the stronghold of London,” the coming of the Anglo-Saxons begins to seem less like a few isolated battles and more like a conquest. The same is true of the entry for 473, when “Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh, and seized countless war-loot, and the Welsh fled from the English like fire,” and by 491, when “Ælle and Cissa besieged Anderitum, and killed all who lived in there; there was not even one Briton left there” (Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. 12–14). The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a text that “reflects, and even helps to construct, a developing Anglo-Saxon national identity, an identity that continued, like the *Chronicle* itself, even beyond the Norman Conquest” (Bredehoft 3). While it is believed to have been created in the ninth century under King Alfred’s reign in Wessex, the origin myths of other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that it preserves reflect an earlier process of Anglo-Saxon identity formation as positioned in opposition to the Britons.

Glimpses of Anglo-Saxon identity understood in opposition to the Britons can also be found in texts that have been traditionally considered works of literature rather than historical record. The Latin *Life of Saint Guthlac*, written in the eighth century by a monk named Felix, speaks of a moment during the saint’s life when “the Britons,
the implacable enemies of the Saxon race, were troubling the English with their attacks, their pillaging, and their devastations of the people” (Colgrave 108–09). Similar is the tenth-century Old English poem The Battle of Brunanburh, which commemorates an Anglo-Saxon victory over the Vikings and is preserved in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This poem concludes, “never yet within this island has there been a greater slaughter of folk felled by the sword’s edges before this one, according to what books tell us, and ancient authorities, since when from the east the Angles and Saxons arrived here, sought out Britain across the broad ocean, proud craftsmen of war, overcame the Welshmen and, being men keen after glory, conquered the country” (Bradley 518). As Thomas A. Bredehoft has argued, these lines are a “claim to national unity” in which Æthelstan is positioned as “the fitting heir to the Anglian and Saxon invaders of the fifth century” (101). In this poem, “the figuration of the Anglo-Saxon migration as a shared element of history works to support the notion of a coherent English nation” (101).

II. The Danes

In its preservation of the Anglo-Saxon origin myth of conquest over the Britons, The Battle of Brunanburh links together two of the three key peoples against whom the Anglo-Saxons constructed a sense of themselves as a people. The focus of the poem itself is an heroic defeat of the Viking army (and its allies) by an Anglo-Saxon force itself drawn from across multiple kingdoms. The poem places Anglo-Saxon valor in contrast to the Vikings’ shameful retreat when it describes how “the Norsemen set forth, a dreary remnant left over by the javelins, in their riveted ships upon Dingesmere, to find their way to Dublin across the deep water, back to Ireland, humiliated” (Bradley 517). As Jennifer Neville has noted, this is a moment of significant mythic and historical continuity. She argues that “the ‘people’ encouraged to imagine itself as it listened to The Battle of Brunanburh would no doubt recognize itself as the same ‘people’ who found itself as it read the ‘Adventus Anglo-Saxonum’” (120–21). As she notes, the Anglo-Saxons are “defined in a way that shares striking parallels with the way that the Chronicle described them as they arrived on the island, despite the fact that, this time, they are repelling an invading army that has crossed the sea, rather than acting as invaders” (120–21). The Battle of Brunanburh, in its twinned focus on two different peoples against whom the Anglo-Saxons constructed their own identity, encapsulates the continued presence of this process of identity formation in opposition across changing historical conditions.
The Viking attacks left a significant impact on Anglo-Saxon England. This impact is evident in the literary and historical works of the period. Scholarship on these texts has noted that one key reaction of the Anglo-Saxons to the Viking invasions was an awareness of the religious differences between the two peoples (Smyth 29). Records of the Viking attacks make clear that while the Anglo-Saxons were certainly aware that their attackers were Danish, until they began to settle in Anglo-Saxon England and convert to Christianity in the late ninth century, they were also frequently identified as heathens (29). The Battle of Maldon is another tenth-century Old English poem, which contra Brunanburh records an Anglo-Saxon defeat by the Vikings. This text illustrates this dual sense of difference—on the basis of both land and religion—between Danish and Anglo-Saxon identities. The Anglo-Saxon battle-leader Byrhtnoth tells the Viking’s messenger: “seamen’s spokesman, report back again; tell your people much more distasteful news: that here stands a worthy earl with his troop of men who is willing to defend this his ancestral home, the country of Æthelræd, my lord’s nation and land. The heathens shall perish in battle” (Bradley 521). As the Viking attacks increased in severity, Anglo-Saxon texts from the period demonstrate an increasing sense of unity among the Anglo-Saxons who stood in opposition to the Vikings as an invaded, Christian people with a common land and tongue.

Recent scholarship has fruitfully noted that this sense of a national English identity opposed to that of the pagan Scandinavian peoples did not simply arise as an ex nihilo response to the Viking attacks. Rather, English identity developed more directly as a consequence of Alfred the Great’s political agenda and vernacular translation program. As Foot has argued, “Alfred was indeed trying to shape the English imagination; by collating and presenting a coherent historical whole he invented an English community, implanting into the minds of his people a personal and cultural feeling of belonging to the Angelcynn, the English kind” (36). Moreover, Alfred created a sense of Anglo-Saxon identity in opposition to the Vikings by invoking a more particular concept of Englishness which was specifically predicated upon Christianity (Foot 37). Contemporary accounts of the Viking attacks in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Asser’s Life of King Alfred provide a clear picture of the very real sense of military opposition with which the Anglo-Saxons viewed the Vikings. However, it is within their status as texts arising out of King Alfred’s translation program that scholars have found the clearest expressions of Anglo-Saxon Christian identity in opposition to that of the pagan Danes. As Janet Thormann notes, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle both records actual events and creates its own historical narrative. She argues that “the writing of the Chronicle
produces the idea of a nation, an Anglo-Saxon England that may legitimately lay claim to power” (60). Likewise, Alice Sheppard has argued that it is during Alfred’s reign that “the Angelcynn formally come into being as a people whose land has been settled by the Danes and who are harassed by the Danish army, but who are bound to Alfred by lordship obligations” (18).

While the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* bears witness to the formation of an *angelcynn* under Alfred’s rule, the other texts of his translation program worked to spread that sense of Anglo-Saxon solidarity against the Vikings more broadly to the English people. As Foot notes, the texts which Alfred had translated were not selected at random “but together constituted a programme of study which if mastered would serve to restore Christianity among the English aristocracy, which in the king’s opinion had declined so far . . . that God had sent the Danes as divine punishment” (30). Alfred’s own *Preface* to his translation of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* mourns the passing of a past intellectual golden age in England before the Viking attacks at the same time as it seeks to unite the Anglo-Saxons through a common vernacular. He writes, “when I reflected on all this, I recollected how—before everything was ransacked and burned—the churches throughout England stood filled with treasures and books . . . and they derived very little benefit from those books, because they could understand nothing of them, since they were not written in their own language” (Keynes and Lapidge 125). As Davis has noted, Alfred’s attention to writing in Old English is significant. She argues that “the English vernacular stands as one among many legitimate languages in which wisdom can be conveyed, and Alfred’s literary project emerges as both conforming to universal Christian tradition and as distinguishing England within that tradition as a national, homogeneous unit with its own language and a single political, as well as spiritual, identity” (615). Alfred’s construction of English unity, as it situated the Anglo-Saxons within a broader Christian historical framework, simultaneously incorporated a religious, geographical, and historical sense of opposition to the pagan Vikings.

As was the case with the Britons, changing historical conditions did bring about a softening—or at least, a nuancing—of the textual representations of the Danes over time. For instance, as Bredehoft notes, the tenth-century *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* poem known as *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* stands in contrast to *The Battle of Brunanburh*. In this poem, “the Danes are explicitly opposed to the harassing Northmen; the settlers of the Danelaw are identified as being under the protection of the English king, in need of his efforts to release them from the fetters of the heathens” (103). Yet England’s Viking troubles did not cease after the establishment of the Danelaw. A good illustration of
this is Wulfstan of York’s eleventh-century *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (“The Sermon of ‘Wolf’ to the English when the Danes Persecuted Them Most”). This text, in its sense of grim oppression, constructs an English Christian identity—albeit an unworthy one—in opposition to that of the pagan Vikings. In so doing, Wulfstan draws a deliberate parallel between the current historical moment and the rhetoric of the sixth-century British writer Gildas in his *De excidio et conquestu britanniae* (“On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain”). This text blames the sins of the Britons for the coming of the Anglo-Saxons (who at the time were themselves pagans). Wulfstan writes that “among heathen peoples one dare not withhold little or much of what is appointed for the worship of false gods, and we everywhere withhold God’s dues all too frequently . . . often two pirates, or sometimes three, will drive herds of Christian men out through this people from sea to sea, huddled together as a public shame to us all, if we could in earnest properly feel any . . . they ravage and they burn, plunder and rob, and carry away on board; and indeed, what else is there in all these events but the wrath of God clear and visible towards this nation?” (Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose* 179, 182). As Elaine Treharne has cogently argued, the time of the Viking attacks on England—even during the ostensible period of stability brought about under Cnut’s reign—was “still a period of cultural trauma” (2). She notes that at this time “the majority of English ealdormen and thanes were killed, the country divided into four, Anglo-Scandinavian jarls given positions of power, and many changes brought about in governance at national and local level, the impact of which was still felt into the Norman period” (50).

III. The Normans

The historical impact of the Norman Conquest upon England has, of course, been well-studied. Yet as recent work, particularly by Treharne, has demonstrated, at the same time as the Conquest was a very real moment of collective trauma, Anglo-Saxon identity did not disappear overnight on October 14, 1066. Rather, the “voices of the English often writing in English” survive both in greater numbers and for a greater length after the Conquest than is usually acknowledged, “at least into the thirteenth century” (Treharne 93). In addition to testifying to the persistence of Old English textual production through the twelfth century, those texts written during the hundred and fifty years or so following the Norman Conquest are also of interest for their continuation of the process of defining English identity in opposition, now against the Normans. As Hugh M. Thomas has noted, “English society in the late
eleventh century was permeated by an awareness of ethnic difference, and of the contrast between English and Normans” (46). Anglo-Saxon texts produced after the Conquest articulated differences between the English and Normans on the levels of appearance, clothing, hairstyle, manners and customs, language, governance, and military organization. These works, written both in Latin and in the vernacular, preserve a sense of English identity in opposition to the Normans long after the Conquest itself.

Only one contemporary written English account of the Battle of Hastings survives, in the Worcester Manuscript (MS D) of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. While we should not expect a narrative of any battle recorded by the defeated party to be less than a lament for the loss, the entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that surround the Norman Conquest are notable for the immediacy with which several crucial differences between Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman governance are underscored. The most important of these differences are the rapid building of fortified castles and an increase in bureaucratic documentation. Immediately after the Conquest, the Normans are said to have “built castles widely throughout this nation, and oppressed the wretched people; and afterwards it always grew very much worse,” while the following year in 1067, “the king set a great tax on the wretched people, and yet nevertheless always allowed to be raided all that they went across” (Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Prose 200–01). The process of collecting information for the Domesday Book is likewise described by the Peterborough Chronicle (MS E) of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in ways that emphasize the difference between current Norman practice and what had come before. William is said to have “had it investigated so very narrowly that there was not one single hide, nor one yard of land, not even (it is shameful to tell—but it seemed no shame to him to do it) one ox, not one cow, not one pig was left out, that was not set down in his record” (Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Prose 216). As Marjorie Chibnall notes, while the Normans formed a minority population in England, they were nonetheless dominant and their presence had a considerable impact on the land and its people (48). As she points out, “within twenty years all the most prominent secular magnates had been replaced by continentals, and only two pre-1066 bishops still survived . . . earls, king’s thanes and almost all the wealthiest thanes had either fallen in battle or fled into exile” (48). While the majority of the Anglo-Saxon population did remain in England after the Norman Conquest, a sense of the immediate impact which the Normans had on the English landscape is often used to articulate an English identity within the literature of this time.

These entries from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle illustrate the ways in which English identity became understood in relation to the Norman
presence in the immediate aftermath of the Conquest. Additionally, two
Latin works—the *Life of Harold Godwinson* and the *Life of Hereward*—
written about a hundred and fifty years after the Battle of Hastings un-
derscore the persistence of an English identity constructed in opposi-
tion to a Norman one long after the Conquest itself was over. The *Life
of Harold Godwinson* is a part-romance, part-*Vita* whose main focus is
the king’s piety. The text recounts a legend that he survived the Battle of
Hastings and lived for years in anonymity as a hermit. The work begins,
however, by defending Harold’s right to the throne and detailing the
impact of the Norman Conquest upon the English. Harold is “a most
famous and lawful king—rightfully and lawfully crowned” (Swanton,
*Three Lives* 3). His *Life* depicts the persistence of a native English iden-
ity as contrasted to an alien Norman one. The text describes how “when
the English army was overcome and beaten by this initial Norman on-
slaught . . . all the common people and all the nobility of the kingdom
had submitted their necks to the yoke of the Conqueror; by now nearly
all the leading men were either annihilated or driven from their home-
land, leaving their ancestral estates to be divided and occupied by for-
eigners” (13). While the anonymous hermit Harold, as Laura Ashe has
noted, is “explicitly not a hero for the English, or a figurehead of English
identity” (“Harold Godwinson” 79), he is nonetheless a microcosmic
embodiment of what it means to be English: standing in opposition to
the Normans; an alien in one’s homeland.

Another post-Conquest iteration of English identity in opposition
to Norman can be found in the *Life of Hereward*. This text provides the
fullest narrative of events also related elsewhere, namely the rebellion
of the Anglo-Saxon earl Hereward against William the Conqueror from
a base in the fens. This text has an interesting scribal preface which
articulates the equivalence of English identity and writing in the ver-
nacular—and the perilous status of both—in the years following the
Conquest. The scribe writes, “I took care to enquire in many places, yet
found nothing complete—only a few loose pages, partly rotten with
damp and decayed and partially damaged by tearing . . . I have with dif-
culty extracted from it a few details . . . written down in English by the
deacon Leofric . . . it was the endeavor of this well-remembered priest
to collect together from histories or from trustworthy stories all the
exploits of great heroes and fighters of ancient times . . . and for their
remembrance to commit them to writing in English” (Swanton, *Three
Lives* 45). Although the English texts in question are now lost, this pas-
sage gives voice to Treharne’s recent argument that literary production
in the vernacular continued after the Conquest for much longer and to
a much greater extent than scholars have traditionally recognized. Yet
this preface also demonstrates a continued sense of English identity
that is linked both to a shared history and to an ongoing tradition of preserving that history by recording it in the vernacular. At the same time, the tangible loss of the vernacular literary tradition is mourned in the vivid image of decaying and fragmented manuscript pages.

This same sense of loss appears in the narrative of the *Life* itself. After a romantic youth abroad, Hereward returns to the shock of an altered post-Conquest England. He “wished to visit his father’s house and his homeland, now subject to the rule of foreigners and almost ruined by the exactions of many men, wanting to help any friends or neighbors who perhaps might still be alive in this place” (Swanton, *Three Lives* 61). Hereward’s English identity is defined in contrast to his Norman foils. His return to his ancestral home finds that “they were bewailing the fact that they were subject to those who the previous day had slain the innocent younger son of their lord,” and his first encounter with Normans comes when “he saw them all by the fireside overcome with drunkenness, the soldiers reclining in the women’s laps;” […] “among them was a jester playing a lute, abusing the English race and performing antics in the middle of the hall meant in imitation of English dancing” (62–63). Interestingly, this narrative underscores the mutual English and Norman awareness of their disparate identities as peoples as expressed through custom and language. For instance, Hereward disguises himself as a potter to spy on the Norman camp, and “heard them discussing in French how they were going to bring about the downfall of the Isle,” because “they supposed him to be a peasant and unfamiliar with the language” (75). A century and a half after the Battle of Hastings, the *Life of Hereward* preserves a sense that what it meant to be English, on some level, was that one was not a Norman.

**Conclusions**

In an article on “national” identity in twelfth-century Wales, Huw Pryce reminds us that “it cannot be assumed that ethnic terms used in written texts invariably represent notions of identity that were widely held by the people thus labelled: they may equally well reflect the predilections of authors seeking to promote a particular concept of identity, as has persuasively been argued, to take a well-known example, with respect to Bede’s emphasis on the ‘English people’” (775). This review article has called attention to those moments in Anglo-Saxon literature which stand out precisely because what it means to be a part of “the English people” is formulated in opposition to other peoples “thus labelled” by Anglo-Saxon authors. I hope it has been clear that all such moments themselves “reflect the predilections of authors seeking
to promote a particular concept of identity” (Pryce 775). While it goes without saying that the literary depictions of the Britons, Danes, and Normans in the texts which I have highlighted above cannot be taken as representative of those peoples themselves, it is also important to remember that neither can they be understood as an accurate reflection of historical Anglo-British, Anglo-Danish, or Anglo-Norman relations.

Consider the following description of a battle in Britain in which an invading pagan army was successfully defeated by native Christian forces: “the barbarians were beaten and he was victorious; they fled to their keels and were drowned as they clambered aboard them like women” (Morris 31). While both the circumstances and rhetoric of this text are nearly identical to the Anglo-Saxon defeat of the Viking army described in *The Battle of Brunanburh* above, this quotation is not from an Old English text but from a Welsh one, namely the ninth-century Cymro-Latin *Historia Brittonum*. The passage describes not just the invasion of the pagan Anglo-Saxons from the perspective of the Christian Britons, but also, importantly, the defeat of one people by another who did not in the least consider themselves to be conquered.

Thus, it is important to remember that the scholarship on the construction of an Anglo-Saxon identity in opposition to other peoples which has been drawn together here does not fully illuminate the actual relationships between the Anglo-Saxons and those other peoples. Rather, in pointing to some moments where English identity is articulated in opposition to that of others, this review article hopes to have called attention to the process of identity formation itself. The rich body of recent studies in this area demonstrates that one way of gaining access to how a people understood themselves is through the lens of how they viewed others. By understanding who the Anglo-Saxons positioned themselves against and the ways in which they did so, we can gain a greater understanding of the formation of an English identity in the literature of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Yet as this essay has suggested, a sense of Anglo-Saxon identity was not formed in isolation. Rather, it developed in large part as a result of interactions with the other peoples of the early British Isles. This review article has highlighted much excellent recent work which has been done on the formation of an English identity during the Anglo-Saxon period. However, such studies are written largely from the perspective of Old English and Anglo-Latin texts. Future work on the formation of an Anglo-Saxon identity might fruitfully consider these Anglo-Saxon works alongside their British, Scandinavian, and Norman counterparts. Placing these early Anglo-Saxon materials in a comparative perspective would not only better illuminate the process of identity formation in
the early medieval period, but also help to increase our understanding of how the Anglo-Saxons were viewed by themselves and by others.

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New Directions for the Old French Fabliaux: Updating Harry F. Williams’s 1981 Review

Kathryn L. Smithies

As a genre, the old French fabliau is essentially a collection of thirteenth-century ribald tales that have interested scholars from different disciplines for over four centuries, including antiquarians, linguists, literary scholars and social and cultural historians. In 1981, South Atlantic Review published an article by Professor Harry F. Williams, which outlined the then-current state of fabliau scholarship. Thirty-five years has proved a fecund period; in the succeeding three and a half decades, fabliau scholarship has continued along existing schools of thought and burgeoned into areas and fields previously unconsidered. The consequence of this scholarship—old and new directions—has served to extend and refine our knowledge and understanding of these complex tales, their place in thirteenth-century society and the concerns and foci of that society. The focus of this article is to supplement Williams’s observations and reveal some unanticipated directions in which fabliau scholars have taken their research since 1981. Further, it is also the intention of this article to promote the fabliau to a new audience as a legitimate genre for research into many aspects of medieval society, as well as to stress the genre’s ongoing significance to established fabliau, medieval, and literary scholars. Schematically, it will initially follow Williams’s tri-partite structure, which provided a brief overview of fabliau research followed by consideration of some unsolved problems and a list of potential avenues for future investigations; finally, I will outline more recent and innovative directions in fabliau scholarship.

A Brief Overview of Fabliau Research since 1981

The first observation to make is that the exponential growth in fabliau studies articulated by Williams has continued unabated. There is no shortage of publications dedicated to this collection of humorous tales, predominantly in the form of journal articles with some edited thematic collections of essays and monographs. For this reason alone, it is timely to review the evolution of research of a corpus of tales little
known outside discrete literary and historical academic communities. In this section Williams notes several areas of fabliau research that had attracted scrutiny pre-1981: specifically in the areas of bibliographies; doctoral dissertation topics; translations; societies dedicated to the study of the genre; and published editions. As outlined below, interest in these fields has continued to prosper and attract scholarly attention, although not necessarily in prolific numbers.

Whilst prior to 1981 had certainly witnessed the publication of numerous bibliographies, which Williams acknowledged, the most recent addition to this field, Cobby's excellent 2009 analytical bibliography is feasibly the most comprehensive. This work quite possibly covers almost everything ever published on the fabliaux between 1581 and 2007. The author’s far-reaching scope and methodical organization means that the scholarship is easily accessible, being arranged into four discrete sections: bibliographical studies; manuscript studies; editions, translations, and adaptations; and finally, the largest section, critical studies. It is thoroughly indexed, providing three categories—author name, fabliau title, and topic—making it an indispensable reference tool for fabliau scholars. Additionally, the on-line bibliography—International Medieval Bibliography, hosted by the academic publisher Brepols—lists publications addressing various aspects of fabliau scholarship. It has a refinable search engine and endeavors to be current. Arguably, these two sources are indispensable, not only for scholars working in the field of fabliau studies, but also for general medievalists considering associated topics.

From the point of view of the fabliau as subject material for doctoral dissertations, the trend that Williams identified has continued to the present day. Literature and history doctoral students mine these rich texts to present myriad arguments and analyses. In many instances the fabliau features in doctoral chapters forming a component of the overall thesis; less often they take centre stage as the focus of the investigation. Frequently, when the fabliau is at the center of the doctoral thesis, the doctoral candidate has taken a literary approach and concentrates on the genre’s humor; recently however, some theses have hypothesized on more diverse and interdisciplinary topics. Eaton’s thesis on shame and guilt culture, for example, considered the fabliau as a means of providing and maintaining social control, whilst Horton’s thesis on the fabliau’s relation to the vices and virtues concluded that many fabliaux were a form of “inverse exempla.” The extension of scholarship into new disciplines discloses the rich nature of the genre and shows no signs of abating. Indeed, as the final section will reveal, fabliau scholarship enjoys a far more varied application than pre-1981.
Williams also noted that translations of the corpus had enjoyed an academic presence during the 1970s, yet this practice has not persisted and many fabliau texts remain untranslated. This is disappointing, as with the current fiscal challenges facing universities, many no longer routinely offer the opportunity to learn languages such as old French and consequently, much of the corpus remains out of reach to many students, undergraduate and postgraduate (incidentally, Ramey and Wenz’s article addresses this very issue). The potential result is that the opportunity to study the fabliau diminishes. Of course, there is the criticism that translations rely more on poetic licence than remaining true to the original text. One 1980s reviewer disliked a translator’s practice to “compress, paraphrase, or embellish the original”; nonetheless, without translations, many scholars have no point of departure to stimulate their academic interest (Seigneuret 191). Interestingly, after a forty-year hiatus, 2013 witnessed a publication of sixty-nine fabliaux translations, which were twenty years in the making. Nathaniel E. Dubin’s, *The Fabliaux: A New Verse Translation*, contains virtually half of the known corpus translated into English whilst retaining the original rhyming couplet structure. Endorsed by the eminent fabliau scholar, R. Howard Bloch, Dubin’s translations are certainly erudite, even if they also contain an element of poetic license, and should be welcomed by a new generation of fabliau scholars.

Another development on which Williams passed comment concerned a then newly-formed society focused on the study of beast epics, fables, and fabliaux, which had commenced hosting biennial colloquia. This successful society, the International Reynard Society (la Société Internationale Renardienne), held its twenty-first colloquium in Switzerland in July 2015. Furthermore, it now produces a peer-reviewed annual journal, *Reinardus*, dedicated to promoting “comparative research in the fields of medieval comic, satirical, didactic, and allegorical literature, with emphasis on beast epic, fable and fabliau.” Notably, however, whilst this society enjoyed a strong fabliau presence in its early years, witnessed through the abundant conference proceedings of the society’s early colloquia, more recently papers concerning the fabliau have waned to a smaller although determined presence. Hopefully, this is a cyclical phenomenon as scholars still present conference papers concerning the fabliau at the larger all-encompassing medieval and thematic conferences, and in time more scholars will elect to present their work in this discrete and specialized environment.

Fabliau editions, which witnessed popularity in the first half of the twentieth century and are well recorded in Cobby’s analytical bibliography, have certainly continued to be produced with around fifty English language publications since the early 1980s. Many of these editions fea-
ture a limited number of fabliaux with some containing translations; however, the principal critical collection of the fabliau, produced post-1981, is arguably Noomen and Boogaard’s ten-volume, *Nouveau recueil complet des fabliaux* (*NRCF*). Although Williams’s article pre-dates the publication of this collection, he knew of its impending appearance. Although Montaiglon and Reynaud’s (*MR*) nineteenth-century edition had been the epitome of fabliau editions for a century, the *NRCF*, a Dutch collaboration, certainly displaced its pre-eminence. The *NRCF* provided a thorough examination and consideration of all extant fabliaux, providing a parallel publication of all known manuscript texts. Furthermore, for each fabliau, the Dutch team provided a summary of extant texts, considering their syntactical differences and considered the question of location, date and authorship. Of course, with the evolving nature of scholarship, even this long awaited critical edition now has lacunae.

One potential weakness, however, of the *NRCF* is the number of texts identified as fabliau and thus included in the collection. Collection numbers have varied depending on each scholar’s understanding of fabliaux definition. For example, Montaiglon and Raynaud’s edited collection contains 157 fabliaux, whilst Noomen and Boogaard’s *NRCF* contains 127. Bédier identified 147 fabliaux, Nykrog, 160, and Schenck included 66 fabliaux in her work, having applied quite restrictive parameters. This raises the unresolved matter of genre definition, which will be addressed more comprehensively in the next section. As Pearcy noted in his review of *NRCF*, with genre classification still awaiting a clear consensus, any attempt to provide a complete collection should be inclusive of all known texts, rather than being exclusive (449). Consequently, whilst the *NRCF* is often the point of departure for scholars, it is prudent to remain mindful of this issue and address it in scholarly methodologies and fabliaux selection. Another criticism that the collection and its editors attracted was that some reviewers saw the collection as meeting the needs of specialist fabliau scholars rather than a general reader. One reviewer proposed that only “eccentric and wealthy fabliaux fanciers” would be interested in, and able to afford, the ten volumes, before suggesting that the numbers of fabliau scholars must be “on the wane” (Holden 996). Evidently, as this paper reveals, no decline in fabliau interest has transpired. Nonetheless, regardless of the collection’s shortcomings, Williams did review an early volume of this collection favorably, noting the editors’ “outstanding scholarly achievement” and anticipating the remaining volumes’ prompt publication (811).
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Consideration of Some Unsolved Problems

As already alluded, one persistent problem regarding fabliau scholarship has been the difficulty to irrefutably and convincingly define the genre; the situation has not changed since Williams’s observations, although scholars’ attitudes to the problem have. Since 1981 many scholars have, more judiciously perhaps, preferred not to engage directly in the definition debate, noting the difficulties faced by any attempt at fabliau classification. Even in the late 1950s, Johnston and Owen had commented on the diversity of content, stating that “classification on any grounds is at best arbitrary and cannot take account of every one of the texts” (ix); Ménard has considered the issue difficult—“peut-être insoluble” (33). He also contemplated whether or not scholars would ever find a model that they could apply to the fabliau (36). Some scholars have even gone so far as to deliberately avoid the complexities of genre definition in their works. Lorcin advocated bypassing the problems of genre definitions. For her, acceptance of the heterogeneity of the fabliaux led to more research possibilities (3–4).

A new direction for fabliau definition, however, was emerging circa 1980. Noted by Williams, this new approach to genre definition came from Schenck who applied an adapted structuralist approach. A major advantage in Schenck’s method was that in using a structuralist approach she identified fabliaux characters (two in total: duper and duped) and plots by their functions or actions (nine in total: arrival, departure, interrogation, communication, deception, misdeed, recognition, retaliation, and resolution), rather than by their social status and thus circumvented the on-going Bédier-Nykrog dispute of bourgeois versus courtly narrative (41).

Notwithstanding Schenck’s germane contribution, a conclusive definition of the fabliau genre still remains elusive. Since 1981 work has continued although its focus has been more directed to the problems of definition rather than declaring a definition. Some scholars have identified one obstacle to overcoming the problem as the central tenet of Bédier’s definition: humor. And yet, even this is not straightforward. As Tudor illustrated, when many edifying texts have been accepted into the fabliau corpus, humour becomes problematic and paradoxical (599–603). Indeed, Ménard noted that “on ne rit pas continûment dans ces textes, et parfois même on ne rit guère” ‘one does not laugh continuously in these texts and sometimes one hardly laughs,’ whilst Jacques Ribard concluded that the fabliaux contain some themes, motifs and concepts which do not lend themselves to humor (Menard 166; Ribard 134). More recently Luciano Rossi has proposed that the problem dates back to the period of fabliaux production (342–62). Specifically, that a
lack of a clear distinction between *fabliau* (“fabliau”) and fable arising in the twelfth century has led to the longstanding debate and accounts for many texts referring to themselves as fabliau which today are excluded from the corpus.

Another obstacle standing in the way of conclusive genre definition is that thus far studies have concentrated on the broad characteristics of the fabliaux, which cannot account for the manifest variety of tales within the corpus. In the introduction to her doctoral thesis, Brown offered a succinct explanation of the difficulties surrounding fabliaux definition. She especially noted that the “fabliaux defy formal definition precisely because of their heterogeneity. Whereas the concept of the roman courtois or the chanson de geste is seemingly more clearly defined, the idea of a fabliau is considerably more fluid . . .” (2). Evidently, with the large fabliau corpus, anomalies exist; some appear anti-feminist, others anti-clerical, some focus on the bourgeois, others the nobility, some use a naïve humor, others are more complex, some have an appended lesson or moral, others do not. Possibly, there is no one definition that will account for the genre and that there exist genres within genres, or sub-genres. Many scholars return to Bédier’s modest explanation, *contes à rire en vers* whose longevity, perhaps, lies in its simplicity. As Raymond Eichmann noted, Bédier’s definition facilitates separation of the fabliau from other contemporaneous narratives but equally permits inclusion of some peripheral texts, namely those with recognizable common characteristics (v).

Moving on from the ceaseless and problematic issues of genre definition, further complications that Williams identified, notably fabliau origins, audience, and variants are still attracting critical analysis. This is despite Williams opining on matters pertaining to audience and origins that “these problems have been sufficiently treated already to demonstrate . . . little hope of our reaching satisfactory conclusions” (80). Nonetheless, scholars still argue for the genre’s class, clerical, scholastic, oriental, and geographical origins. For instance, Richard Collins’s doctoral thesis (1997) argues for a neo-courtly understanding of the genre encompassing a class, clerical, and scholastic background; whilst Kinne also supports a scholastic reading for at least one fabliau, *Le Vilain qui conquist Paradis par Plait*. As late as 1995, Charmaine Lee put forward a case for the oriental origins of the genre, continuing the Bédier tradition. Of course, it is hard to deny the fabliau’s northern French provenance with fresh scholarship by Butterfield and Trotter now focusing on associated areas including the Anglo-French connections and *gaulois* sentiment respectively. And research regarding fabliau audience mirrors that of fabliau origins, with scholars continuing to analyze and refine existing hypotheses. In this field of research, for
instance, Busby has extended Nykrog’s theory concerning a courtly audience in an article that identifies elements of courtly parody in some fabliaux, whilst Braet considers the image of the literary peasant and audience from the intersection of realism and stereotype. He suggests that the literary image of the peasant as a “pariah” reveals the “mental attitudes of the audience” (199). And Cailly’s conclusions on the question of audience, suggests that the jongleur’s ability to adapt tales points to a diverse audience (179–86). Williams’s remark (“satisfactory conclusion”), however, reveals a desire for a definitive or all-encompassing theory, yet the subsequent research confirms the heterogeneity of the genre and the futility of seeking a one-size-fits-all application.

As for variants, building on Rychner’s (1960) seminal work on variants, remaniements and dégradations, scholars have continued to produce research that cements the oral tradition of the fabliau as well as the practice of copying manuscripts. Established fabliau scholars, such as Eichmann and Noomen have revealed through various studies, how the oral performance of fabliau has affected the written transmission of fabliaux. Manuscript research reveals that copying tales from one manuscript to another occasionally leads to degradations in text and tale. Here Lops’s work reveals a classic case of degradation through the misuse of pronouns in the copied tale. Variants, by the very title unequivocally reveal the multifaceted nature of the genre, and, as a consequence, are suggestive of the fabliau’s impossible nature to have a one-size-fits-all model.

Despite the protracted history on some fabliau topics, most notably definition, fabliau criticism has evolved to take other directions. Williams noted the start of collections of critical essays, citing Cooke and Honeycutt’s critical work on humor. The trend of edited collections continues to produce erudite works concerning various aspects on the genre. Most recently Crocker’s edition of critical works, Comic Provocations: Exposing the corpus of old French fabliaux, focused on the fabliau as a vehicle for the body, whilst a year later Burr, Moran and Lacy published a collection of essays that contextualized the fabliau humor. Certainly, many critical studies now have a thematic approach, and whilst humor continues to dominate the scene, there are other nascent themes, which I will discuss further in the final section.

Potential Avenues for Future Investigations

Williams identified thirty potential avenues for future fabliau scholarship and many of the topics have received critical scrutiny, usually in the form of journal articles, book chapters, and essays in collected edi-
tions. Using Williams’s numbering system in brackets, I will comment here on a number of works, some collectively and others in isolation that have (and have not) followed Williams’s suggested directions for future fabliau research.

Unsurprisingly, considering the wit and comedy present in the fabliau, Williams proposed several avenues pertaining to humour [19] that warranted further exploration. A range of works on topics involving an assessment of the fableors’ use of comedic [8] and other literary techniques, which Williams identified as irony, symbolism, parody, travesty, and satire, have all been produced since 1981. In fact, there has been a steady stream of scholarship published on these topics, with parody and satire attracting the utmost attention. Indeed, the variety of comedic approaches identifiable within this corpus emphatically reinforces the fabliau’s complex and nebulous nature.

Other identified topics involving the fableors’ choice of language, character, and plot actions have also received varying amounts of critical acclaim. In the corpus of scholarship on aspects of language, for instance, Taylor has considered the comic aspect of proverbial expressions [28] in the fabliau, whilst Schulze-Busacker found similarities between fabliau and fable use of proverbs. As recently as 2007, Cailly considered the use of proverbs in the fabliau, concluding that they add to the authority of the fableor due to medieval society’s penchant for proverbs (147–64). As for **double entendres** or **calembours** [9], Collins’s careful reading of *Les trois meschines* reveals the use of bilingual puns that rely on the audience’s knowledge of legal process, suggesting an informed audience. Whilst other studies have proposed numerous fabliaux that use a variety of puns to achieve an assortment of aims, Corbellari has posited that only three fabliaux use real puns, which he frames as deliberate ambiguities to bring about damage or change. This direct contradiction or denial of previous analyses only serves to promote scholarly debate and further highlight the genre’s complexity.

As for Williams’s proposal that euphemistic language [27] warranted further study—Pearcy had already suggested that the fableors and audience could differentiate between obscene and euphemisms based on a Platonic or Aristotelian approach (Pearcy, *Obscene Diction* 163–96). Although few works have since appeared dedicated to this subject, Hicks’s comparative essay on obscenity and euphemisms in some fabliaux and the *Roman de Renart* is a rare exception. Continuing scholarship on the use of proper names [2] has an expansive focus with emphasis placed on potential authors, place names, local identities and references to local and universal saints. Other studies considering fabliau authors and their techniques include scholarship that addresses the role of the narrator [3] and authorial intrusion [11], as well as work
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on the genre’s introductions and conclusions [23]. In this area, the fabliau mirrors other contemporary genres in that there is a strong emphasis on truth through truth assertion: raconteurs as guarantors of the truth as well as invitations to the audience to actively engage with the tale either as character judge or endorser or refuter of the tale’s veracity (Zink; Cailly; Pitts). Similarly work on prologues and epilogues also reinforces the authors’ or reciters’ influence on the fabliau and audience through a variety of techniques such as self-identification (Collet) and, once again, truth assertion (Giermak-Zielińska). Scholarship on the narrator certainly discloses the diversity of the raconteur, showing that the longevity of the genre could be attributable in some small way to the narrators’ skill of delivery—indeed performance. Other research that considers fabliau characters [7] and plot techniques [6, 12, 24], whilst not addressing Williams’s exact criteria, still appears in scholarly journals and, as in all previous cases, continue to further our knowledge and understanding of these tales through literary, social and cultural, and historical lenses.

Whilst Williams suggested that literary portraits of known authors [21] could provide another avenue for study, this concern has not eventuated in book form. Work on authorship, however, has continued but remains an enduring and problematic topic for fabliau scholarship. Many fabliaux are anonymous and others have only tentative author assignment. Noomen and Boogaard identified twenty-five individual fabliaux in the NRCF, although they often admitted that whilst they could name fabliau authors, they were unable to elicit further information regarding other aspects of their lives. Regardless of the problems, work on author identification continues. In 2004, Corbellari and Zufferey published an article raising the question of authorship for the fabliau *Le Lai d’Aristote*. Previous scholarship had long attributed this fabliau to Henri d’Andeli, but Corbellari and Zufferey made a convincing argument otherwise. Basing their conclusions on a comparative analysis of four texts attributed to Henri d’Andeli, in which they considered literary and linguistic style, for them, *Le Lai d’Aristote* had significant differences when compared to the three other texts. They proposed Henri de Valenciennes as a more convincing author and Zufferey further substantiated his authorship case, demonstrating the similarities between *Le Lai d’Aristote* and a text already attributed to Henri de Valenciennes. Nonetheless, author identity remains a difficult, and probably an unresolvable, topic.

On a more positive note, in the case of furthering the scholarship on fabliau manuscripts, Williams rightly advocated for the photographic reproductions of more fabliaux manuscripts [14] to complement the two principal existing facsimile publications of MSS BNF fr.
837 and fr.19152. Yet what he could not have foreseen in 1981 was the potential and scope to digitize fabliau manuscripts. This will almost certainly make the corpus accessible to all students and academics. Naturally, whilst there is no substitute for seeing the real thing, this is not always feasible for every researcher. The manuscript BNF fr. 837 is in such a fragile condition that the Bibliothèque nationale de France denies virtually all requests to see the actual manuscript. Considering that this manuscript contains the largest number of fabliaux as well as many other contemporaneous texts, the argument for its accessibility through digitization is easily defendable. Maintenance of web sites however, might prove problematic fiscally and technically, as rapid information technology advances mean that host institutions will need to continually update their information services to ensure continued compatibility between user and interface and thus continued access to the digitized manuscripts.

Converse to the future scholarship that Williams recommended and has been realized, there remains a selection of his potential avenues that do not appear to have produced further scholarship. This, I believe, is a sign of the times in that the directions of scholarship evolve as society and the Academy evolves. Hence, the absence of scholarship addressing a system of order for presentation of fabliaux [18] reflects the movement away from definition studies, although Pearcy’s 2007 publication, Logic and Humour in the Fabliaux: An Essay in Applied Narratology does establish a new canon [30]. Likewise, there has been no discrete critical review of reactions to Nykrog and Bédier [22] reflecting the trend away from the seminal fabliau scholars towards studies of a more textual or thematic nature; and whilst we might not have had a critical bibliography [15] since Nykrog, we do have, as previously noted, Cobby’s wide-ranging analytical bibliography. Extensive glossaries [20] or linguistic works certainly continue to be produced; however, apart from the glossaries contained in each of the NRCF’s ten volumes, works of this nature tend to have a larger focus than being exclusively dedicated to a single genre. Furthermore, the emergence of the digital age has witnessed dictionary-styled web pages such as the French site, Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales and the British Anglo-Norman Dictionary, a project of the universities of Aberystwyth and Swansea and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK). Some hard copy dictionaries have also been published, including the Hindley, Langley, and Levy collaboration, the old-French to English Dictionary. Sources of this nature certainly complement the older existing lexical scholarship such as Godefroy’s Dictionnaire de l’ancien français (c.1900), and provide support for scholars needing to work on translating the original texts. Other avenues, such as Williams’s expec-
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tation of a study of nature or lack of nature in the fabliau [16], would appear to have been ahead of its time. Although work on this has not gained traction, it is surely only a matter of time before scholars mine the fabliau and produce work that reflects the environmental pressures that the world now faces.

New Directions in Fabliau Scholarship

Thus far, this paper has endeavored to update Williams’s summary on his three identified areas of fabliau scholarship. This final section deals with new avenues not considered or predicted prior to the start of the 1980s. They stand witness to the continued fecundity of this corpus of humorous medieval tales.

As Williams recognized, fabliau scholarship had proliferated exponentially since the 1960s; post-1980 has been no exception. Fabliau scholarship has moved away from genre definition and classification towards studies of a thematic nature: for example, comedy, gender, and socio-cultural themes. Notwithstanding this shift, it remains that some fields of critical study remain more prevalent than others. As the fabliau is a literary product, much of its scholarship has a philological foundation. Critical studies with a literary focus equal or surpass most other themes, comedy being the possible exception. Textual, lexical, linguistic, and structural analyses dominate the milieu; some approaches offer Bakhtinian, Lacanian, or post-modern interpretations. For instance, Jost’s Bakhtinian analysis of two non-conformist fabliaux identified the texts’ transgressive and subversive nature, whilst Simpson’s Lacanian analysis of the atypical fabliau, Trubert, juxtaposes modern literary theory with a medieval text to explore the relationship between disguise and a rising monetary economy. And within the field of post-modern studies, Collins’s doctoral thesis, “Courtly and Neocourtly: Love, Licence and Latinity in Selected Old French Fabliaux,” considered certain fabliaux as manifestations of an evolution of the existing literary concept from courtly to neo-courtly, which also revealed the impact of high or scholastic literary techniques and structure.

Studies of this nature certainly produce relevant and essential scholarship; however, by their very nature they naturally consider the text in isolation, even in isolation from its codex. Busby is one scholar who has addressed this lacuna in his 2002 text Codex and Context: Reading old French verse narrative in manuscript, claiming that many medievalists have ceased to consider texts in their manuscript context, using critical editions instead. Busby dedicates a substantial section of chapter five on reading in context to the fabliau, arguing convincingly for the
significance of textual juxtaposition (437–63). For instance, Busby suggests that clusters of fabliaux with characters associated with urban trades reveal that some manuscripts were collated in relation to audience types. Other scholars have followed Busby’s lead; for instance, Tracy Adams has also stressed codicological enquiry. In her examination and analysis of the placement of fabliaux in relation to the other genres in MS BNF fr. 19152, she resolved that the manuscript served to promote “laws or rules for living” (Making Sens 23, 30). Her later article, concerning the same manuscript, follows a similar line of enquiry in which she extends her work on the didactic aspects of the fabliau (Cunning Intelligence). Adams is one of a group of literary scholars who have extended their scholarship into historical fields of enquiry in an attempt to expand the body of scholarship on medieval texts.

In an age when interdisciplinarity has become a keyword for humanities scholarship, it should come as no surprise that fabliau scholarship has extended into other disciplines, particularly into the realm of historical studies and that many historians now routinely consider popular texts valid sources. Particularly, social and cultural historians are using medieval texts as a means to produce wider analyses of medieval society and its culture. Following on from the earlier work of the French Annales scholars Lorcin and Menard, and avoiding some of the pitfalls of their approaches, Muscatine’s 1986 work on the fabliau astutely combined the study of the fabliaux in their cultural setting as well as a consideration of them in a literary sense. The strength of his work lay in his ability to provide a clear, judicious examination of the fabliaux as a reflection of medieval sensibilities. Unlike his French contemporaries, Muscatine openly engaged with other fabliau historiography and theory (164–66).

More recently, Daron Burrows extended the scope of interdisciplinary research, taking a socio-historical approach in his analysis of the fabliau priest. Based on his doctoral thesis, The Stereotype of the Priest in the Old French Fabliaux: Anticlerical Satire and Lay Identity (2005), Burrows used the social-psychological work on the nature and functions of stereotyping and applied those findings to the depictions of fabliau priests. He revealed the intersection of “high” and “low” or “popular” literature, specifically citing the decrees from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the fabliau, as a means to present the ideal image of a priest. Furthermore, he grounded his analysis in modern understandings of the psychology of stereotyping. Whilst it remains that historicizing the fabliau is not the most prevalent scholarly modus operandi, and despite some uncertain outcomes, with careful scholarship, the fabliau can yield effective results especially when considered from a cross-disciplinary approach.
Another field of enquiry to have flourished in recent decades concerns the scholarship of the medieval body. There is an ongoing critical interest with corporeal theories and medieval society, led by eminent scholars such as Miri Rubin and Caroline Walker Bynum. Their focus on the body’s significance in medieval Christian practices, despite not using the fabliaux as case studies to exemplify or support their research, certainly underpins understandings of bodily representations in the fabliau. The fabliau, with its fixation on certain body parts—read sexual—certainly invites scrutiny and as Alison Moore stated, “representations of the human body are never, in any socio-cultural context, incidental” (237).

Burns was one of the first scholars to apply the notion of the body as a repository for cultural meaning to the fabliau. Eschewing traditional fabliau interpretations as a misogynous comic narrative, she suggested that the way in which women speak through, or from, the body was a mode of knowledge; one that paradoxically highlighted a lack of knowledge on the part of the assumed male author. As a feminist historian, Burns is yet another example of the ways in which the fabliau can stimulate interest and scholarship from newer sub-disciplines, such as gender studies. Another scholar to have approached the fabliau and body scholarship through a gendered perspective was Alison Moore, who also subscribed to a historicist methodology, thus highlighting a blended way to approach these old ribald texts. Moore focused particularly on fabliaux that exhibited the concept of “fragmentation imagery,” in which body parts from various fabliaux characters take on a life of their own, sometimes, but not always, detached from their owners (262). Moore claimed that some learned and authoritative sections of society feared fragmentation of the body, as it indicated a disintegration of society.

A more recent publication, a compilation of essays, also focuses on the corporeality of the fabliau. Holly Crocker’s edited collection, Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux, emphatically uncovers the fableurs’ preoccupation with the body as a means to impart meaning. Whilst the overarching feature is a variety of body parts from a selection of fabliaux, the methodologies, approaches, and themes vary, ranging from the folkloric, the monstrous, and the lower classes to the scatological, gendered power relations, and the changing economy. The outcome is a nuanced and extensive body of scholarship that reveals not only how medieval authors used the body to inscribe cultural meanings but also the ways in which fabliau scholarship has deviated from traditional modes of enquiry.

One avenue of research pertaining to the fabliau that is gathering pace is the question of the genre’s didacticism. Unquestionably, wheth-
er or not the fabliau has an edifying role had been cursorily debated by the time Williams made his assessment in 1981, usually centred on the polemic of edifying or entertaining, although Williams made no reference to this. When scholars such as Badel have already noted that “everything is didactic in the Middle Ages” and that “all medieval literature can seem . . . a moral-didactic enterprise,” it is intriguing that there are still lacunae in this field of research (165).

Another hurdle to overcome or at least reconcile in assessing the fabliau’s didactic approach has been the contentious issue of how to understand the ways in which humor and edification can be complementary. Schenck, for instance, drew attention to the fact that since there have been studies of the fabliau’s anti-feminism, anti-clericalism, and anti-bourgeois properties, this in fact must imply a serious purpose as well as just one of simple entertainment (22). Lorcin, too, considered the fabliau as possessing “un but didactique” ‘a didactic goal’ (3), whilst Pearcy is probably one of the first fabliau scholars to view humor and instruction as complementary and inseparable, thus reconciling the long durée of contestation (*Sentence* and *Solas* 233). Notwithstanding this fresh line of enquiry, whilst confirming a didactic presence, this scholarship has stopped short of quantifying or examining in explicit detail how the fabliaux revealed their didactic messages.

Continuing in the vein that Williams had noted regarding doctoral work, there have, in recent years, been several theses produced addressing the nature of didacticism in the fabliau. As previously noted, Horton’s thesis considers the fabliaux to be inverse *exempla*. My own doctoral thesis provides a close reading of several fabliaux, concluding that language, imagery, and events within the body of the tale essentially reveal the didacticism, which, in the cases under scrutiny, is centred on reinforcing Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Christopher A. Lee’s 2012 doctoral thesis continues to extend work on edification. He examines a series of medieval literary genres including the fabliau, specifically its use of signs as a means to teach, though disappointingly, does not share my enthusiasm for the fabliau’s didactic nature. Nonetheless, regardless of outcomes and conclusions, work on medieval didacticism is starting to encompass this strand of popular literature.

Work on the edifying nature of the fabliau cogently leads to a recurring issue, the question of authorship, which is not in this case a matter of trying to identify the individual but is rather a matter of determining what type of individual might have constructed these tales. Some fabliau scholars, including Bédier, have already made passing references to the possibility of the fablors’ scholastic origins, suggesting that, in general terms, they received an elementary university education before discontinuing their studies to become composers and or performers
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of fabliaux and other texts (Bédier 390). Others have been more precise; for instance, Bayless has argued that goliard poets were present amongst the prominent and influential members of the ecclesiastical establishment (180); could the same theory be applied to the fableors? Pearcy has associated fabliaux authorship with the scholastic tradition, albeit briefly. In noting the presence in the fabliau of sophist logic style arguments he concluded that “all those who attended the universities [. . .] and . . . numerous authors of fabliaux may have been included in this group, could hardly have escaped some exposure to the influence of sophistic [sic]” (Pearcy Investigations 99).

Whilst the premise that fableors had some form of clerical or university education does not seem to have been wholly adopted or assimilated into mainstream fabliaux theory, fableors do appear to have had a learned, possibly scholastic, background. Until the question of authorship is addressed more comprehensively, then the purpose of the fabliau remains open to interpretation and is yet another potential direction for fabliau studies.

Conclusion

When Williams wrote about fabliau scholarship in 1981, the discipline appears to have been at a crossroads in its history. The seminal works of Bédier and Nykrog were well entrenched in the psyche of scholars and inspiring new debates on the many aspects of the fabliau, not least the questions of audience and humor. By 1981 Bédier’s and Nykrog’s opposing stances had inspired new scholarship that was on the verge of burgeoning into even newer territory in terms of academic disciplines and methodologies. Three and a half decades on has proved to be a particularly prolific period for fabliau scholarship. From critical editions, bibliographies, and a courtly versus bourgeois discourse, fabliau scholarship now interests numerous literary scholars and historians. From philologists, manuscript scholars, and historicists to social and cultural historians and more, the fabliau continues to pique intellectual curiosity. The genre has and continues to generate a body of knowledge, much of which intersects with broader themes and strands of academic enquiry. Over six hundred years after the last known fabliau was produced (c. 1340), the corpus is still revealing its complexities, and offering a fragmented window into a corner of thirteenth-century France.

In this paper it has not been possible to mention every fabliau scholar; however, that it not to dismiss them through omission. In focusing on the scholarship post Williams’s 1981 outline, the formative fabliau masters such as Bédier and Nykrog barely get a mention as their work
was already well established in 1981, yet it is without doubt that all contemporary scholarship has been built on the shoulders of these giants. Likewise, recent fabliau scholars such as Brian J. Levy or Keith Busby must also share some of the accolades for their erudite contributions to the corpus of medieval contes-à-rire. What this paper has ultimately revealed is diversity: diversity of approaches now being applied to the fabliau, diversity of disciplines mining the texts for perception and understandings of medieval society, and diversity of scholars attracted to the fabliau—undergraduate, doctoral and established academics.

The genre continues to interest medievalists. Despite already having a long history of scholarship when *South Atlantic Review* published Professor Williams’s article thirty-five years ago, this article reveals the continued rich and fecund nature of the genre and the new directions that fabliau scholarship has taken. These new directions reflect the changing nature and focus of academic scholarship; I envisage that the next thirty years will also witness yet more unpredictable directions and advances in fabliau research. Unlike Williams, I am disinclined to foresee the future; however, I eagerly await the future.

**Notes**


2. The focus is on scholarship predominantly published in English; principally from North America, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, with some French works also considered.

3. This is certainly the case in Australia. Some motivated scholars continue to participate in reading groups dedicated to the language.

4. Quote taken directly from the publisher’s website: [http://benjamins.com/#catalog/journals/rein/main](http://benjamins.com/#catalog/journals/rein/main) (accessed, 17 Dec. 2012). In the early years of the society’s existence, they published their conference proceedings; this has been surpassed by the peer-reviewed journal Reinardus.

5. For a further appraisal of the criticism of Lorcin and Menard’s methodological approaches, see my opening essay.

**Works Cited**


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South Atlantic Review


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From the Guest Editor

Special Cluster: T. S. Eliot and Asia

Introduction

Roderick B. Overaa

For twentieth-century scholars of Euro-American modernism, the question of T. S. Eliot’s engagements with Eastern religion and philosophy inevitably evoked one particular, oft-quoted reflection by the poet upon his time at Harvard, published in After Strange Gods: “Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patanjali’s metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification.” Thus for the great bulk of Eliot scholarship that touches even remotely upon this subject, the ideas that Eliot was initiated into the esoteric mysteries of Asian thought during his graduate years at Harvard, and that any influence of Asia and its cultural productions on the poet’s writings must be attributed to this “formative” experience, have become axiomatic. The recent transnational turn in modernist studies, however, has given a growing number of Eliot scholars the opportunity to interrogate these entrenched assumptions. As the articles in this special cluster attest, Eliot’s exposure and indebtedness to various Asian traditions are far broader and more complex than has been acknowledged in the scholarship.

The project of bringing these papers together has its origins in the Thirty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the T. S. Eliot Society, held in the poet’s hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, September 27–29, 2013, at which a special closed peer seminar was held to address the question of “Eliot and Asia.” The participants met on the campus of Washington University to share position papers on the influence of Asia and its diverse literatures, philosophies, religions, and cultures on Eliot’s œuvre. Two of the articles presented here emerged from the work presented that day, with the third contribution (from fellow Eliot Society member Tatsuo Murata) having been solicited especially for this occasion.

The essays have been arranged roughly in chronological order, with the intention of lending a sense of historical development to Eliot’s en-
gagements with and shifting attitudes toward Eastern material (with acknowledgement that such framing is necessarily artificial and somewhat arbitrary). The first essay argues for the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis as a site of early exposure to Asia, its peoples, and its artifacts in the adolescent Eliot’s developing poetic sensibility. Extending the work of the late Tatsushi Narita on Eliot’s visit to the fair and drawing upon material found in the Missouri History Museum archives, I suggest that the extensive Japan exhibition, in particular, must have influenced the poet’s early dabblings in *Japonisme* (for instance, the “Mandarins” sequence of 1910), and that the fair’s construction site provided mental imagery that would later be recollected and synthesized during the composition of *The Waste Land* (1922). Tatsuo Murata’s article focuses on *The Hollow Men* (1925), persuasively demonstrating conceptual correspondences between Eliot’s four kingdoms and the four states of mind laid out in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (a key text for both Hinduism and Buddhism). Christopher McVey’s contribution revisits the tensions between Eliot’s original 1922 “Shantih” footnote in *The Waste Land* and the amended version he published in 1932, using the framework of today’s global modernism to expose the historically privileged position Euro-American modernism has enjoyed (enforced?) relative to the Asian traditions and thought systems from which the modernists drew so heavily. Thus the perspectives on Eliot’s various appropriations and re-deployments of Asian literature, art, and philosophy in this special cluster, while disparate in scope and emphasis, complement one another in ways that invite much-needed attention to this integral yet largely underappreciated aspect of Eliot’s poetry—and of Anglo-American modernism more generally.

**Works Cited**


**About the Guest Editor**

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“The Lotos Rose, Quietly”: T. S. Eliot, Asia, and the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis

Roderick B. Overaa

It has been axiomatic in T. S. Eliot scholarship that the poet’s abiding interest in Eastern religion, philosophy, and culture was awakened during his graduate years at Harvard. For most of the twentieth century, critics took much the same line as Stephen Spender: “At Harvard he [Eliot] not only laid the foundations of his extensive education, but he also covered the ground of almost all the spiritual and intellectual material which was to preoccupy him for most of his life” (26). The principal source of this misconception is Eliot’s oft-quoted comment in a lecture at the University of Virginia (later published in After Strange Gods) that “Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patanjali’s metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification” (43). Tatsushi Narita has been indefatigable in drawing attention to this critical misstep, stating,

it has long been maintained that it was only during his Harvard graduate years that Eliot developed his interest in primitive cultures. Such a view assumes that he was incapable of developing an interest in primitive cultures in his own, personal terms. Instead, too much emphasis has been placed on the academic aspect of his interest and on his Harvard period to the exclusion of his earlier years. (“Young T. S. Eliot” 524)

Narita’s emphasis on Eliot’s primitivism aside, in recent decades it has become clear that the poet’s interest in the East actually has its origins in his childhood reading, particularly of Sir Edwin Arnold’s The Light of Asia, Edward FitzGerald’s The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, and Rudyard Kipling’s Kim. Largely missing from the narrative, however, is a satisfactory account of the intervening years, during which the young Eliot’s interest in the East certainly underwent significant development. Narita’s work demonstrates persuasively that Eliot attended the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition and World’s Fair in St. Louis, emphasizing in particular the influence that the Philippine Exhibition may have had on Eliot’s cross-cultural sensibility. Building upon this
work, this paper examines the broader influences of the Fair on Eliot’s interest in the East, i.e., beyond the connections Narita draws between the Philippine Exhibition and Eliot’s primitive/modern dialectic. In what follows, I first address the valuable yet rather narrow scholarly emphasis on the Fair’s Philippine Exhibition and its possible influence on Eliot. I then consider other positive correlations, with particular regard to the probable influence of the Fair on Eliot’s desert imagery in *The Waste Land* and on his early poetic experiments in *Japonisme*. In this way I hope to draw sharper attention to this formative event in the young life of Eliot and to broaden the discussion surrounding its significance. While his time at Harvard certainly formalized these studies, Eliot by no means needed to travel to Cambridge, Massachusetts to acquire this interest, for in 1904 the World’s Fair—quite literally—brought the East to St. Louis.²

**Eliot and the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis**

The fact that Eliot never mentioned the 1904 World’s Fair in his writings, lectures, or correspondence poses particular problems. As Elizabeth Schneider puts it, “The earliest development of Eliot as a poet is only broadly traceable” (7). Yet in the preface to his study of Eliot’s early writings, Eric Sigg argues that “Every sort of writing Eliot did has a root in his personal past, especially insofar as it involves the historical past” (vii). “Eliot’s childhood is at the essence of his work,” Robert Crawford points out; “However, because of the nature of that embedding, Eliot’s childhood is most deeply hidden under the impersonal surface which he made his own theory of poetry. His childhood is as deeply buried as it is constantly revived” (8). Yet Eliot himself remarked upon the deep symbolic meanings that the city of St. Louis and Washington University held for him as an aspiring poet: “the City was St. Louis—the utmost outskirts of which touched on Forest Park, terminus of the Olive Street streetcars, and to me, as a child, the beginning of the Wild West; the University was Washington University, then housed in a modest building in lower Washington Avenue” (“American Literature” 44). Eliot’s grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, had helped to found the university, a fact that Eliot referenced in an address delivered there in 1953: “The early history of this University which my grandfather served with tireless devotion until his death, is inextricably involved for me in family and personal history” (“American Literature” 43-44). But by the time the Fair opened on April 30, 1904, Washington University had begun the process of relocating to its present location, which was temporarily incorporated
into the fairgrounds in exchange for further construction and funding. This year also found the Eliot family relocating to the more fashionable west side of St. Louis; today the house at 4446 Westminster Place lies a dozen blocks from the northeastern corner of Forest Park, the site of the Fair. Thus while Eliot never publicly acknowledged visiting the Fair, the circumstantial evidence is compelling.

The smoking gun is Narita's discovery in the Missouri History Museum archives of a “Stockholder’s Coupon Ticket” issued in Eliot's name by the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company and bearing his photograph. This breakthrough has led Narita to assert that “the future poet visited the 1904 World’s Fair” on at least one occasion (“How Far” 275–76). Barring the discovery of further documentation, it seems likely that we will never be in a position to construct a complete and fully accurate account of this period in Eliot's life, for as Paul Stasi remarks in a recent paper, “It is, of course, impossible to ascertain what the fifteen-year-old Eliot took away from this Exposition” (5). The best that can be done, as Narita's work demonstrates, is to examine existing evidence and to trace these influences as they manifest in Eliot’s writing.

Historical scholarship on the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition has focused predominantly on the Philippine Exhibition and the racist ideology upon which it was based. Jose D. Fermin's excellent book, 1904 World’s Fair: The Filipino Experience, is dedicated exclusively to this subject. Sharra L. Vostral emphasizes how “the Philippine Exhibition waved its banner of imperialism and served as a propaganda tool in the US government’s crusade to sell the American people on their country’s new role as a colonial power” (Vostral). Following the annexation of the Philippines in 1898 during the Spanish-American War, the US government established the Philippine Commission, which viewed the 1904 World’s Fair as “a perfect vehicle for persuading Americans to support continued involvement in the islands” (Vostral). The Philippine Reservation at St. Louis covered forty-seven acres and was populated with nearly two thousand Filipino people representing the Igorot, Bagobo, Negrito, and Visayan tribes, most of whom lived in tribal “villages” constructed to make it “appear as if they were in their native homeland” (Vostral). Consistent with the racialized discourse pervading the Fair, the exhibition’s various tribes were ranked according to a rubric of ethnic stratification. The lighter-skinned, Christianized Visayas were extolled as products of Western colonial accomplishment, while the Negritos, then widely considered to be of African origins, were deemed barbarous and irredeemable. According to James Gilbert,
This universal hierarchal thinking was no better or more obviously illustrated than in the vast Philippine Reservation and the anthropological displays scattered throughout the Fair. Rather than fitting abstract knowledge into evolutionary categories, however, such sections proposed to contain and categorize the entire world of human diversity into an evolutionary scheme in which, once again, the United States occupied the privileged position... The order and hierarchy of races was first assumed and then asserted. (28)

In his study of ethnographic photographs taken during the Fair, Eric Breitbart argues that the “juxtaposition of ‘savagery’ and ‘civilization’ was one of the most powerful messages of the 1904 fair, and the Philippine Reservation was perhaps its most fully realized representation” (53). Similarly, more general studies of the 1904 World’s Fair (such as those by Robert W. Rydell and James Gilbert) also emphasize the role of the Philippine Exposition in disseminating American imperialist and Euro-American racist propaganda. Similarly, the handful of studies dealing with Eliot’s visit to the Fair focus principally upon the Philippine Exhibition as a seminal influence on Eliot’s early cross-cultural literary efforts and subsequent interest in the East. Narita, the most prolific scholar working in this area, has repeatedly taken this tack in a series of notes and articles published over the past quarter century. In particular, he argues that Eliot’s presumed visit to the Philippine Exhibition had a marked influence on his 1905 short story “The Man Who Was King,” published that year in the Smith Academy student magazine (“How Far” 273, 276). “On the Philippine Exhibition part of the Fair site,” Narita suggests, Eliot “was confronted with what seems to be highly ‘primitive’ culture. Thus the young Eliot was led to reflect deeply upon the nature of the primitive world” (“Fact and Fiction” 192). Narita’s conclusion is that “it was as early as his St. Louis period that the poet’s concern with cross-culturality took definite shape” (“How Far” 272). Stasi also emphasizes the Philippine Exhibition, arguing that “Eliot’s central concept of tradition emerges out of the complex relationship between past and present, primitive and modern, generated by an experience of empire closer to home: that of the American conquest of the Philippines and its representation in the 1904 World’s Fair held in Eliot’s hometown of St. Louis” (1). Robert Crawford, while not focused explicitly on the Fair, argues that Eliot’s “key preoccupation with savage and city emanates from his own childhood,” echoing this familiar construction of Eliot’s dialectic between the primitive and civilized and locating its origins in the years leading up to his writing of “The Man Who Was King” (2–3, 23).
The actual diversity of Asian cultures on display at the Fair, however, complicates this construction. In addition to the now notorious Philippine Exhibition, the Fair also boasted exhibitions from Japan, China, British India, Ceylon, and Siam. Referencing the avenue of shops, restaurants, and attractions called the Pike, Gilbert notes that “Orientalism was ubiquitous on the Pike, from the Street in Cairo, to Mysterious Asia, to the Moorish Temple, to Fair Japan, Chinese Villages, Constantinople, and the Shanghai Restaurant” (165–66). While much of the reporting on these various exhibitions in American periodicals did indeed employ a jingoistic, Manifest Destiny rhetoric emphasizing the purportedly backward, stagnant, primitive cultures on display, the Japanese Exhibition in particular was widely regarded and embraced as an exemplary model of modernization and progress in the Eastern hemisphere. As Gilbert notes, “The display of human diversity did not end with the living tableaux of anthropological specimens . . . a principal strategy of the management was to present, for purposes of education, entertainment, and profit, the vast array of human civilizations visible everywhere on the grounds and in every format” (30). He adds that “There is little, if any, evidence that visitors remembered their experiences in terms of the hierarchies of knowledge and display that were promoted and visible everywhere on the fairgrounds,” and that with respect to the Philippine Reservation’s overall effects on fairgoers, “In the end, the contending purposes and the many actors involved in this racial production prevented any single message from predominating” (99, 62). As Breitbart puts it, “The St. Louis fair offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity since no previous international exposition had brought together so many people from so many foreign countries” (18). For his part, Louisiana Purchase Exposition president David R. Francis noted in his two-volume summary of the Fair “the participation of almost every country on the globe” and the “universal character of the Exposition” (Francis v). Francis concluded that, among other outcomes, the fair was a highly “cosmopolitan” event, “a milestone in the development of the faculties of man, in the cultivation of his sentiment, in the expansion of his sympathies” (vol 2, xv). However naïve Francis’s pronouncements may now seem (and the obvious racial and cultural violences they tend to obscure or conceal), I suggest that focusing strictly on the Philippine Exhibition and its supposed influence on the modern/primitive dialectic in Eliot’s writing is far too simplistic an approach to the work of such a complex and cosmopolitan poet as Eliot.® Surely the Fair played a much larger role in shaping Eliot’s fascination with the East and its diverse cultures, as shall presently become clear.
Before the Fair: Forest Park as Waste Land

Eminent twentieth-century critic Northrop Frye wrote of Eliot that “his total work is an imaginative world, and must be approached through his imagery” (49). A similar impulse has led to various speculations about the possible sources of Eliot’s desert imagery in The Waste Land, ranging from the ravaged battlefields of WWI Europe, to the austere badlands of the American southwest, to the poetry of Tennyson, to Jessie L. Weston’s From Ritual to Romance (the latter an explication of the Arthurian legends that Eliot had been reading while working on the poem). The problem with these suggestions is that Eliot had no firsthand experience with any of these landscapes, and knew them only from photographs, written text, and possibly silent films. Consider the following passage from the final section of the poem, “What the Thunder Said,” in which we get this description as the narrator approaches the Chapel Perilous: “Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water and the sandy road / The road winding above among the mountains / Which are mountains of rock without water” (lines 331–34). Spender has noted that “Eliot’s imagination was far more visual than is usually credited,” an observation that leads one to wonder what formative experience Eliot may have been drawing upon in his rendering of the waste land in “What the Thunder Said” (Spender vii).

For it is probable that Eliot’s wasteland, or desert imagery, has its inchoate origins in the poet’s youth. This is one reason why Nancy Hargrove qualifies her argument that “Landscape as symbol is a basic element in all of Eliot’s poetry” by acknowledging that “Perhaps, however, the poet’s own life with its myriad events provides the greater reservoir of symbols” (7, 9). Images of drought and rocky, arid wastes seem to have held a terrifying power over Eliot, as he associates them in his poetry not only with moral and spiritual bankruptcy, but with the drying up of mental acuity (as in “Gerontion”). Indeed, Eliot’s core set of recurring symbolic images seem so deeply ingrained that writers have often been led to speculate upon their origins in Eliot’s childhood, as with Sigg and Crawford (cited above). T. S. Matthews states in his biography of Eliot that for “sixteen years, the whole long life of childhood, he would be absorbing images . . . getting his bearings in a perplexing world” (10). Eliot himself wrote that from his reading of Baudelaire and Laforgue, “I learned that the sort of material that I had, the sort of experience that an adolescent had had, in an industrial city in America, could be the material for poetry” (“What Dante Means” 126). In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot explained that “The poet’s mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles
which can unite to form a new compound are present together” (8). Edmund Wilson noted this “interplay of perception and reflection” in Eliot’s poetry in *Axel’s Castle* (107–08). Eliot’s desert imagery—so integral to the last section of *The Waste Land*—no doubt has its origins in just such a “mental storehouse” acquired largely in youth.

Eliot’s metaphor of the catalyst suggests that Weston’s book may have merely acted as a catalytic agent, drawing certain latent memories and images to Eliot’s awareness, for as A. G. George states, Eliot proceeded “on the principle that the brain works by association of ideas, words, reminiscences, and mental states” (124). This idea is in accord with Eliot’s statement in “The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet” that “I am not maintaining that early impressions are the only ones that count. Far from it: later impressions come to cover them, and to fuse, in some sort, with them” (422). Even the notoriously slippery “Notes on ‘The Waste Land’” that Eliot appended to the poem support such a reading when he states that “a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem [was] suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book,” for while the poem is indebted to Weston in terms of its references to ancient vegetation ceremonies, the term “suggested” here indicates a much more complicated mental process than a direct “borrowing” from a source (“Waste Land” 70; my italics). Hargrove supports this line of thought when she asserts that “Eliot’s landscapes are composites of actual scenes from his own life and real or imagined settings from many literatures” (35). Therefore, whereas Edmund Wilson has it that “The poet of ‘The Waste Land’ is living half the time in the real world of contemporary London and half the time in the haunted wilderness of the medieval legend,” today we might credibly split this pie chart into thirds, adding Eliot’s youth and adolescence as the source for much of his most arresting imagery (Wilson 106).

Just inside the entrance of the Missouri History Museum’s permanent exhibit, “The 1904 World’s Fair: Looking Back at Looking Forward,” a wall-sized reproduction of a 1902 photograph depicts the construction site of the World’s Fair (see Fig. 1). Exhibition President David R. Francis later wrote that “The site chosen embraced 657.36 acres of land, being the western half of Forest Park” (Francis 83). He described the western end, near the university, as “a tangle of wild woods, with trees of large dimensions and a dense undergrowth . . . commonly known as the Wilderness” (83). The River des Peres “was nearly a dry bed for a greater part of the year” (83). Once construction got underway, however, the landscape changed dramatically. In her book about the founding and development of Washington University, Candace O’Connor writes that during preparations for the Fair “crews of workmen were transforming Forest Park, creating lagoons and pools, foun-
tains and cascades. They cut down 40,000 trees, temporarily leaving a wasteland of stumps” (101). A memoir by St. Louis resident and fairgoer Edward V.P. Schneiderhahn contains this rather melancholy reflection on the workers’ progress: “It was a pity however to see giant monarchs of the forest fall before the woodman’s ax to make room for the exhibit palaces. Standing on one of the hills, in the pre-exposition period, one could see a whole plain that had been swept bare of patriarchs of the forest such as few cities could boast to possess” (Schneiderhahn).

The 1902 photograph gives a remarkable sense of the awe such a scene must have inspired, especially for a youth like Eliot who, Matthews tells us, had been fond of visiting “the zoo in Forest Park” and knew the area well (13). Yet for those who know Eliot’s poem intimately, the photograph immediately and inevitably evokes the lines of the final stanza, in which the narrator imagines himself as the wounded and infertile Fisher King from the Grail legend: “I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?” (lines 424–46). O’Connor’s use of the phrase “wasteland of stumps,” along with the water either standing or running beneath the embankments, is certainly suggestive, but what makes the image so
striking in this connection is the looming, Gothic Revival structure in the distance, which gives the scene an evocative, medieval quality. The building stands on the University of Washington campus, was initially leased to the Fair as its headquarters, and was later renamed Brookings Hall, as we know it today. Eliot would have seen similar vistas firsthand, as well as comparable photographic images in the newspapers, magazines, and the ubiquitous Fair-related pamphlets being circulated at the time. The clearing of Forest Park in preparation for the Fair undoubtedly left an indelible mark on Eliot’s imagination, providing him with a deeply personal and profound set of images, in whatever forms he encountered them. While it is impossible to identify any specific artifact or to point to any specific experience as the earliest source of Eliot’s waste land imagery, what can be said here is that the adolescent Eliot would undoubtedly have borne witness to the development of the Fair site, and that his desert imagery in *The Waste Land* assuredly owes some debt to these experiences.

**Japan at the Fair: An Early Influence on Eliot’s *Japonisme*?**

The young T. S. Eliot would have found himself hard-pressed to avoid exposure to the Japanese Exhibition at the 1904 World’s Fair. In terms of acreage and sheer number of industrial, agricultural, and cultural artifacts on display it was the largest exhibition of any Eastern nation, including that of British India. “A better acquaintance with the Orient was one of the valuable offerings of the Exposition,” wrote Exposition President David R. Francis, and “The scale upon which Japan participated was the most extensive and elaborate attempted by that country” (315). “Japan was represented by 80,000 exhibits” housed in various pavilions across the fairgrounds (Francis 316). More recently, Carol Christ has drawn attention to “the unprecedented scope of Japan’s participation in the 1904 St. Louis Fair,” noting that it covered “almost seven acres of exhibits” (Christ). “The Japanese flag waved all over the fairgrounds,” she writes, and “it was as common as the US flag. In fact, Japanese exhibits were so ubiquitous that one visitor reported that it was not possible to ‘lose sight of the Japanese flag’ during his visit to the Fair” (Christ).

The reasons for Japan’s unprecedented participation at the 1904 World’s Fair were largely political. After a period of rapid modernization following upon Admiral Perry’s visits to Edo (now Tokyo) in 1853–54, the Japanese were embroiled in a war with Russia (declared two months before the Fair’s opening). The strong Japanese presence at the
Fair was intended by the Imperial government to send a powerful message to the West respecting Japan’s rising influence on the world stage. Despite the impending war with Russia, the Japanese had “decided to make a display at St. Louis which should reveal to Western civilization the social and economic progress of the people” (Marcosson 5146). “At the Louisiana Purchase Exposition,” Christ writes, “Japan proclaimed its culture to be a world treasure, and its state an Industrial and imperial power exempt from western colonial encroachment” (Christ). In his memoir of the Fair, Schneiderhahn reflected on the implications of a map displayed in one of the Japanese exhibits in terms of admiration that reflect the American reception of the Imperial government’s intended message:

Admired a Japanese map of the world. A monster map—hand embroidered. From but a short distance it appeared like a large printed map . . . Thousands passed it with this belief. It was so perfect. It is curious to note how the Japanese have copied the art of illustrating any commercial statistics by pictorial representations. The Japanese section of the Transportation Building is full of illustrations. They certainly intend to apply everything they see that they feel themselves capable of applying. And if they are not yet able to apply, they will learn until they can apply whatever they see. That is the impression the Japanese make. (Schneiderhahn)

This impressive “monster map” is at least suggestive as a figure for the global ambitions of the Japanese Imperial government in the first decade of the twentieth century (the consequences of which need not be expounded upon here).

The general reception of the Japanese Exhibition by American and European visitors to the Fair was positive. “Unlike the Chinese at the fair,” Robert Rydell writes, “the Japanese were comparatively well received” (180). Shortly after the Fair’s opening, an anonymous article appeared on “Other Foreign Countries,” which remarked upon the manufactures and other objects in the Chinese exhibition:

But these things are as old as the great Celestial Empire. No advance is represented in the exhibit; only the adherence to a tradition of patient mechanical work . . . China’s civilization is thousands of years older than Japan’s, yet her exhibit at the Fair is one that could have been made two hundred years ago. Japan’s represents the most advanced industrial achievements. China’s building shows a primitive architecture; her
exhibit, merely the formal things that Chinamen have labored on for centuries.” (“Other” 5159)

While the civilization of China was often described as primitive and stagnant in the discourse surrounding the Fair, Japan’s exhibits were generally lauded for their aesthetic beauty and modern sensibility. Referring to the recent popularity of *Japonisme* in Europe and America, Francis described the “art of Japan” as “one of the most potent influences in directing the trend of western art expression” (358). The 150,000 square-foot Japanese garden, with its elegant *matsu* pines, cascades, manmade lake, lanterns, bridges, and “quaint-looking pagodas and teahouses, were suggestive of fairy land” (see Fig. 2; Francis 316, 239). The Japanese carpenters who erected the pavilions and other buildings were praised for their advanced skills and ability to have “built without the use of a nail” (Francis 596). Christ notes that “Japanese accomplishments on both sides of this modern/ancient duality were trumpeted by Fair propaganda, independent newspapers, and international journals” (Christ).

As with the Philippine Exhibit of their American counterparts, the Japanese contrasted their modernizing society with a primitive culture under their territorial authority—the Ainu people of Hokkaido (then

**Fig. 2**

Japanese Pavilion and Gardens at the 1904 World’s Fair. Courtesy of Missouri History Museum, St. Louis.
called Ezo), the northernmost of the four main islands in the Japanese Archipelago. “In what appears to have been an effort to align themselves with imperialist Americans and British and to distance themselves from colonized Filipinos and Kaffirs, Japanese officials collaborated with an American anthropologist to exhibit the Ainu peoples, an indigenous group from northern Japan” (Christ). A group of eight adult Ainu and one infant were sent to St. Louis and established in a small village constructed to emphasize their primitive living conditions. In this anthropological exhibit, “Fair propaganda set the modern Japanese in high relief against an Ainu backdrop of primitivity” (Christ). An American reporter at the Fair noted that “the real significance of the Japanese exhibit at St. Louis” is that the Japanese “are steadily making their way to a large place in world power” (Marcosson 5153). Thus the young Eliot need not have confined himself to the Philippine Exhibition to be exposed to a binary rhetoric of “primitive/modern” established by a specific nation.

The influence of Japanese art on Eliot’s poetry is evident from a very early stage in his development, and is entirely in keeping with the Euro-American vogue for all things Japanese in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. The debt owed to Japanese art by the French Impressionists and the American painter James A. M. Whistler is now commonly understood. In letters, the Symbolist poets to whom Eliot gravitated and borrowed from owed much to Japanese poetry. Later, Japanese poetry would heavily influence T.E. Hulme’s coterie of Imagist poets, thus planting the seeds for Ezra Pound’s fruitful engagements with Noh plays and haiku. In his seminal *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*, Earl Miner acknowledges the “increasingly widespread and accepted presence of Japan in American and English life” during this period, adding that “Japan and its culture may fairly be called one of the important determinants of modern literature” (45–46, 74).

While Eliot would later come to favor Indic traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism in his poetry, Japan was the first Asian nation to excite his poetic imagination and become manifest in his poetry. The four lyrics collectively titled “Mandarins,” written in August 1910, reflect Eliot’s fascination with Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints in their flattened representations of Japanese nobles. In “Mandarins I,” a Japanese nobleman stands “complete, / Stiffly addressed with sword and fan,” both symbols of authority as during the Tokugawa Era only members of the samurai class were permitted to carry such articles (lines 1–2). The figure is described as “Indifferent,” waiting “Upon his own intrepid dignity; / With fixed regardless eyes— / Looking neither out nor in” (lines 6, 9–11). The man’s aristocratic reserve and lack of affect are characteristic of a style of portraiture often used in the
ubiquitous woodblock prints that made their way to France and New England as packing material in the nineteenth century, and which greatly influenced the French Impressionists. This mandarin is “A hero” that does not so much stand at, but rather embodies, “The centre of formalities,” a figure of man-made stability that contrasts sharply with the true nature of things described in the poem’s final line: “The rest is merely shifting scenes” (lines 12–15). Eliot’s supercilious mockery of the figure not only anticipates the sardonic tone of subsequent early poems, but also the conception of flux that he would become enamored with during Henri Bergson’s Paris lectures, and his abiding interest in Buddhist thought (into which he later would be initiated at Harvard). In “Mandarins 2” “Two ladies of uncertain age” sit with a similar “assured tranquility,” and the narrator’s aside “(No persiflage!)” imparts to the reader that this portrait, too, carries sardonic overtones (lines 1, 4, 3). “The eldest of the mandarins” in the third poem is “A stoic,” an “Indifferent idealist” who sits idly regarding “the corner of his nose,” a somewhat stereotypical reference to the cross-eyed appearance of many ukiyo-e portraits (lines 1, 2, 8, 4). The man’s “obese repose” is juxtaposed with the “Pert, alert” gaze and flight of the cranes depicted on a Japanese shōji screen, thus contrasting an active pragmatism with the passive, ascetic life of the intellectual: “And what of all that one has missed! / And how life goes on different planes!” (lines 2, 6, 11–12). The “demoiselles and gentlemen” in the fourth poem also exhibit the aristocratic reserve common to the series, their “conversation dignified . . . And graceful, not too gay” (lines 7, 11–13).

Eliot’s flattened caricatures were almost certainly inspired by one or more Japanese woodblock prints, although the condescending tone with which Eliot presents his four Japanese portraits indicates that he is not merely mocking the works of art themselves, but the bourgeois Americans that collect, display, and view them. Frances Dickey has drawn attention to “Eliot’s intense interest at this time in the portrait poem,” of which the “Mandarins” lyrics are an example (92). She writes that during his undergraduate years at Harvard

Eliot also surely saw Asian artifacts in Boston homes, where they were popular as decoration at the turn of the century, and probably visited the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, which had (and has) one of the largest collections of Japanese art outside of Japan . . . At the MFA, Eliot would have seen examples of the kinds of artifacts and images mentioned in “Mandarins,” as well as crowds of museum-goers who flocked to the new galleries. (93)
The “Mandarins” poems, as Dickey suggests, are early poetic experiments in perspective, and as such they demonstrate a keen awareness of the dynamics involved in cultural appropriation, display, and consumption. As David Rosen puts it, Eliot’s “mandarins, empty-headed puppets enacting the clichés of upper-middle-class life, are only slightly better off than their ‘audience,’ an urban proletariat gawking at them open-mouthed” (477).

While it is presently impossible to identify a specific source of inspiration for the “Mandarins” poems, I tend to follow Dickey’s suggestion that “It is very likely that Eliot was responding to a number of different images; his ekphrasis picks out easily recognized, somewhat stereotypical features of Asian art” (94). Whatever images Eliot may have drawn from in the poems were almost certainly encountered in the spring or summer of 1910, just before Eliot composed “Mandarins.” However, I think it would be a mistake to assume that Eliot’s first encounter with Japanese art occurred in New England. In the Japanese pavilions at the 1904 World’s Fair the precocious Eliot surely saw similar aestheticized images of Japanese aristocratic self-possession and poise. For instance, the Schneiderhahn memoir notes that “The Japanese exhibited an immense number of vases, beautiful, variegated and costly” (Schneiderhahn). One such is on display in the aforementioned permanent exhibit in the Missouri History Museum (see Fig. 3). This vase depicts several Japanese noblemen wielding fans, sword-hilts emerging from the folds of their richly embroidered kataginu jackets. The elaborate, raised moriage elements lend a three-dimensional aspect to the scene that contrasts sharply with the flat, affect-free expressions of the seated figures. Visitors spending any appreciable time at the Fair would certainly have encountered similar imagery in the Japanese pa-
vilions or during a stroll past the “Fair Japan” concessions on the Pike. Whether or not Eliot was intrigued by such objects at the time is an open question, but the notion that he would not have encountered them at the Fair strains credibility.

While Eliot’s poetic Japonisme is most apparent in “Mandarins,” it is evident in subsequent work. The facsimile of the first draft of The Waste Land, for instance, contains this passage from “The Fire Sermon” in which the typist awaits her not-so-gentlemanly caller: “A bright kimono wraps her as she sprawls / In nerveless torpor on the window seat; / A touch of art is given by the false / Japanese print, purchased in Oxford Street” (33, 45). The kimono and picture, cheap knock-off reproductions, suggest a slipshod, Bohemian lifestyle, although as Ezra Pound clearly understood in his reading of the draft, these details were unnecessarily redundant and verbose given the more concise, evocative formulations of the typist’s “drying combinations” and unappetizing supper of “food in tins.” On Pound’s excision of the kimono passage from the poem, Spender remarked, “Where everything should be—and is, in the final version—left precise, bold, suggestive and simple, the original scene was a 1920s period piece” (94).

Subsequent to this episode, overt references to Japan and its culture disappear from Eliot’s poetry. In Earl Miner’s view, “whatever of Pound’s ‘Japanese’ techniques Eliot found useful are so covered with traditional Western modes and forms that the Japanese element is all but completely submerged” (Miner 153). Nevertheless, Eliot’s 1917 “Noh and the Image” (a review of Pound’s translation of several Japanese Noh plays via the papers of Ernest Fenollosa) reminds us of the Imagists’ substantial influence on Eliot during this decade, as well as his keen understanding of their aesthetic interest in Japanese literature and art. Thus Japan figures more prominently as a formative influence on Eliot’s interest in Asia than has been recognized—and the World’s Fair was clearly the poet’s first extensive introduction to Japanese culture and its artifacts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to further delineate the origins of Eliot’s interest in Asia and its religio-philosophical systems of thought by considering the possible impact of the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis. In my similar studies of other modernist and proto-modernist writers, this work has been relatively more straightforward because, in general, these writers “came to it late,” i.e., they often turned to Eastern material in earnest only after having established themselves as authors,
thus manifesting in their writings a distinct shift that can be traced and explicated. In the case of Eliot, the evidence is harder to trace—precisely because, as I stated at the outset, the earliest yet perhaps most profound influences occur before Eliot’s Harvard years, and are rooted in his childhood and adolescent reading and experience. To borrow a well-known Buddhist symbol as a figure here, one might say that, as with Eliot’s dry pool in “Burnt Norton,” “the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,” only to be obscured by the passing clouds of his subsequent life (176).

It is likely impossible at this late date to assess with accuracy or confidence the extent of the influence of the Fair on Eliot’s poetic sensibility, on his mental storehouse of images, and on his abiding interest in Eastern material. Yet as Thoreau reminds us, “Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk” (Thoreau 94). What can be said is that the Fair, with its cosmopolitan atmosphere and exhibitions from the Near East, Far East, Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, could not but have had some formative influence in this regard. Certainly any future discussion of the origins of Eliot’s interest in Asia can no longer confine itself strictly to Eliot’s graduate student years, and must at least nod toward the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis as a probable formative experience. Such a conclusion is not inconsequential. The period between Eliot’s childhood reading of Sir Edwin Arnold, FitzGerald, and Kipling and his initial arrival at Harvard in 1906 is, as we know, a largely uncharted territory within Eliot scholarship. What the 1904 World’s Fair allows us to do is to begin to contextualize this insufficiently studied period of Eliot’s life in relation to his later development as a poet—an area which fairly cries out for further study, and which must inevitably yield valuable (if not exactly low-hanging) fruit.

But there is a further conclusion that may be drawn here, with implications that extend beyond Eliot scholarship to our understanding of Euro-American modernism more generally. The pervasive critical overemphasis on Eliot’s training in and command of Eastern material (which this study challenges) tends to obscure the more fundamental causes of this widespread intellectual shift. For surely Eliot’s engagement with Asian (particularly Indic) religion and philosophy must be viewed in the broader context of the numerous writers, artists, and thinkers who turned to Eastern thought in their work with a measure of sympathy and receptivity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Studies dealing with this aspect of Eliot’s work typically downplay or ignore this larger context, and too often the authors insist upon making value judgments about the sophistication of Eliot’s use of Eastern material relative to his peers. Such single-minded efforts to deify Eliot miss or elide two larger, more essential questions: 1) why
so many modernist writers (and their nineteenth-century predecessors) took such an avid interest in the philosophy of India and the Far East; and 2) what this sustained interest has to teach us about Euro-American modernism, its roots, and its legacy.

In this regard, critics who insist that Eliot’s Harvard background in Eastern philosophy, Sanskrit, and Pali gives him an authority over Eastern materials that other modernist writers cannot match end up missing the larger (and more germane) point. In this vein we have P. S. Sri’s otherwise excellent study of Eliot’s engagement with the Vedanta and Buddhism, which ends with the rather disappointing conclusion that “Eliot’s eclecticism is the most convincing and comprehensive in modern poetry” (Sri 121). Kearns deems it necessary to emphasize that Eliot’s grasp of Indic thought was more sophisticated than that of Emerson and Whitman, claiming that it emerged “from something at once sharper in distinctions, wider in scope, and more complex in cultural and psychological motivation (190, 29). Such statements emerge from what is essentially the same hierarchical impulse we find in Arthur Versluis’ book on Eastern religion and American Transcendentalism, in which the author devotes three consecutive pages to the deprecation of the “diluted Asian religion” and “Bowdlerized Emerson” that took hold of the popular consciousness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (314–46). The problem with such pecking-order perspectives is that they ignore the historical and cultural contexts that actually explain this widespread turn to Eastern spirituality and thought. The central critical question that demands attention is not whether or not writers like Melville, Yeats, Blavatsky, and Pound “got it right” in their various appropriations of Eastern thought, but why they were appropriating it in the first place, and in such increasing numbers. Eliot’s formal study of Indic material at Harvard unquestionably spurred his interest in the subject to new heights and influenced his poetry and thought in profound ways—to such an extent that he feared the loss of his Western identity (After Strange Gods 44). Whether or not this formal study, in and of itself, places him head and shoulders above those of his peers who took an interest in Eastern thought, however, is a matter open to debate—for as Aldous Huxley trenchantly observed, “To understand the meaning of tat tvam asi, ‘thou art That,’ it is not necessary to be a profound Sanskrit scholar. (Similarly, it is not necessary to be a profound Hebrew scholar in order to understand the meaning of ‘thou shalt not kill’)” (Huxley 53).

Cultural contrast and cross-fertilization are now widely recognized as important characteristics of modernist literature. Yet despite the many fine case studies that now exist on the use of Eastern religion
and philosophy by individual writers, this aspect of modernist literature remains insufficiently understood and appreciated. To continue studying these individual engagements in isolation is to remain fixated on teapot eddies while the real tempest howls around us. The modernist engagement with the East is inextricably interwoven with more commonly accepted modernist traits such as the search for order and meaning, blending of genres, fragmentation of the Cartesian self, the problem of Time, and the emphasis on secular humanism—yet in terms of academic inquiry, it remains a sort of unacknowledged stepsibling. Contrary to Kipling’s prediction, in the era of globalization and transnational capital, East and West have met, and if the economic and political problems associated with these encounters have often been troubling, they nonetheless remain human problems. The need for a broader understanding of the nature of the modernist response to the East has become apparent—an understanding to which this essay contributes. Just as we cannot continue to view Eliot’s interest in the East as solely rooted in his graduate student years at Harvard, neither can we consider this interest as an isolated case—for Eliot’s uses of Eastern material are actually highly significant instantiations of a much wider phenomenon that has a lot to tell us about what modernism is and how our understanding of it is changing.

Notes
1. See Kearns 21, 67; Crawford 31, 35–36; Ackroyd 27; and Sri 5–10, 58.
2. To give but one example, to house their 80,000 exhibits the Japanese Imperial government exported tons of wood, bamboo, dwarf matsu pine trees, and other materials to the Fair site, along with thousands of industrial and agricultural products and enough artworks to fill seven galleries. One reporter wrote that “Nearly every stick of wood used on their exhibits was brought from Japan, and was put up by Japanese laborers” (Marcosson 5146). See also Francis 316, 359.
3. On the question of the origins of the Andamanese (Negrito) peoples, a genetic study published in 2003 concluded that “the Andamanese have closer affinities to Asian than to African populations and suggest that they are the descendants of the early Palaeolithic colonizers of Southeast Asia” (86). See Thangaraj, et al.
4. See Rydell and Gilbert.
5. For capsule summaries of Eliot’s short story, see Braybrooke 387–88 and Sri 8.
6. This is not to deny the obvious oppositions between the primitive and the modern, past and present, so essential to Eliot’s aesthetic and so ubiquitous
in his work. I merely wish to argue against reductive readings that ignore or dismiss other dimensions of the poet’s work.

7. For a deeper discussion of Eliot’s desert imagery in particular and the importance of landscape in Eliot’s work more generally, see Hargrove, Landscape as Symbol in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot, in which she argues: “It seems clear that landscape occupies a central position in Eliot’s poetry and that any attempt to read his work must come to grips with this important element” (212).

8. As Stephen Spender reminds us, “images of parched land, rocks and desert, water that only drowns, trees that are dead, are all terrifying to Eliot” (117).

9. While Eliot’s extended metaphor is that of the catalyst (drawn from the science of chemistry), this passage may be easily understood as also being inextricably bound up with the concept of the collective unconsciousness, which is so integral to Eliot’s “impersonal” poetics—what he referred to in Four Quartets as “the dialect of the tribe” (“Little Gidding” 204).

10. For the date of composition, see Ricks 127.

Works Cited


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---. “How Far Is T. S. Eliot From Here?: The Young Poet’s Imagined World of Polynesian Matahiva.” How Far Is America From Here?: Selected Proceed-


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In 1932 F. R. Leavis offered one of the first readings of *The Waste Land* that acknowledges the rather underdetermined relationship between the footnotes, which T. S. Eliot first appended to the December 1922 Boni and Liveright edition, and the end of the poem. At times he chides the footnotes as unnecessary, and he spills a good deal of ink to illustrate that the poem already explains everything contained in the notes (to greater artistic effect) and to show that any other information added by the notes consists of nothing more than “interesting irrelevance” (Leavis 99). Although he certainly celebrates *The Waste Land* as “self-subsistent” poetic achievement and a “new start for English poetry,” Leavis nonetheless concludes that the poem “depends upon external support in ways that can hardly be justified” (105). Leavis points to the final note, which translates the meaning of “shan-tih,” as an example, not only of how these notes illustrate the poem’s dependence on external source material, but also in terms of how such notes detract from the formal and thematic autonomy of the text. In his view, the final note thoroughly ironizes the poem’s gesture toward peace or resolution: the note, Leavis says, “can impart to the word only a feeble ghost of that content for the Western reader” (Leavis 106). Yet perhaps, Leavis ultimately concludes, this is partly the point: to force *The Waste Land* together, to fit its parts like so many puzzle pieces into a singular whole, is to miss the whole purpose of the poem, which is to dramatize and underscore its own instability, its fragmentation, and its disjointedness. The “feeble” translation of the final note is, in its own way, an appropriate failure of translation, as it encapsulates the dialectic between the poem’s centripetal and centrifugal energies. Without such instability and without such failure, *The Waste Land* would not be a waste land.

Contemporary readers of *The Waste Land* might be confused by F. R. Leavis’s analysis, since most modern printings of the poem, including the version contained in both the Faber and Harcourt Brace printings of *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, have a different note for the final “Shantih” refrain. Here are the two versions of the note, the first from its original Boni and Liveright edition, and the second from the most recent 2004 Faber and Faber printing of *The Complete Poems and Plays*:
The textual history behind Eliot’s change to the note is curious: the 1925 Faber edition of Poems 1909–1925, for which Eliot first adds the dedication to Ezra Pound, still retains the “feeble” version. The “equivalent” version first appears in the 1932 American Harcourt Brace printing of Poems 1909–1925, which Eliot arranged as a means to limit or end the demand for unauthorized copies of The Waste Land by Boni and Liveright who, according to Eliot, still sold copies after the expiration of their copyright in 1927, and Knopf, who continued to sell Poems (Letters, vol. 5 651). As a consequence, it is this version of the note that persists throughout the poem’s vast publication history and critical scholarship. Even the current Norton Critical Edition of The Waste Land mistakenly retains the “equivalent” version of the note, though it claims it is based off the Boni and Liveright edition, despite the fact that it also contains an excerpt from Leavis’s essay. Other reprintings do acknowledge the change, though in different ways, and some more responsibly than others. For instance, the second volume of The New Anthology of American Poetry offers an odd mash-up of both versions:

A feeble translation is not, to be sure, an equivalent translation, and the adjectival inflection is wonderfully oxymoronic. To suggest that “feeble” and “equivalent” were initially combined may simply have resulted from editorial confusion or alternate printings of the note between different editions. Yet the conflation of the two notes seems
I. To Criticize the Critic: Navigating Textual History

Explaining Eliot’s revision to the note requires some historical gumshoeing paired with an equal amount of informed speculation. Though largely unrecognized within Eliot scholarship, a few other critics have also noted this odd textual history. For instance, Stanley Sultan suggests the change from “feeble” to “equivalent” testifies to Eliot’s renewed religious conviction, a transition from the young student dabbling in Eastern mythology to an older and devout Christian following his conversion to the Anglican Church in 1927. This hypothesis seems a likely source for the editorial comment on the conversion in the New Anthology of American Poetry version of the note. Sultan argues, though, that reading The Waste Land through such a Christian framework can be misleading: “To transform the prominent Hindu and Buddhist elements in The Waste Land into Christian analogues is a presumption not grounded in the poem” (Sultan 174–75). Sultan’s primary aim is not to explain the change in the note—indeed, he does not mention which specific edition the change to the note occurs—but rather to argue that the religious nature of The Waste Land was “too readily accepted,” insisting that the poem neither acknowledges nor advocates for the authority of any institutional religion. Christopher Ricks, in his book on Eliot and prejudice, also directly acknowledges the change in this final footnote:
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Eliot had two tries at explaining what he had effected with ‘Shantih’, and neither of them will quite do. . . . To call [the note] a feeble translation of the content of the Sanskrit word is not only the wrong kind of surrender but also questionable in itself, for strictly speaking ‘The Peace which passeth understanding’ is not a translation of the content of the Sanskrit. But in remedying this slight, Eliot played into the hands of those who would accuse him of ostentatious pretension in having recourse to the Sanskrit. . . . [Yet the] thought of an equivalent is both unavoidable and misguided. (Ricks 194, emphasis original)

Ricks touches on the central hermeneutic trouble of The Waste Land: none of the sources, either Western nor Eastern, offer us firm ground on which to stand. Perhaps Eliot would have more wisely deleted the note in its entirety. But the note, no matter our critical feelings about it, persistently remains, a Gordian knot at the end of an underdetermined poem. As Ricks makes clear, however, it was likely Eliot the Editor, not Eliot the Christian, who decided that the note needed to be adjusted.¹

Yet, for any sensible reader, this should still seem strange. What would have caused Eliot to edit a poem that had been published an entire decade earlier and which, by 1932, had already achieved canonical status? The answer, it would seem, returns us to F. R. Leavis, who initially tried to make contact with Eliot through I. A. Richards. According to Richards’s account, Eliot and Richards had been meeting since late 1921 and—despite Eliot’s complaints to Herbert Read regarding Richards’s writing ability—began routine correspondence around 1924.² In May 1929, I. A. Richards invited Eliot to tea with Leavis, Bennett, Tillyard, and others inside the literary circles of Cambridge. Eliot responds that he should be glad to meet. Later that month, however, Eliot writes to Richards to say that the sale of his house and the purchase of his new flat means that he must cancel the tea; in a letter on May 21st, Eliot laments: “I don’t feel justified in leaving town, even to visit you. I shall be very sorry to miss a meeting with Tillyard and the others . . . .” (Letters, vol. IV 505–06). It is unsurprising that Eliot left Leavis unnamed in this letter. Leavis was still a young scholar at Cambridge, having recently finished the new PhD degree in 1924. At the time, he was virtually unknown to Eliot, or to many others, and he remained a probationary or part-time Lecturer until 1931, at which point his probationer-ship was not renewed. He then began teaching at Downing College thanks to his friend and colleague William Cuttle, who had also left teaching at Emmanuel for a new post at Downing College.
Leavis would eventually become the Director of Studies at Downing, yet he still lacked a full-time university post and complained that he was saddled with “several times more teaching than anyone else in Cambridge English, with the duties of a professor without the status and salary” (MacKillop 156–57). Nonetheless, the early 1930s ushered in a significant turn for Leavis’s career and reputation despite his frustrations with his employment.

His resilience—and keen interest in Eliot—would eventually pay off. In 1930, he submitted an article on the subject of “Modern Poetry” to The Criterion and, in his capacity as editor, Eliot responded that July, marking what is likely their first direct correspondence. In this letter Eliot thanks Leavis for the submission but ultimately declines to publish it, explaining: “. . . for purely personal reasons it is very difficult for me to judge it and it would also be unsuitable for me, as Editor, to publish an essay which deals at such length and so kindly with my own work” (Letters, vol. 5 233). Eliot then graciously invites Leavis to send him something else to print that does not take up Eliot’s own work in such a direct manner. The editors of Eliot’s letters also identify this unspecified article on “Modern Poetry” as most likely a draft portion of Leavis’s seminal New Bearings in English Poetry, in which the essay on The Waste Land is included, and which was published in 1932. As these letters from the early 1930s were first brought out of the archives and published in 2014, the correspondence and subsequent professional relationship between Eliot and Leavis has been understudied. We usually envision Leavis as an early critic of Eliot, not as a possible influence. However, because of this correspondence, I argue that Eliot’s change to the footnote for the 1932 American Harcourt Brace edition—published less than a year after Leavis’s own book and two years since Leavis submitted the article version of the chapter on Eliot to The Criterion—was directly inspired by Leavis’s specific criticism of the way that “feeble” ironized the poem’s conclusion. This is a much more tenable explanation than to attribute the change as a symptom of Eliot’s new religious convictions. And although he did not let The Criterion review it, surely Eliot would have been interested in Leavis’s New Bearings; it was well received in the New Statesman and Nation and within literary circles. Moreover, in July of 1932 The Criterion—in an essay by Eliot himself—favorably reviewed Queenie Dorothy Leavis’s Fiction and the Reading Public, born from her doctoral dissertation directed by I. A. Richards. Finally, Eliot was among the first subscribers to Leavis’s new journal, Scrutiny, which also first appeared in 1932 (MacKillop 146). It is obvious that, by 1932, Eliot knew Leavis and his work, though of course he would not have been keen to admit that it influenced him in any way. Eliot was, after all, the elder states-
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man. Their relationship began as one of polite exchanges. In 1934, Eliot mentions that he might contribute to Scrutiny himself, and in 1935 he invites Leavis, once again, to send him something for The Criterion, though nothing came of either request (MacKillop 195). Eliot would later remark that he “strongly disagreed with Dr. Leavis during the last days of [Scrutiny] . . . and objected to his attacks and innuendoes about people I knew and respected. I think it is a pity he became so intemperate in his views and was extravagant in his admirations, as I had, in the earlier stages of the magazine, felt great sympathy for its editor” (qtd. in Allen). As his own scholarship matured, Leavis tried to ensure that his work was not merely perceived as derivative of Eliot’s own. In his 1932 “Manifesto” for the first issue of Scrutiny, Leavis decries the lack of a “serious critical journal” for England, footnoting—the irony is delicious—The Criterion as a possible exception, explaining that Eliot’s journal nonetheless too often “substitutes solemnity for seriousness and, during the last two years, a narrowing of its interests prevent it from influencing more than a small proportion of the reading public. [The Criterion] is necessary, but [it is] not the unum necessarium” (Bentley 2). We can read between the lines of these sometimes uncharitable public slights; whatever professional relationship they had, Eliot and Leavis would clearly not have been keen to be too indelicate about one another, at least not in the early 1930s.

Some might charge that Eliot never would have revised The Waste Land because a young upstart at Cambridge lamented the notes to the poem. One wonders what Leavis himself would have thought had he noticed the change to this final footnote; it seems that he never did. Yet perhaps Eliot would not agree that a change to the notes could be thought of as a change to the actual poem. After all, Eliot dismissed the notes in “The Frontiers of Criticism” (1956), explaining that they were added simply to hedge off any accusations of plagiarism and to provide a few more pages of printed matter, though he “regret[s] having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail,” also claiming that he had “sometimes thought of getting rid of these notes; but now they can never be unstuck” (OPP 121–22). Many second-generation critics took Eliot at his word. Hugh Kenner, for instance, implores “we should do well to discard the notes as much as possible” (Kenner 150). Of course, if Eliot had truly no care for the notes, he would not have taken the pains to edit particular phrasing within them. On one level, The Waste Land seems involved in a continual process of translation between East and West, between past and present, and between speech and silence. On another level, the relationship between the notes and the text mirrors or performs this kind of translative act. Even if Eliot believed that the notes had become
nothing more than a “remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship,” it is only because, as any careful reader of *The Waste Land* already knows, they do not explain or explicate the poem in any substantive way—they offer more problems than solutions, so many keys merely confirming our prison.

II. Where East Meets West: *The Waste Land* and Global Encounter

Why should such a small footnote leave such a large imprint? After all, if Eliot was keen to sweep it into the dustbin of history, it seems bookish and pedantic to worry about such matters of textual history. Yet the note operates as a useful flashpoint between Western literary modernism and its sustained interest in Eastern cultures, religions, and texts. By exploring the larger textual, cultural, and theoretical implications of this flashpoint, we can better calibrate and nuance our larger understanding of modernism’s global encounters.

For instance, the “feeble” version of the note implies a gesture toward the sublime, and perhaps even serves as a prime example of what some might characterize as Eliot’s orientalism, construing the Indic and Sanskrit sources in the poem as Other: incomprehensible, inaccessible, and exotic. But Eliot was at least somewhat versed in Eastern traditions: he studied Sanskrit and Pali while at Harvard, and Stephen Spender’s account has it that Eliot even considered converting to Buddhism while composing *The Waste Land* (Kearns 22, Spender 20). In his infamous 1933 Page-Barbour lecture at the University of Virginia, in which he makes anti-Semitic remarks about the dangers of “free-thinking Jews,” Eliot admits, “After a year or two spent in the mazes of Patanjali’s metaphysics . . . I came to the conclusion . . . that my only hope of penetrating to the heart of that mystery would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as a European; which, for practical as well as sentimental reasons, I did not wish to do” (ASG 34). Whether we read this comment as representative of Eliot’s orientalism or as a responsible acknowledgment of the dangers of claiming ownership of a culture and religion of which he had merely a nascent and limited understanding, it still recalls the ambivalence of Eliot’s original note, anticipating the final line to E. M. Forster’s *Passage to India*: the West and the East may eventually unite or reconcile, but not here, not yet. Moreover, many might argue that the “equivalent” version of the note is the more irresponsible, culturally deaf gesture in its implication that the allusion to Philippians 4:7—“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ
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Jesus”—is an unproblematic and uncorrupted “translation” of the Sanskrit, as if these two religious source-texts are somehow analogous despite their different histories and cultural contexts.

Yet it also seems absurd to insist that any writer—Western or Eastern—quarantine herself within a singular literary tradition, or that any inclusion of non-Western sources and influences in Western texts must always be the product of cultural imperialism. Surely we can advance a more tempered approach that frames The Waste Land as productive and important site of global encounter within Western literature even at the same time we remain sensitive to the politics of literary history and representation, especially the representation of the non-West by the West. Indeed, there are many article and book-length studies that examine The Waste Land’s direct and indirect parallels with the Eastern traditions from which it draws, especially Cleo M. Kearns’s 1987 T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions, published almost three decades ago but which remains an important critical watershed for this particular aspect of Eliot studies. Yet despite Kearns’s work, Eliot’s reputation as both a poet and critic has not fared well within postcolonial studies. To a certain extent, some of the charges levied against him are justified. But critical scholarship has begun to come full circle, albeit with a more tempered and cautious tone. For instance, in his 2009 A Transnational Poetics, Jahan Ramazani points to both The Waste Land and Ezra Pound’s Cantos to suggest that the indigenous texts subsumed within them retain “at least some capacity to question both their Western host texts and the ways in which the non-West is represented” (Ramazani 109).

We need not read against the grain of the text in order to arrive at this conclusion. After all, Eliot spent his entire dissertation writing about the limited capacity to escape the self or to know the world as it exists outside of our own minds. Thus, even though I begin by invoking what must seem to be Leavis’ antiquated analysis of the poem, it is especially relevant for thinking about The Waste Land as a poem about failure: the failure for the fragments to cohere, the failure for the Western and Eastern traditions to come together, the failure to escape cultural, or even national ideologies and religious structures of belief. This kind of reading perhaps pushes against our critical sensibilities. To consider The Waste Land as a poem about failure neither explains how the poem’s various jigsaw pieces fit together, nor offers a master key for solving its puzzle. It is at least a little ironic that a text so thoroughly associated with the hermeneutic strategies of New Criticism seems to resist those same critical methods of analysis. And, of course, many would agree that criticism never fully explains or encapsulates the texts that it analyzes—this is, after all, what makes a text literary in
the first place. We might borrow a line from J. Alfred Prufrock: sometimes it is impossible to say just what a poem means.

And yet I am trying to propose something still different: that the point of *The Waste Land* is to refuse this kind of literary wholeness. For instance, we should not only ask what St. Augustine’s *Confessions* and the Buddha’s *Fire Sermon* have in common, but rather we should also explore how or if these superimposed sources fail to focus into a single unity. Eliot’s note on the end of “The Fire Sermon” is both cheeky and instructive: “The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident” (*CPP* 53). But collocation is not the same as unification or synthesis, and the Western and Eastern sources texts within the passage remain conflicted, both as equivalent analogues and as narratives of ascetic redemption. Although both ascetics seek liberation from the material, embodied world of suffering and passion, that liberation is never achieved, at least within the context of the passage. This is, in a sense, the nadir of the poem, though it is also the beginning of its final ascent. St. Augustine enters Carthage, praying that God shield him from the “cauldron of illicit loves” swarming throughout this Unreal city:

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning (*CPP* 46)

This passage is one of the most quoted and universally studied in *The Waste Land*, and yet it remains one of the most enigmatic. Does the fire of illicit love and desire successfully transform into a fire of salvation or purification, as the link to the Buddha’s fire sermon seems to imply? I would suggest that it is impossible to answer this question: the poem simply does not provide enough information, and Eliot intentionally designs the text in such a way that the section does not conclude, but simply ends, cut off in a way that recalls the allusion to Philomela’s tongue, cut off by Tereus, to which Eliot also earlier alludes. Of this passage, Kearns writes of the unification of the Buddha and Augustine, both correlated with the Sermon on the Mount (also mentioned in Eliot’s footnote). Yet she qualifies her analysis:
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There is, however, a kind of anxiety . . . in trying to combine the early Buddhist or even the Upanishadic and Christian points of view, that is, in attempting to abolish the ego and accomplish the total ‘burning’ of all forms of identity in the presence of a theistic conception of God. Something of the anxiety occasioned by this stressful linking together of heterogeneous ideas hangs over the end of Eliot’s “Fire Sermon,” as the syntax enacts the abolition of both object and subject, “me” and “Lord,” leaving only the process, “burning” (Kearns 209–10, emphasis mine).

Her keyword in this analysis—“anxiety”—hinges on the assumption that the passage truly does achieve some kind of unification or rhyme between these Western and Eastern sources. Eliot’s word—“collocation”—implies no such synthesis nor progress. Moreover, it is important to remember that The Waste Land is not a lyric poem. Unlike “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” there is no single lyric speaker in this passage, or in the poem as a whole, that could unify these distinct traditions. St. Augustine has no recourse to Buddha. The parallel lines of these very distinct traditions, however close they might be, fail to converge.

But to be cognizant of that failure is to achieve a different vantage point entirely, at least from the perspective of the reader, who both sees what Tiresias sees and more. The poem and the speakers within it may fail to restore the wasted land, just as the West and the East fail to converge into a singular global tradition. But by noticing this failure, the horizon of the poem, at least for the reader, changes dramatically: The Waste Land transforms from a text that tries to knot together a grab-bag of varying cultural and religious traditions into a text that registers the necessary acceptance of a world that is too complex, too different, ever to be unified into a whole. This is, in a way, a natural outgrowth of what Eliot came to realize in his dissertation on the idealism of F. H. Bradley: “. . . the life of a soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater or less extent) jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them” (Knowledge and Experience, 147–48). The Waste Land articulates just such a longing, which is made all the more salient precisely because the unification it seeks is never achieved, at least in any definitive way.

I propose, then, that we read The Waste Land not as a poem about crisis, but as a poem about failure. In driving a wedge between these two terms (“crisis,” after all, derives from the Greek verb χρίωνος, “to
separate” or “to distinguish,”) failure takes on a new valence: the seemingly incompatible worlds of the poem are valuable precisely because they are irreducible. In this light, the association—though not equivalency—between “shantih” and the passage from Philippians is entirely appropriate. The Philippians passage marks both a failure to know or understand God’s design, as well as a kind of surrender, an acknowledgment that it is only with faith in something other than this world that such a unity or peace is possible. In the prior Philippians verse, St. Paul comforts his readers: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” The context—Paul’s imprisonment and impending death for preaching the Gospel—is important, as it marks him as the counterpoint to the Sibyl of Cumae, who begins The Waste Land, and who is also caught between life and death. Like the Sibyl of Cumae, Paul wants to die (so that he may be in heaven with God), but he ultimately recognizes that his work on Earth remains unfinished:

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me. (Philippians 1: 22–26)

Despite the overwhelming amount of interest in identifying and explaining the various source-texts for The Waste Land, the few studies which do mention the allusion to Philippians in this final note seldom explain it in terms of its broader context. To be torn between life and death, this world and another—as St. Paul is in this letter—is the central problem of The Waste Land and of all of the characters who haunt its interlacing narratives. The end of the poem contains two oppositional gestures of surrender: the “Shantih” mantra seems to imply a withdrawal from life and the body, and yet the collocation with St. Paul is a significant return to or reclaiming of an earthly body and an earthly life. Even in the footnote, the Western and Eastern source texts gesture in different directions. Do they nonetheless arrive at the same endpoint? As Eliot says in his epigraph to the Four Quartets—quoting neither Sanskrit nor Western Christianity, but the Greek Heraclitus—“the way up and the way down are one in the same.” Unlike the Four Quartets, though, The Waste Land is not a comedic poem, and it is im-
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important not to let Eliot’s later poetry prevent us from seeing *The Waste Land* on its own terms. The end of the poem, including its footnotes, remains radically under-determined.

In a way, the final footnote so well encapsulates the poem as a whole, especially as a kind of grail quest that has at its center a game of interpretation. In order to restore the wasted land, the questing night must proceed to the Chapel Perilous and ask certain ritual questions; only if the correct questions are asked can the land regain its fertility. Hermeneutics is also at the center of “What the Thunder Said,” with the Thunder’s sound, DA, interpreted in three different ways. As taken from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, the gods hear Prajapati’s DA as Damyata (self-control), man as Datta (to give, to be charitable), and the Asuras, or materialist-prone demon-like deities, as Dayadhvam (to sympathize, to understand the suffering of others). Eliot changes the order, but the idea remains the same: to become what you are not, to relinquish the temptations of one’s own nature. And yet these three different interpretations fail to include the others, just as each passage following the three DA statements eventually collapses under the weight of its respective speculation. Moreover, the three interpretations—give, sympathize, control—are at odds with each other. Translation compounds the problem further. As Brooker and Bentley explain, these translations, once supplied, “are elaborated by a Western voice . . . Actually, there may be one, two, or three Western interpreters, just as there may be several Indian translators. A vast gulf, then, separates the translators of the thunderclap and the interpreters of the translations” (Brooker and Bentley 191). As a consequence, these glosses “do not provide us with an authoritative statement of the poem’s main ideas or even of some exotic guides to life . . . . The thunder episode ends by exposing the inadequacy of the interpretive process . . . . We can explain and philosophize about the implications of our words ‘give,’ ‘sympathize,’ and ‘control,’ but in regard to ‘Datta,’ ‘Dayadhvam,’ and ‘Damyata’ we can only look up our equivalent words (195–97). Brooker and Bentley’s choice of “equivalent” in this final cited sentence is surely no accident, but their reading demonstrates that no words can ever be fully “equivalent,” and that with each subsequent attempt to pin down the meaning of the original, language seems ironically to do nothing more than to underscore its own inadequacy.

To say that the “peace which passeth understanding” is a *feeble* translation, not an equivalent one, is to acknowledge a similar kind of failure. However, as I have been suggesting, there is ethics and humility in that gesture, not merely F. H. Bradley’s solipsism. To acknowledge that failure of translation is, as with “The Fire Sermon,” to attain a different vantage point entirely, one not marked by a confinement within
oneself, but rather by an engagement and awareness of an Other. To fail in this way is, in a sense, the only way that one can achieve some form of escape from solipsism. That is why, in my view, the first version of the footnote is more appropriate than Eliot’s revised version: *The Waste Land* is a poem about a complex world in which things are seldom ever equivalent, where even our most sincere longing to understand that world usually results in nothing more than feeble grasping.

III. From Crisis to Syncresis: New Vocabularies for Global Modernist Studies

Crisis: Even with the advent of new modernist studies and an increasing acknowledgment of the translocal, the transnational, and global modernism, we still have a tendency to construe modernism’s response to modernity as that of “crisis,” implying a fossilized antagonism, rupture, or suspicion. Out of this crisis comes the novel, the new: “Make it New,” Ezra Pound wrote—though not many remember that Pound’s catchphrase is reference to the ancient Chinese Emperor Ch’eng T’ang, who reigned 1766–1753 B.C.E, and who had the slogan inscribed not on an urn or archway but, of all places, on his bathtub. As with Eliot’s final note, it is at least a little ironic that Pound’s often-appropriated slogan for twentieth-century Western literary modernism is older than Western civilization itself, though this fact is often lost on both artists and critics who invoke it. Perhaps we focus too much on the adjectival inflection in Pound’s phrase; after all, if *The Waste Land* feels like a fundamentally new turn for poetry in English, it only accomplishes this newness by drawing on the very old.

Here I propose, then, a momentary thought experiment: that we read *The Waste Land* not as a poem about crisis, but as a poem about globalism and colliding textual traditions, about the necessarily cosmopolitan world of twentieth-century experience and travel, and about an encounter with alterity or difference that cannot be so easily subsumed into a single worldview. Such polyphonic multiplicity is not a mark of crisis but, instead, a paradoxically generative and productive space in that it forces us to realize the precariousness of our previous beliefs. To see *The Waste Land* as a global poem, and to fully appreciate Pound’s injunction to “Make It New” in the *Cantos*, means that we need to consider both Eliot and Pound’s understanding of the dialectical relationship between Old and New in terms of this doubled or mirrored relationship between East and West. As Jessica Berman has said, situating texts such as *The Waste Land* within the new critical rhetoric of global modernism means that we envision modernism not
as a “static canon of works,” but rather as “a dynamic set of relationships, practices, problematics, and cultural engagements with modernity” (Berman 7). To subsume such engagements primarily through a rhetoric of crisis is to presuppose a philosophical orientation for The Waste Land, thereby limiting or oversimplifying the way its registers a fundamentally disorienting but productive experience with a broad range of global horizons.

We can better calibrate the critical optics we use to theorize and interpret both The Waste Land and modernism more generally by complementing the rhetoric of crisis with that of syncretism or syncretism. Of course, syncretism is not without its own critical presuppositions, and many within cultural studies or anthropology worry that it reifies a discourse of contamination, “the infiltration of a supposedly ‘pure’ tradition by symbols and meanings seen as belonging to other, incompatible traditions” (Stewart and Shaw 1). Yet the act of syncretism itself—usually understood as a process whereby differing religious traditions and practices are recombined together—often upends rather than affirms such notions of purity. Within an aesthetic dimension, syncretism also seems like a term more critically tuned to the kind of formal experiments so often associated with modernist literature across the arts, readily seen in the influence of African masks on Pablo Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (1907) or the incorporation of pagan ritual in Igor Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring (Le Sacre du Printemps) (1913). To see such cross-cultural moments as forms of aesthetic syncretism is to better understand the way in which even what has been called high modernism is marked not by a crisis of representation, but rather by a sustained and conscious attempt to register the porous and complex relationship between the West and non-West, between the self and Other.

The purpose of this essay has not been to argue that the “feeble” version of the final note is more authoritative or definitive than Eliot’s “equivalent” revision, but I do suggest that it is the superior of the two versions, both because of its humility and because it underscores rather than whitewashes the global nature of the poem’s various source-texts, especially in the way that these sources fail to coalesce into a stable whole. Indeed, to talk about The Waste Land as a poem about failure is not to say that the poem fails, but rather to understand the rapidly expanding, and often disorienting, global horizons of encounter encoded in the poem, and to appreciate the way that such disorientation is also an invitation to cross borders, to relinquish the usual matrices by which we identify the complicated dynamics of global citizenship and cultural inheritance. In this way, I agree with Michael Levenson, who has pointed out that, though a waste land is dry and barren, it is also a cleared space, and that this opening marks a strange commitment to rather than
a divestment from cultural politics: “The weak currency of postwar modernity is challenged by the gold standard of poetic tradition—in place of banknotes, footnotes . . . At the last the poem devastates the urban vortex of sex, money and J. C. Squire, and it compensates with Dante, Tennyson, Kyd. It enacts a depletion of social life and a saturation of cultural life” (Levenson 11). Yet that saturated cultural life—irrevocably global—is not easily attained. *The Waste Land* is a moving target, manifesting a dialectical tendency to rise above Stephen Dedalus’ nets of nation, language, and religion, and yet insisting that we can never fully escape those nets, for better and worse. Always, to a certain degree, an outsider, Eliot is perhaps far closer to the diasporic and postcolonial writers who followed in his wake than he is with other modernist contemporaries. Of course, many of these writers—Kamau Brathwaite, Christopher Okigbo, and Derek Walcott, to name a few—appropriated and indigenized Eliot’s poetry, reclaiming it for their own national, political, or artistic purposes. That intertextuality is an acknowledgment that Eliot’s modernism has always been interested in the world, in the molecular as opposed to the molar self, offering us a space that acknowledges alterity and difference, but which also denies an easy appropriation or translation from one discordant view to another.

Notes
1. Co-Editors Sir Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue are, at the time of the composition of this article, in the final stages of completing the Critical Edition of Eliot’s complete poetry, which will be published through Faber in the United Kingdom and Johns Hopkins University Press in the United States. Their research on the textual history of *The Waste Land* concurs with my own, and I am very grateful for additional information they provided regarding the 1932 American edition of Eliot’s *Poems 1909–1925*. Sir Christopher Ricks was also kind enough to meet with me during the composition of this article, and he offered useful observations regarding the Eliot-Leavis relationship and the history of English studies at Cambridge.


3. For more recent considerations of Eliot and Eastern religions, see Hauck.

4. Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley also take up the history of critical interpretations of this section, pointing out that these readings often fail to take into account a number of paradoxes: “First, this section of the poem does
not even remotely resemble a sermon . . . . Second, its dominant image is not fire but water . . . . Third, its sexual episodes are not characterized by passion or hatred or remorse or by any emotion that could be compared to fire” (Brooker and Bentley, 122–23). Within the greater context of the passage, they suggest, “The Fire Sermon” is not really about sin or desire at all, but rather about a world of automatons who lack both a sense of good or of evil. As a consequence, they argue that this section concludes not with a moment of lust or desire, but with a “lusting for lust itself—for an idea or a sin or an adversary against which to define their sermons” (145–46). It is only by reclaiming desire—even a morally corrupt one—that one can begin to operate within a moral field once more. Although their reading is perceptive, Brooker and Bentley also assume a seamless association or yoking of Augustine and Buddha—that they represent the same paradox of redemption through desire. It is this seamless association that I wish to challenge.

5. See, for example, Susan Stanford Friedman’s influential essay, “Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism.” Friedman’s forthcoming book project, Planetary Modernisms Provocations on Modernity Across Time (Columbia UP, 2015) further deconstructs the critical categories used to police definitional boundaries of modernism and modernity. Studies that associate modernism with the concept of crisis are too numerous to outline here. A representative example can be found in Eysteinsson: “The Russian Formalists can certainly be judged as instigators of a semiotic revolution, but what they inquired into at a theoretical (analytical and metalinguistic) level regarding production and function of meaning in literary language is more immediately acted out as a crisis of meaning in the realm of modernist literature, as is apparent when its site of troubled signification is observed within the context of social norms of language use . . . . Modernism could certainly be seen as the aesthetic embodiment of the ‘crisis of representation’ that structuralists, and particularly poststructuralists, have greatly elaborated on recently, and to some extent ‘performed’ themselves” (46–47, emphasis original).

6. See Pound, Canto LIII, 265.

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The Indic Eliot in “The Hollow Men”

Tatsuo Murata

The aim of this paper is to reveal the deep relationship that exists between Eliot and some dimensions of Indic thought, and further, to clarify how the poet uses it to inform an apparently familiar work like “The Hollow Men,” which is just one example of the sustained influence of Indic thought on Eliot’s creative sensibility.

As George Whiteside, Cleo Kearns, and others have shown in documentary research of Eliot’s studies at Harvard, Eliot was absorbed in studies of A Sanskrit Reader in Charles Lanman’s class (autumn 1911 to spring 1912), Indian philosophy such as The Yoga-System of Patañjali in James Woods’s class (autumn 1912 to spring 1913), and, in autumn 1913, Anesaki Masaharu’s “Schools of Religious and Philosophical Thought in Japan” as a course numbered Philosophy 24A. The handwritten notes of Eliot are now kept in the T. S. Eliot Collection at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and are labeled “T. S. Eliot, Notes on Eastern Philosophy, A. MS. annotations; 3 Oct. [1913] – 15 May [1914] 62 s. (80 p.).” During this time he also studied Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant.

Later, Eliot summarized this highly stimulating period of immersion in Indic modes of thought and expression in the following pertinent passage:

Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patañjali’s metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification. A good half of the effort of understanding what the Indian philosophers were after—and their subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys—lay in trying to erase from my mind all the categories and kinds of distinction common to European philosophy from the time of the Greeks. My previous and concomitant study of European philosophy was hardly better than an obstacle. And I came to the conclusion—seeing also that the “influence” of Brahmin and Buddhist thought upon Europe, as in Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and Deussen, had largely been through romantic misunderstanding—that my only hope of really penetrating to the heart of that mystery would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European:
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which, for practical as well as sentimental reasons, I did not wish to do. (ASG 40–41)

From this and other comments, it is clear that Eliot had a deep interest in Indic modes of thinking and that he possessed a wide knowledge of Indic concepts from a relatively early age, especially their metaphysical treatment of “mind” and “soul.” Almost in the same period, Eliot bought F. H. Bradley’s Appearance and Reality in October, 1913⁴, and he paid keen attention to the notion of “immediate experience” with respect to idealism and the concepts of object and subject in discursive thinking.⁵

Later, as a poet and literary critic bent on establishing his own formal style,⁶ Eliot made a remarkable comment as evidence to back up the idea that Indic texts were a strong influence on his creative work. In the essay on Massinger in his Selected Essays, he criticizes the immaturity of Massinger’s sensibility and sets up a bold proposal as to what makes a poet “mature”:

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest. (SE 296, italics mine)

This passage is so central to Eliot’s poetics that it could be taken as a kind of credo for his own “allusive” technique as is shown in the present paper. As the italicized sections show, there are two aspects to Eliot’s allusions: firstly, they undergo a metamorphosis by which they are welded into something “utterly different”; and secondly, the sources can be very culturally and linguistically “remote.” This is to suggest that, although it might be tempting to assume from the last sentence of the former citation that, as his sensibility matured, Eliot shook off the early influence of his youthful study of Indian literature, this is far from the fact.⁷ Any attempt to interpret Eliot’s work only through a predominantly Western viewpoint operates from a faulty assumption, failing to acknowledge the lifelong impact that Indic philosophy had on his work as a whole, and such a core position exiles the poet to a world of cultural flatness. All too often, the wide-ranging “compound” eye fails, and the full import of Eliot’s commentary is lost.
In his Student’s Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot, for example, B. C. Southam makes the following general introductory remark on the poem, “The Hollow Men,” the subject of this paper.

“The Hollow Men” is an extraordinarily difficult poem to annotate. Its language and imagery are disarmingly simple. There are no problems of historical reference or translation. But it is highly allusive, allusive almost to the point of obscurity, and the identification of Eliot’s sources cannot be made without some degree of interpretation. (148)

Southam picks up four major sources of reference: the Gunpowder Plot, Caesar’s assassination in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Dante’s Divina Commedia, and Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. Relevant to a greater or lesser degree as these sources may be, Southam limits his remarks to the Western tradition—a culturally flat approach that fails to encompass Eliot’s broader, and arguably more profound, interests. As a result, Southam struggles to provide clear guidance for the poem, and leaves his readers to deal with the poem’s allusive obscurities for themselves. Furthermore, extensive as their annotations certainly are, even Ricks’s and McCue’s recent annotations to the “The Hollow Men” limit themselves to the Western tradition (Ricks 721–26).

At this point we would do well to adopt a more wide-ranging point of view that takes heed of and embraces what Eliot has stated about his own work and concerns in passages such as the two quoted above. For taken together, these two quotations provide a powerful rationale for the reader to avoid a simplistic, one- or two-dimensional approach to Eliot’s use of allusion, and to look for the multi-faceted elements transformed and welded into each unique new work—the “authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest” who are the focal concern of this essay.

This is not to suggest that Eliot’s affinity for Indic thought systems has gone unnoticed. Critics like Cleo McNelly Kearns and her T. S. Eliot and Indic Tradition have noted the importance of Eliot’s study of Indic philosophy and related it to his poetic sensibility. Yet not even Kearns’s extensive study has provided us with a comprehensive account of the way in which Indic patterns of thought inform the whole of Eliot’s work. Kearns’s critique, for instance, only covers The Waste Land and Four Quartets in significant detail, and shorter poems like “The Hollow Men,” in which Eliot is almost certainly borrowing extensively from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, as he did earlier for The Waste Land, lie outside the scope of her overview. At this moment, we note the germ of Eliot’s interest in Indic literature (including the Upanishads and
This present essay attempts to expose the connection of this previously obscure source for “The Hollow Men” in much the same way that Kearns, following Eliot’s well-known note on the source of “What the Thunder Said” in The Waste Land, explains how Eliot employed Prajapati’s “divine voice of thunder” for the culminating section of the poem (Kearns 219). In that case, Eliot consciously changed the original order of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad’s three directives, from “control,” “give,” “sympathize” to “give,” “sympathize,” “control”—“control” being a key term to any understanding of his own work, as both Kearns and, previously, B. P. N. Sinha have noted (220). Eliot may have shifted the order and hence the emphasis and nuance, yet the meaning and force of the original are maintained (Kearns, EIT 219–20). This is very much in line with the “mature” poetic technique we find in the essay on Massinger.

“The Hollow Men” was composed in 1925, only three years after The Waste Land, and is heavily informed by Yagnavalkya’s four conscious states of mind, which are contained in the IV Adhyāya, 3 Brāhmaṇa of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. (Eliot’s “What the Thunder Said” comes from V Adhyāya. This is a moralistic or religious passage of Indic thought). Meanwhile, Yagnavalkya’s preaching focuses on the metaphysical, dealing with the conscious state of mind. The original text is a discussion about a matter that “the self indeed is his light” and “Who is that self?” (Müller 163), and its answer is “what the light of man is.” After accounting for the sun, the moon, fire, and sound, in that order, Yagnavalkya points to the Self as man’s light (Müller 161–63). Then, in verse 7, he explains the twofold nature of that Self:

He who is within the heart, surrounded by the Prānas (senses), the person of light, consisting of knowledge. He, remaining the same, wanders along the two worlds, as if thinking, as if moving. During sleep (in dream) he transcends this world and all the forms of death (all that falls under the sway of death, all that is perishable). (Müller 163)

Yagnavalkya develops this fundamental duality in consciousness into four distinct yet overlapping states of mind (Müller 161–73): that is, the states of “waking,” “dreaming,” “deep sleep,” and “death,” the last of which, contrary to what one might initially suppose, is the highest state of mind, representing an “emancipation” from worldly desire and the attainment of mokṣa, Hindu liberation (or Nirvana, enlightenment
in the Buddhist tradition). Eliot utilizes this fourfold pattern for his own purposes in “The Hollow Men,” where the four conscious states of mind are remolded into the text in the form of four distinct, yet interlinked “kingdoms.” In order to understand how the poet deploys these divisions, the chart below may prove helpful to clarify the parallels between Yagnavalkya’s four states and Eliot’s four kingdoms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yagnavalkya’s States of Mind</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Eliot’s Kingdoms</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>waking</td>
<td>full of delusion and selfish desire</td>
<td>our lost kingdoms</td>
<td>hollow men no eyes dead, cactus land valley of dying stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dreaming</td>
<td>Self-deceiving “the golden person, the lonely bird” (Müller 165) a playground of rejoicing and terrible sights</td>
<td>death’s dream kingdom</td>
<td>deliberate disguises sunlight on a broken column distant voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deep sleep</td>
<td>bliss silent consciousness no desires no dreams shadow of the Supreme</td>
<td>death’s twilight kingdom</td>
<td>perpetual star multifoliate rose hope final meeting Shadow (capitalized)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death</td>
<td>no delusions no selfish desires enlightened</td>
<td>death’s other Kingdom (capitalized)</td>
<td>direct eyes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this way, Eliot represents Yagnavalkya’s original four states of consciousness by the four kingdoms in the poem. An overview of the poem reveals the narrative interplay between these sharply delineated yet interrelated states. In Section I, Eliot contrasts the dry, hollow world of what we later learn to be the significantly pluralized “our lost kingdoms” (CPP 84) with the significantly capitalized “death’s other Kingdom” (CPP 83). Section II centers around “death’s dream kingdom” (CPP 84), with “the twilight kingdom” (CPP 84) also introduced and contrasted as the feared venue of some final reckoning. Section III is a stark description of “our lost kingdoms” once again set against “death’s other kingdom,” though “kingdom” is not capitalized this time. A sense of “empty” hope pivots the sharply delineated juxtaposition of the two stanzas that make up Section IV, the first part of which continues the description of the hollow men’s lost kingdoms before shifting to images of hope and salvation, which, to a certain degree, counterbalance the image of fear associated with “death’s twilight kingdom” in Section II. Section V in the poem presents an even more sharply contrasted juxtaposition between the now italicized sections relating to the hollow men, interspersed with allusions to the capitalized Kingdom of a Christian God, and the stanzas in standard type that represent Eliot’s twilight kingdom and its capitalized “Shadow” (CPP 85). The close correspondence of these two frameworks, used in Indian thought and in Eliot’s poem, are clearly apparent, with Eliot’s divisions being an almost carbon copy of the description of the fourfold states of consciousness outlined in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

Yagnavalkya’s four mental conditions represent proportional degrees of spiritual enlightenment according to the degree to which the individual has been able to rid him- or herself of selfish and passionate desires. In line with Yagnavalkya, for whom death and deep sleep hold positive associations as higher states of mind, Eliot rarefies “death’s other Kingdom” and invests his “twilight kingdom” with fundamentally positive attributes. In Indic thought, ultimate enlightenment involves freeing oneself from one’s self-centered worldly desires and ridding the self of its worldly and stained egoism. By contrast, the two other kingdom-states are basically negative for both the writers since they have their base in worldliness. The reader who fails to pay sufficient attention to Eliot’s profound interest in Indian philosophy may be bewildered by the terms like “death” and “twilight,” which have unfamilarly positive overtones, whilst a normally highly positive word like “dream” is imbued with negative implications. And this may partly account for why Southam notes that “The Hollow Men” is “an extraordinarily difficult poem to annotate” (202).
Having outlined the general structure of the poem, let us now turn to a detailed analysis of its content. The first section of the poem opens with a description of the hollow men’s dry, empty lives, which are placed in sharp opposition to the first of Eliot’s kingdoms to be mentioned: the capitalized “death’s other Kingdom,” which is said to be inhabited by rarefied beings “who have crossed / With direct eyes” (CPP 83). This is the Buddhist state and action of enlightenment, which is written as “pāramitā” (pāram means “the other side of the land,” itā, “to go to”). Eliot is referring to it here, tactfully linking it with the highest fourth state of mind in Nagarjuna’s writings. It is outlined in the following way in Mascaró’s explanation:

This fourth condition is Atman in His own pure state: the awakened life of supreme consciousness. It is neither outer nor inner consciousness, neither semi-consciousness nor sleeping consciousness, neither mere consciousness nor unconsciousness. He is Atman, the Spirit Himself, that cannot be seen or touched, that is above all distinctions, beyond thought and ineffable. In the union with Him is the supreme proof of His reality. He is peace and love (Mascaró 83).

The Buddhist concept of bodhisattva (a person destined for enlightenment)—a state in which all bodily and mental desire has been extinguished, and Nirvana achieved—is reflected in Eliot’s use of capitalization and alludes to the pure land into which Gautama Siddhartha, or Buddha, as the greatest of its achievers, crossed. The expression “with direct eyes” reflects the idea clearly stated as “Atman in His own pure state” (Mascaró 83). It is the noblest state of consciousness in which life is most clearly perceived and, as the quotation suggests, all distinctions cease to exist.

With regard to the phrase, “those who have crossed with direct eyes,” Eliot noted a passage from Anesaki’s “Buddhist Ethics and Morality”:

“the paramitas, the virtues, which bring us to perfection or to the other shore of Nirvana. . . . Buddhist morality is to bring us to the attainment of arahatta (saintship) or to Buddhahood, to the final goal of perfect enlightenment. So in this respect every virtue is a paramitta.” (“Notes on Eastern Philosophy,” Appendix 17)

We will recall Eliot’s fondness for the image of an individual who has crossed with direct eyes to some pure land, leaving the soiled world of human desire behind. This idea of “crossing” in the achievement of
Buddhist salvation is also written in The Prajñāpāramitā-ḥṛdaya Sūtra (the Heart Sutra) (Takakusu 848). It is expressed as “gate gate pāra-gate pāra-sam-gate bodhi svāhā iti Prajñā-pāramitā-ḥṛdayaṃ samāptam” (Wakui 135–36) which means, as noted before, “go and cross over to the other side of the shore with perfect wisdom in the heart.” Eliot refers to this kind of event in The Family Reunion, when Agatha says that “Harry has crossed the frontier / Beyond which safety and danger have a different meaning” (CCP 342), and in The Confidential Clerk when Colby says, “We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it” (CCP 518). These passages have far deeper significance than appears at first sight. Both instances describe a situation in which the characters experience a spiritual awakening by becoming able to see the world and themselves with the direct eyes, thus attaining salvation from a state of personal, worldly passion and agony.

In Section I, Eliot contrasts such enlightened individuals with the “us” (CPP 83) of the poem—the hollow men whose dry lives lack vision and meaning, and later in Section III, where they are described as “Waking alone / At the hour when we are / Trembling with tenderness” (CPP 84). These lines contain an image which in Buddhism contains all the signs of the lowest state of consciousness—an isolated ego, awake and burning with worldly desire. Later on in the poem, Eliot will describe these directionless, burning men (note the allusion to Guy Fawkes) as inhabitants of “This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms” (CPP 84).

With the image of the eyes connecting Section I and Section II of the poem, Eliot turns his attention to “death’s dream kingdom,” which corresponds faithfully to Yagnavalkya’s state of dreaming. In Müller’s translation, the dreaming individual, even if having assumed light, can be only transformed into “the golden person” or the “lonely bird,” as is cleverly written in the following quotation: “Going up and down in his dream, the god makes manifold shapes for himself, either rejoicing together with women, or laughing (with his friends), or seeing terrible sights” (Müller 165), adding that it is a “playground” (of the mind). This is reflected in the highly-charged, iconic nature of the images Eliot has chosen in his description of this dream-like state of mind in Section II; for example, in the image of “Sunlight on a broken column” (CPP 83). Nevertheless, it is still without vision and meaning: it is a world of “deliberate disguises” (CPP 84) with the hollow men merely transformed into will-less scarecrows, “Behaving as the wind behaves” (CPP 84). Mascaró explains this state of mind as “the dreaming life of inner-moving consciousness, employing the seven subtle inner elements in its own light and solitude” (Mascaró 83). The ego may have lost its burning desire, but the isolated ego is still alone and deluded.
and is written as “the Golden person. The lonely bird,” even if it has been transformed.

In the last two lines of Section II, Eliot employs the same technique of juxtaposition that he used in Section I to delineate two different states of consciousness between “dream kingdom” and “twilight kingdom.” This time he introduces the third of his kingdoms—the “twilight kingdom” and its much-feared “final meeting” (CPP 84). Despite the strong associations of these lines with the Last Judgment, the reader has to wait until Section IV for clarification as to why it is held in such dread by the hollow men in a state of dreaming mind, and a great deal of the poem’s tension derives from the delayed and pivotal relationship that Eliot establishes at this point in Section IV between the other two states of consciousness: “twilight kingdom” and “the death’s other Kingdom”; that is, the division between the fundamentally negative and the fundamentally positive states of mind that, as we have already seen, Yagnavalkya presupposes before detailing his fourfold framework.

Before proceeding, however, we would do well to observe how the poet deploys his talent (we might call it his idiosyncratic poetic technique) for producing images that deftly borrow from authors “remote in time, or alien in language” (SE 296), simultaneously re-clothing them in his own words for his own aesthetic and artistic purposes. The recurring star motif in its various forms is of obvious symbolic importance to the poem. In Sections II and III it appears in the lower forms of consciousness as “a fading star” (CPP 84)—distant, receding, and faint. Then, in Section IV, it appears again in starkly opposed forms: the “valley of dying stars” (CPP 84), the place of which is synonymous with “This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms,” which is set against “the perpetual star” (CPP 85) of “death’s twilight kingdom” that represents the hope of some sort of salvation for the hollow men. As with the eye motif, this image of the star is used to link the various kingdom-states of consciousness in the poem and, as such, work with exponential importance to the poem as a whole.

We have seen how Eliot “as an American or a European” (ASG 41) superimposes images with strong Christian associations on his essentially Indic framework in the example above of the “final meeting” (CPP 84) with its associations with the Last Judgment. The same may be said about his use of the star symbol and its strong associations for Western readers with the birth of Christ. Ricks and McCue link its use in Section III with Jane Taylor’s well-known Christmas carol, “The Star” (Ricks 720); and in the pivotal Section IV, Eliot’s “perpetual star” is immediately followed by an immediately-recognizable image of the Virgin Mary as the virtuous “Multifoliate rose” (CPP 85) from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin (Ricks 721). This is to argue that Eliot’s technique
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is highly syncretic, collating Indic philosophy with Christian narrative and doctrine. This technique of imposing iconic Christian imagery on an essentially Indic system of thought, just like a tactful juggler with two precious jewels, is, for most readers, clearly going to obscure the Indic elements; but it is suggested that Eliot is doing this in a conscious manner—in fact, as an integral part of his allusive poetic technique.

Albeit that the image of the star is a focal symbol for Christians, we might simultaneously note that it is also closely connected with the scene of Buddha’s “solemn” enlightenment. A Buddhist legend has it that Gautama realized the true nature of man and the world when he was sitting meditating on a rock in the early morning, when the morning star, Venus, was fading away (Soejima 5). It would seem more than coincidence, then, that in Section III there is an uncannily similar stone image of bodhisattva, “receiving / The supplication of a dead man’s hand / Under the twinkle of a fading star” (CPP 84). Anyone who visits a Buddhist country can find such stone images, called kṣitigarbha in Sanskrit, standing with their hands against their breasts along the roadside, their palms joined in prayer. In Japan, for instance, these small statues are called jizo, and they are a common feature of the landscape. This suggests that the lines there: “Lips that would kiss / Form prayers to broken stone” (CPP 84) demand a Buddhist interpretation. Moreover, it is to suggest that, in Eliot, “Twinkle, twinkle, little star” can coexist with an allusion to Buddha’s enlightenment: that, as Eliot has directed us, “The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn” (SE 296).

Section III takes us back from the world of dreams of the previous section with its anxious projections about some final meeting, and out of the highly-charged symbolism and its language, back into the monosyllabic, barren, yet burning world of the state of solitary and hollow wakefulness of “our lost kingdoms.” Yagnavalkya explains this return like this: “That (person) having enjoyed himself in that sleep (dream), having moved about and seen both good and evil, hastens back again as he came, to the place from which he started, to be awake” (Müller 167). As in Section I, here in Section III hollow life is once again projected against “death’s other kingdom” (CPP 84); this time, “kingdom” is not capitalized, perhaps to reinforce a sensation of fading, or recession. The second stanza of Section III is of importance because it contains potent imagery relating to the world of physicality and physical desire, which, as we have noted, is characteristic of the lowest state of mind in Yagnavalkya.

Thus, the opening line of Section IV takes us from the physical world of the trembling lips of the previous section back into the eye and star imagery that symbolize enlightenment and hope, or salvation,
but only to emphasize their absence. We are still in “cactus land” (CPP 84). And the situation of it is deteriorating: “The twinkle of a fading star” has become “this valley of dying stars” (CPP 84); “our lost kingdoms” are finally given a name. The phrase places them in the lowest within the fourfold framework. The vision of it has degenerated to the extent that the hollow men “whisper together” (CPP 83), now “sightless” (CPP 85). Prayer has stopped and speech is avoided. It is the “last of meeting places” (CPP 85)—a black endgame, as it were, like the final state of “Mistah Kurtz” (CPP 81) to the “waking life of outward-moving consciousness, enjoying the seven outer gross elements” (Mascaró 83).

Then the following lines come:

. . . unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death’s twilight kingdom (CPP 85)

This “kingdom” is just linked with Yagnavalkya’s state of “deep sleep” and is described in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad as a state of “bliss” (samprasadā) (Müller 166). It is, however, the second highest state of consciousness. Juan Mascaró’s translation of it provides a more specific account of this kind of sleep. It is “the sleeping life of silent consciousness when a person has no desires and beholds no dreams” (Mascaró 83).

It seems significant at this moment to remember what we have detailed and repeated concerning the descriptions of the lowest state of mind, which is the main reality for Eliot’s hollow men, and that there is a colorful and partially detailed description of his “dream kingdom.” By contrast, the outline of “death’s twilight kingdom” is brief and delayed and, although the eye and star imagery is united, it is extremely distant and tentative from the viewpoint of those gathered by the humid river of Eliot’s hollow valley. Of “death’s other Kingdom,” we learn even less—merely that it is inhabited by “those with direct eyes.” It surely lies beyond the hollow imagination. In this way, Eliot creates a sense of perspective, with the higher states of consciousness receding beyond the grasp of his protagonists.

The word “unless” in the quotation above is pivotal, even if it is so fragile that it virtually sounds its own death knell. There is hope, certainly, but it is the sightless, speechlessly supplicating hope “Of empty men.” Both the meaning and the expression of it in the poem is simple, yet the reader may find passages such as the one above allusive almost to the point of obscurity. On the one hand, the poet suddenly introduces one of the supreme Christian symbols in the image of the “Multifoliate
rose,” and with it, associations of the kind of unconditional salvation that Jesus represents. Such interpretations will naturally fit in with the lines about the hopes of empty men. The “perpetual star” can be easily interpreted as a metaphor for Jesus as Light of the World.

But here again, we might detect a subtle allusion in this metaphor to Buddha’s enlightenment and its light. True, Buddhist salvation, as contained in Buddha’s last words, asks us to “Work out your salvation with diligence,” (CPP 411, 420–21) with “direct eyes” (83). Nevertheless, given the Indic philosophical system that clearly seems to inform “The Hollow Men,” an argument can be made for a syncretic interpretation here as well; for this is not an isolated incidence of Eliot superimposing Christian notions on Indic ones, including Buddha’s salvation and Yagnavalkya’s fourfold framework in the poem. Objections of inconsistency may be raised, but these can be countered by what the poet himself says about what makes a poet mature. There are numerous examples elsewhere in his work of Eliot’s use of this ‘composite’ technique; for instance, the superimposing of St. Augustan’s “O Lord Thou pluckest me out” on the Buddhist notion of “Burning burning burning” in “The Fire Sermon” (CPP 67). Indeed it is a prominent feature of Eliot’s creative talent that, when borrowing from “authors remote in time, or alien in language” (SE 296), he will set it in parallel with an image that has strong Western associations, as if to camouflage the “alien” source.

The last section (V) of the poem acts as a spiraling fragmented coda in which the “lost kingdoms” and the “Shadow” world in Eliot’s “twilight kingdom” of Section IV are further polarized. The former, written in italics in the poem, with its rounds of meaningless worldly routine and increasingly broken prayer, descends towards its deeply pessimistic, whimpering conclusion. The latter, written in a common style, is characterized by a sense of profound suspension in which we are repeatedly reminded of some great, descending “Shadow.” That Eliot intended the contrast to be profound is backed up by his advice to Michael Redgrave for a BBC reading:

Referring to section five of The Hollow Men, the first and the last quatrains should be spoken very rapidly, without punctuation in a flat monotonous voice, rather like children chanting a counting-out game. The intermediate part, on the other hand, should be spoken slowly although without too much expression, but more like the recitation of a litany. (qtd. in Ricks 721)

Ricks and McClue astutely cite Bradley, Bergson, and Valéry as possible sources for the lines “Between the idea / And the reality,” “Between the
idea... And the act,” and “Between the motion / And the act” (CPP 85), respectively (Ricks 723), though here again we can find close affinities with Nagarjuna’s Middle Way Theory as outlined in his Madhyamaka-Kārikā, and also with Eliot’s own interest in epistemology about which he says conclusively in his Knowledge and Experience; “This emphasis upon practice—upon the relativity and the instrumentality of knowledge—is what impels us toward the Absolute” (KE 169). This may happen altogether, if we put them in Yagnavalkya’s four states of consciousness, in this forth stage called the “deep sleep” state of mind:

In the state of sound sleep there is no object, neither gross nor subtle, and hence no subject; the subject-object duality is transcended and here the self is called ‘Prājña’ [supreme intellect or wisdom]. In sleep we have absence of pain. We have neither desires nor dreams. We have the shadow [italics mine] of the supreme bliss. It is called shadow because we do not enjoy positive bliss. Ignorance persists in its negative aspect of concealment in this state, although its power of projection is arrested. Ignorance and unconsciousness remain in this state and therefore a higher positive state is needed. (Sharma 11)

Problematic, therefore, is the identification of the source of the capitalized “Shadow” in the poem, which is of central importance to the appreciation of the poem as a whole. Many readers may tend to regard this “Shadow” to be an allusion (potentially ironic) to Psalm 23, verse 4—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou are with me”—which is frequently read at Christian funerals as part of the Service for the Burial of the Dead. The capitalized “Shadow” may also bring to mind the Holy Ghost, and associations of “Jesus Christ our Mediator and Redeemer” as contained in the collect, for example.

Valid as all these observations may be, there are many ways of interpreting the capitalized word “Shadow” in this section. Some persons take it in connection with Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and suggest that it is the shadow of Kurtz, in accordance with the epigraph on the poem’s title page, saying:

Kurtz himself, drawn to these rites, appears to Marlow as a “Shadow—that wandering and tormented thing”... we see that it is a shadow over all mankind: “the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.” (Southam 161–62)
Ricks and McCue suggest Ernest Dowson’s “Non sum quails eram bonae sub regno Cynarae” as a contender for its source (Ricks 723). And a Christian interpretation may well be the most natural one for the final section, in which case what we have already said about the Indic framework to the poem as a whole still stands, for we are learning to be careful of such simplistic diagnoses of Eliot’s work. Even if the capitalized “Shadow”—be it the shadow of the valley of death, or the mediating Holy Spirit—and the capitalized “Kingdom” from the Lord’s Prayer have overwhelmingly strong Christian associations, we have seen that this alone does not preclude the possibility of syncretic overlap. For, dark as the closing section appears, these fragments also allow Eliot to express a deeply suspended inner state of mind, captured in the repetition of the term “between.” And, as we have seen in the pivotal use of the word “unless” in Section IV, even if language and prayer are seen to be breaking down, the poet is aware of the faint possibility of some form of salvation for those entangled in the delusive worlds of their “lost kingdoms” or “death’s dream kingdom”—the faintest of lights flickering in the dark land. We quote again: “We have the shadow [italics mine] of the supreme bliss. It is called shadow because we do not enjoy positive bliss.”

If we take the italicized lines in this section to refer to the “lost kingdoms,” it is possible to interpret the lines in the standard type as reflecting the state of consciousness that Yagnavalkya delineates as “deep sleep,” which is Eliot’s “twilight kingdom.” In this way, it is possible to invest Eliot’s capitalized “Shadow” in the poem as possessing potentially positive connotations, be it the mediating Holy Spirit or the shadow we find in this description of the state of “sound sleep,” which Chandradhar Sharma explains in his Indian Philosophy (cited above).

Those who achieve this level of consciousness in “death’s twilight kingdom” or the state of sound sleep in Yagnavalkya’s four state of mind have not yet achieved true enlightenment, they perceive only a “Shadow” of that supreme bliss. It is therefore described as a “shadow” because a degree of ignorance still persists, preventing the enjoyment of positive bliss. It is the same spiritual condition as the one that Eliot expressed in these lines from “East Coker”: “I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you / Which shall be the darkness of God” (CPP 180), to which Eliot adds that the waiting should be “without hope” (CPP 180). The capitalized “Shadow” in Section V can be thus seen as something akin to “the darkness of God.” And we should note that the quote from “East Coker” exhibits a further affinity to “The Hollow Men” in that both poems link notions of divine darkness, or “Shadow,” to notions of hope. This is to suggest that Section V, bleak as it is, may nevertheless retain an element of hope, whether we take an Indic, Christian, or compound viewpoint.
The last of our observations on the poem, “The Hollow Men,” is about Eliot’s choice of the word “hollow” for the title of the poem, which may contain one final, exquisite twist. Ricks and McCue quote the poet himself refuting that Ernest Dowson is the source of the title, and pointing his readers instead towards William Morris’s “The Hollow Land” and Kipling’s “The Broken Men,” stating that he “combined the two” (Ricks 715). But if we take into account the deep and sweeping influence of Indic thought on the poem, we might note that the Buddhist concept of Nirvana can be a hidden source for the poem’s title. The state of Nirvana embraces the metaphysical notion of śūnyatā, which means “emptiness,” or the total negation of all independent being, both physical and metaphysical, including selfish human desires. As such, it is often translated as “nothing,” “empty,” or “hollow.” Eliot was familiar with this line of thought and the correlation between Nirvana and śūnyatā from his doctoral days at Harvard, when he studied Buddhism under the guidance of the Japanese scholar, Masaharu Anesaki. There is a suspected double-entendre in the poem, then, behind the choice of label Eliot makes to describe his vision of modern man: on the one hand, the pejorative meaning that the term “hollow” normally carries; and on the other, an ironic satirization of his subject—a subject that potentially includes the poet himself, contrasting with the genuine “hollowness” in Nirvana. We remember what he writes in Section I, saying to “those who have crossed / With direct eyes, to death’s other Kingdom”: “Remember us—if at all—not as lost / Violent souls, but only / As the hollow men” (CPP 83) This supreme technique of briefly touching upon and then immediately escaping from and covering over the traces of his sources is a typical feature of Eliot’s creative sensibility. In this way, the very title of the poem, “The Hollow Men” may carry ironic overtones.

Clearly, woven into the very fabric of “The Hollow Men” are the four states of consciousness discussed by Nagarjuna in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and the Buddhist conception of Nirvana. The poem thus has an elaborately concealed structure that would appear to be employing non-Western, Indic material on a wide scale. As such, it would be (and has been) easy for readers to focus upon the more familiar Western elements, thus missing the deep import of these “alien” elements, which the poet learned in his youth.

This would be true not only of the poem presently under consideration, but, we can say, of Eliot’s work as a whole. For example, the introduction of Krishna in “The Dry Salvages” (CPP 187) is an obvious instance of the poet’s technique of borrowing “from authors remote in time, or alien in language” (SE 296). Yet in the case of the Buddhist references in “The Fire Sermon” (CPP 67), the final phrase “Shantih, shanthih, shantih” (CPP 75) in The Waste Land, and the mutual relation
of these to the Sanskrit directives in “What the Thunder Said” (CPP 72), the passing nods we so often pay to these Indic allusions reflect a, so to speak, superficial method of observation that fails to recognize their true and deep implications.

What we have observed of “The Hollow Men” is, thus, in itself merely the visible top of an immense and greatly submerged iceberg of Eliot’s syncretizing poetic technique as a mature, skilled poet. In fact, we may say that almost all of Eliot’s masterpieces, be it “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” “Portrait of a Lady,” “Gerontion,” or even the overtly Christian poem, “Ash Wednesday”⁴—to say nothing of The Waste Land and Four Quartets—rely extensively on materials the poet studied during his Harvard days. He adroitly deployed this knowledge thereafter, and throughout his entire literary career—in the poetry, in his doctoral dissertation, and even in the seminal essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” On this point, as suggested above, even Eliot’s plays are not exceptions.⁸ By weaving Yagnavalkya’s four states of mind as set forth in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad into the text of “The Hollow Men” and juxtaposing these states with his four kingdoms, Eliot merely delivers yet another example of his syncretism as a poet matured in technique and sensibility.

Notes
1. The term “Indic thought” is used here in a broad sense, which includes the two most prominent strains, Hinduism and Buddhism, both of which have a philosophic-religious character. They have their own and mutual histories; the principal difference between them lies, roughly speaking, in Hinduism’s formulation “Atman = Brahm” (in which the soul, atman, participates in and is equivalent to the fundamental ground of being, Brahm), versus Buddhism’s formulation “Anatman-Amitayus” (no soul persisting through time). Within each philosophy there are many schools based on greater or lesser emphases on idealistic doctrine. In this paper, the term “Buddhism” is used when it is necessary to particularize its doctrine. See Hauck 40–41. Sanskrit words in this paper are written with diacritical marks, such as “śūnyatā”; in cases of citation, the words are written as they appear in the original text, such as “shunyata”; and in the case of words commonly used in English, such as “Nirvana,” they are written in the English style.

2. See Whiteside; Perl and Tuck 158; and Kearns, T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions.

3. As to this study of Eliot, Cleo McNelly Kearns writes, “In a review of a history of Indic thought, for instance, Eliot wrote of what seems, in the Buddhist or Buddhist-influenced commentaries on Patañjali’s Yoga-system, ‘an arbitrary and fatiguing system of classifications’” (Kearns, “T. S. Eliot” 131).

4. See Behr 7.

6. As to Eliot’s actions of making poems in his early years, see T. S. Eliot: *Inventions of the March Hare—Poems 1909–1917*, edited by Cristopher Ricks.

7. Cleo McNelly Kearns expresses it as “the point of no return” in her “T. S. Eliot, Buddhism, and the Point of No Return.”

8. We pick up Southam’s comment on “The Hollow Men” as one example of very common views, not only of students, but also of readers who tend to see that “its language and imagery are disarmingly simple” at a glance. Our observation has it the other way round.

9. T. S. Eliot says, “It is best, I think, to keep in mind not the philosophy of a poet . . . but the philosophy of what can be called a philosophical poem. There are three obvious examples: the *Bhagavadgita*, *De Rerum Nature* of Loucretius, and the *Divine Comedy* of Dante” (OPP 224).

10. Yagnavalkya in the *Upanishad* is a preacher, just like Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, who appears in “The Dry Salvages” in *Four Quartets* (CPP 187).

11. In Buddhism, *Amitāyus*, the “Supreme Being,” has another phase, called *Amitābha*. The former implies “Infinite Life” and the latter, “Infinite Light.” These two are united in essence in the form of two in one. See *Dictionary of Buddhism* 13.

12. See Juan Mascaro’s explanations of the four states of mind in the *Upanishads* in his “Introduction” to his edition of *The Bhagavad Gita* (15).

13. See our chart, shown above.

14. Eliot, in his “Goethe as the Sage,” says, “It seems to me that what I do, when I approach a great poem as the Holy Song of the Indian epic is not only. . . to suspend my disbelief, but to try to put myself in the position of a believer. But this is only one of the two movements of my critical activity: the second movement is to detach myself again and to regard the poem from outside the belief. If the poem is remote from my own belief, then the effort of which I am the more conscious is the effort of identification” (OPP 225).

15. The *Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary* writes of the *Mādhyamaka* or *Mādhyamika* school that it is “one of the two major Māhayāna schools in India, founded by Nāgārjuna. It is based on the *Prajñā-pāramitā-sūtras* and the wrings of Nāgārjuna. This school holds that by realizing the doctrine of the independence of all phenomena, one may eliminate all illusions and perceive the ultimate teachings of Buddha—the middle way (chūdō) which avoids the extremes of existence and non-existence” (36). As for Nagarjuna, Cleo Kearns remarks on the evident “triangulation between Nagarjuna, Eliot, and Bradley” (*EIT* 18). Also see Fatone and Inada. Moreover, we note that the name of Nagarjuna appears on the top page of Eliot’s “Notes on the Eastern Philosophy.”

16. As to this kind of mind control, it would be better to recall Eliot’s study of the tenets in *The Yoga System of Patañjali* and Eliot’s descriptions of “sit still” (CPP 90, 98), which are, more or less, related to Zen Buddhism, which is
significant suggested as “Koans” in Kearns’s “T. S. Eliot, Buddhism, and the Point of No Return.” (134) and “the ten thousand things return to the one in shunyata” by Hauck (43), respectively.

17. The passage “iha Śāriputra rūpaṃ śūnyatā śūnyataiva rūpaṃ rūpān na prthak śūnyatā śūnyatāyā na prthag rūpaṃ yadrūpaṃ sā śūnyatā yā śūnyatā tad rūpam evam eva vedanā-samjñā-saṃskāra-vijñānāni” (Taishou 111) is translated into English in the section entitled “The Dialectics of Emptiness,” the first stage in Edward Conze’s translation of The Heart Sutra (162–63): “Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form.” As for “śūnyatā,” Cleo Kearns, in “T. S. Eliot, Buddhism, and the Point of No Return.” calls “shunyata, or divine emptiness,” an “experience which for many lies at the very heart of Buddhism,” and suggests consulting her book, T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions, p. 139–40, 158. (134–35).

18. For a similar analysis of these poems and plays, see Murata, T. S. Eliot and Indo-Buddhism 162–193 and 232–241; also find his comments on Eliot’s Knowledge and Experience (47–105) and “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (105–43).

Works Cited


**About the Author**

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The Passages of Jacques Derrida: Between Philosophy and Biography

Joseph G. Kronick


At a conference on biography and philosophy held at New York University in 1996, Derrida recalled how “traditional philosophy excludes biography” and told the anecdote of Heidegger’s beginning a seminar on Aristotle by asking, “What was Aristotle’s life?” Well, the answer lay in a single sentence: ‘He was born, he thought, he died.’ And all the rest is pure anecdote” (qtd. in Peeters 1). Benoît Peeters begins his fine biography of Derrida with this story, but he balances it with a passage from a late interview in which Derrida insists he is one of the few “who have constantly drawn attention to this: you must (and you must do it well) put philosophers’ biographies back in the picture” (qtd. in Peeters 1). In several works, beginning with “Envois” in The Post Card and culminating in a series of texts from the 1990s—“Circumfesion,” Monolingualism of the Other, Memoirs of the Blind, and Counterpath—Derrida put his life into the picture. But it is one thing for philosophers to be autobiographical and another for their commentators to put biography back in the picture. Although the autobiographical must be distinguished from the biographical—perhaps, as Geoffrey Bennington suggests, because autobiography enacts a fiction of immortality whereas biography, and here Peeters agrees, demands the death of the subject—both constitute a gathering, a drive towards totalization from which Derrida, according to his own testimony, was not immune. The question before us is whether Derrida’s description of autobiography is applicable to biography: autobiography is a gathering not only of “what happens”—in other words, the unique event whose trace one would like
to keep alive”—but also of what “fails to happen” but which “should happen, and is thus a ‘story’ in which the event already crosses within itself the archive of the ‘real’ and the archive of ‘fiction.’” The autobiographical desire for everything includes the desire for what is not (his) life. The very possibility of gathering up everything that happens, if it is to be more than a catalogue of empirical facts and be “properly” autobiographical means that it must include that which goes beyond one’s life, transcendence, an outside oneself that is the impossible possibility of one’s own experience of oneself. This means that my life is never simply my own or proper to me and autobiography is the story of this impropriety. As empirico-genetic accounts of the life and thought of Derrida, Peeters and Baring have put biography “back in the picture” and in so doing they illuminate Derrida’s autobiographical desire, but what they cannot do is deconstruct Derrida. I do not mean to imply they fall short of Derrida’s rigor but rather they demonstrate the proximity of deconstruction to biography and history when they are, as in these cases, done well.

Two remarks are necessary here. First, in speaking of what “fails to happen,” Derrida alludes to Heidegger’s Being and Time and the problem of grasping Dasein as a whole. If, as Heidegger writes, “the essence of Dasein lies in its existence,” how can it be grasped as a whole if it “has existence as its mode of being. . . ?” Paola Marrati points out, “Insofar as it exists, Dasein is never a whole. Insofar as it exists, Dasein has not yet done with its possibilities.” But whereas for Heidegger Dasein’s own most possibility, being-towards-death, is what remains outstanding, Derrida speaks of the “desire that what does not happen should happen” (35), a possibility that is past, a trace to be inscribed in the archive. In Being and Time, Dasein’s relation to death is the foundation of individuation. Derrida’s relation to what does not happen describes the relation to the other that attaches itself to his life, or “what happens.” This what-does-not-happen is not a possibility awaiting the individual, as death awaits Dasein as its own most possibility; instead, insofar as what does not happen belongs to what happens, it is a non-event, a passivity, that is there before the origin, before what happens. This necessary “what-does-not-happen” prevents the reduction of the life to its empirical events and, at the same time, makes any atemporal totalization impossible. Yet it maintains the transcendental in the form of alterity, an otherness that contaminates the origin. Therefore, we can say that autobiography is “a ‘story’ in which the event already crosses within itself the archive of the ‘real’ [we can say the ‘empirical’ or even the ‘mundane’]” and the archive of ‘fiction’ [or ideality]” (Acts 35). This means that autobiography names the contamination of real and ideal,
active and passive, life and death (which is why Derrida could refer to his work “as an autobiothanatoheterographical opus” [Peeters 3]).

Secondly, what Derrida says here about autobiography is very close to a problem that Husserl addresses in his *Cartesian Meditations*. Paul Ricoeur explains, phenomenology “is an exercise of intuiting applied to what Kant calls merely the conditions of possibility” (91). For Kant, “there is no thematized intuiting of the transcendental.” (Intuitions are singular and immediate and concerned only with representation. The transcendental does not obtain to objects or representations.) If phenomenology is to avoid becoming a transcendental empiricism, which would be something like the intuiting of the in-itself of the world, the transcendental reduction, the suspense of belief in an independent world, must entail the eidetic reduction, “which goes from fact to essence” (Ricoeur 91), the moment consciousness is a field for experience. In other words, the “I think” in Husserl is neither a thing, like Descartes’s cogito, nor an empty form as in Kant, but is grasped “as an a priori possibility,” or grasped in its essence: “This is why it brings the ‘fiction’ into play, causes the datum of consciousness to vary imaginatively, and develops experience in the mode of ‘as if’” (91). This element of “fiction” does not mean that what we experience is an illusion but that transcendental experience applies to *irréel* as well as real things, that is, to the ideal as well as the factual; otherwise, consciousness would either be transcendental, not of this world and lived experience or merely an empirical thing.

What happens or what fails to happen is Derrida’s version of Husserl’s solution to the problem of a transcendental empiricism, but whereas Husserl aimed to set out how structures of subjectivity may be intuited, Derrida demonstrates how the transcendental is united to the mundane. This is the aporia of the origin: an origin must always be transcendental or non-mundane or “it would not be an origin,” but intuition is always finite and, therefore, mundane. Beginning with his earliest work on Husserl, Derrida investigates the aporia of genesis: the contamination of active genesis, the constituting act, with passive genesis, the constituted or already given, which he will come to call the “trace.” Something is “already there” before active genesis, before the origin. If the constituted is a “pre-existential foundation” for the “transcendental activity’s own becoming,” then we can say that the idea of one’s becoming what one is, the very idea of autobiography, entails a secret, something that is not available to consciousness; it can never be present or be available for presentation.

My point is that the secret serves very much like Husserl’s “fiction,” a peculiar form of the transcendental that, rather than being the condition for the possibility of intuiting reality or what is, is the impossible
possibility, a freeing of facts from their empirical boundedness, in order that they be available to sense. This is the condition determined by differance and iterability. This is also why from the beginning of his career to the end he professed a taste for literature and its capacity to resist the reduction “of existence to the concept or the system,” that is, its capacity to represent the singularity of existence. As we will see, autobiography situates itself between event and archive, or between literature and philosophy and, even more significantly, it “names” the deconstructive project of thinking together singularity and generality. The opposition, which is also not an opposition, can be phrased in different ways. In his 1954 dissertation, The Problem of Genesis in the Philosophy of Husserl, Derrida would cast it as the dialectical and non-dialectical. In an interview from 1991, he does so in terms of literature and philosophy (in speaking of his interest in the trace, “that which puts philosophy into motion and thereby refuses itself to philosophy,” he offers “autobiography” as an “old name” for the “new bodies of writing” promised by the trace). In each instance, what is at issue is the relation between the non-of heterogeneity and totalization. This non- (as in non-dialectical or non-event or non-oppositional) is a weak force, something that resists the movement of gathering or totalization and yet makes such a drive or movement possible. Elsewhere, he calls it the “secret,” the “non-thematizable, non-objectifiable, non-sharable” that is the condition of communication, objectification, thematization.

The singularity of Derrida’s neologisms and style has obscured for many readers the significance of his early studies on Husserl for all his subsequent work. For the sake of brevity, we can say that the starting point of deconstruction is Husserl’s “principle of principles”: “everything originarily (so to speak, in its ‘personal’ actuality) offered to us in ‘intuition’ is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.” If we keep in mind that for Husserl, intuitive acts are distinguished from conceptions because the former are perceptual presentations while the latter belong to the realm of significations, we can see why Derrida can insist that “we never leave the present” without contradicting his argument that the present is constituted/contaminated by differance. As Leonard Lawlor explains in his superb study Derrida and Husserl, “Derrida never contests the founding validity of presence; there can be no foundation without presence. Yet there is a non-foundation below it, the non-Greek non-foundation.” Derrida, according to Lawlor, derives his concept of differance from Husserl’s intentionality: “like intentionality, differance consists in an intending to; it is defined by the dative relation.” The Husserlian noema, the intentional object, is at once outside and other than consciousness, and as irréel, “a non-real
thing,” it is ideal and therefore “identical to consciousness, inside of, and the same as consciousness.” This double property of the noema, “inside and outside consciousness, immanent and transcendent, mundane and extra-mundane,” means that “[i]t is at once related to acts of consciousness and iterable beyond them; it is in the passage between these poles.” Consequently, “it always implies a relation to others; it always implies transcendental intersubjectivity. This relation to others means that whenever I intend something, it includes the possibility of absence or non-presence.”

Lawlor demonstrates that Derrida’s starting point in philosophy is experience and he never abandons the phenomenological rigor that “consists in limiting claims with experience . . . with the very experience of the non-Greek non-presence.” This means that our very ability to distinguish mundane and extra-mundane rests on this notion of passage, this difference, which is nothing, that lies between what Derrida elsewhere calls phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology, that is, between the singularity of experience and the absolute that permits this singularity to be iterable through all its manifestations. Situated between singularity and essence is life/memory, “the locus in which the question of the signature, psychology and intellectual autobiography is posed: Who thinks? Who signs? What do we make of singularity in this experience of thought? And what do we make of the relation between life, death and psyche?” The opening of the Derrida archive and the appearance of Peeters’s biography and Edward Baring’s The Young Derrida allow us to take up these questions and follow them throughout the corpus that is at once the body of Derrida’s work and the life.

Peeters and Baring make unprecedented use of the Derrida archives in Irvine, California and at the Institut Mémoires de l’Édition Contemporaine in Caen, France. Not only did Derrida leave behind drafts and manuscripts of his considerable oeuvre, he saved everything: correspondence, student essays dating back to his years in Algiers, diaries, unpublished interviews and lectures, his seminars (which, like Heidegger, he wrote for presentation) and all the papers and notes related to his research, teaching, and publications. Both Peeters and Baring employ this material to trace Derrida’s intellectual development, but Baring’s historical study is more concerned with the intellectual milieu in which Derrida developed deconstruction than with the personal makeup of the man. Moreover, they are works in two genres that, whatever Derrida’s own interest in them might be, have not been much represented in the vast secondary literature on Derrida: biography and history.
Both authors address those commentators on Derrida who cast doubt on the possibility of doing justice to Derrida in either genre. Peeters’s biography follows the norms of the genre: it focuses on the life of the man. He does not attempt to write “an intellectual biography,” a “label [he finds] irritating for several reasons; mainly the exclusions it seems to involve: childhood, family, love, material life” (Peeters 3). Peeters tells “the story of an individual, a Jewish boy from Algiers, excluded from school at the age of twelve, who became the French philosopher whose works have been the most widely translated throughout the world; the story of a fragile and tormented man who, to the end of his life, continued to see himself as ‘rejected’ by the French university system” (Peeters 3). His expulsion along with most other Jewish students from the Lycée Ben Aknoun in 1942 by the Vichy authorities provides what might be called the lynchpin of Peeters’s narrative. The expulsion would be associated with his arrest in Prague in 1982, as “if his entire life had been ‘framed by two bars, two heavy, metal interdictions’: ‘Whether they expelled me from school or threw me into prison, I always believed the other must have good reasons to accuse me’” (341). His expulsion from the lycée did not lead to a greater sense of community with other Jews. He said the time spent at the school formed by Jewish professors after their dismissal by the French government “rendered [him] inapt for ‘communitarian’ experience, incapable of enjoying any kind of membership in a group” (qtd. in Peeters 21). His Jewish and Algerian origins meant that he would not be fully accepted in France when he came to study philosophy. With care and insight, Peeters offers a portrait of Derrida as an outsider, which may come as a surprise to American readers who think of him in terms of his fame; however, he never held a university professorship in France, teaching in grand écoles instead, and he was humiliated by the successful effort to block his appointment to succeed Paul Ricoeur at Nanterre, which his former mentor desired, and by his failure to be elected to the Collège de France, despite the efforts of Pierre Bourdieu and Yves Bonnefoy. His experiences, as much as his philosophy, informed his views on the European Union and immigration and the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians (Peeters attributes Derrida’s preference for a bi- or multi-national state to his earlier desire for a French-Muslim Algeria that would be rid of any vestiges of colonialism, “a solution that would allow the French Algerians to continue to live in that country” while respecting the Algerian desire for independence [see Peeters 117–18, 123]).

Although Peeters does not offer extensive readings of Derrida’s philosophy, he provides a wealth of material substantiating Derrida’s claim that “philosophy, or academic philosophy at any rate, for me has always been at the service of this autobiographical design of memory”: “the
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wild desire to preserve everything, to gather everything together in its idiom”.

particularly important are the excerpts from letters and the interviews he conducted. He corrects some misapprehensions, among them that Foucault broke with Derrida over the lecture “Cogito and Madness.” Foucault thanked Derrida for the analysis: “Only the blind will find your critique severe” (Peeters 132). It was not until Gérard Granel reviewed three books by Derrida in 1967 and claimed that Derrida’s reading of the History of Madness exposed the inadequacies of Foucault’s archaeology that Foucault attacked his former student (Peeters 182). Peeters reveals hitherto unknown events in Derrida’s life, such as the depression he suffered during his year teaching in Le Mans, and the insecurities and anxiety that plagued him through much of his life. Particularly revealing is the correspondence with his friend from his days at Louis-le-Grand and the École Normale Superieur (ENS), Michel Monory, to whom Derrida confessed in 1956, while suffering from angina and anxiety as he prepared for his exams, the agrégation, “‘I’m no good for anything except taking the world apart [défaire] and putting it together again [et refaire] (and I manage the latter less and less frequently’” (Peeters 77). Many readers will see in this an anticipation of deconstruction, but it is more properly seen as a confession of someone being trained in philosophical analysis. This abiding insecurity may explain Derrida’s habit of seeking out mentors who would support him and offer approval. Some of these figures, like the literary critic Gabriel Bounoure, the novelist Henry Bauchau, and the philosopher and writer Roger Laporte are little known to English and American readers. And it may come as surprise that more familiar figures, like Louis Althusser and Ricoeur, whose philosophies differed from Derrida’s, played important roles in his life, particularly Althusser who was his caiman (in ENS argot one who is in charge of preparing students for the agrégation) and later his colleague. His friendships with Maurice Blanchot, Emmanuel Levinas, and Paul de Man, are well known, although it was new to this reader that Jean Genêt was among his close friends. No correspondence between Derrida and Hélène Cixous and Sarah Kofman is included. The letters quoted reveal Derrida’s warmth and concern for others, as well as a certain deference to elders like Levinas and Ricouer, and also his need for intimacy and trust.

Peeters has, he says, written “not so much a Derridean biography as a biography of Derrida” and we should be thankful for that. As Derrida’s own comments on biography reveal, he was far from adverse to the genre, despite its being, in the words of Geoffrey Bennington, “one of the last . . . to be affected by deconstruction.” If biography is one of the last, then history must be right behind it as one of the genres most resistant to deconstruction. We can borrow a phrase from Peeters and say
Baring has written an historical study of Derrida and not a Derridean history. And like Peeters, he, too, feels the need to defend his approach. Responding to the inevitable objection that there is no “unified field called ‘French Theory,’” he writes, “what seems philosophically unsophisticated can be historically plausible. The search for philosophical ties is warranted by the thick and dense historical connections that recast the manifold debates not as fundamental differences but as the passionate confrontations of the philosophically and socially proximate” (Baring 1–2). Baring’s point is important. Ever since the 1966 Johns Hopkins conference on “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man,” Derrida has been perceived as a kind of renegade, the one who announced the end of structuralism at a conference devoted to it. Baring reveals, however, just how much Derrida’s most notable debates, those with Foucault, Levi-Strauss, and Lacan, mark his proximity to his philosophical milieu, above all the École Normale. Baring mines the Derrida archive to chart the development of his thought and to contextualize his work. As a result, he makes two claims that will demand the attention of readers of Derrida: the first “is that Derrida’s thought can be understood within the context of French Christian philosophy” (5). The second is that deconstruction developed as a pedagogical answer to the requirements of the agrégation: it provided a model of reading that answered the conflicting demands that students demonstrate a knowledge of the history of philosophy together with original philosophical thought (Baring 256). I find Baring is on firmer grounds with the first of his claims, and while I would by no means dismiss the latter, it fails to take into account how much Derrida’s deconstruction is less a method of reading than a philosophical engagement with problems opened by Husserl.

Baring argues that Derrida participated “in virtually every important philosophical movement in postwar France. When existentialism was the order of the day at the close of the Second World War, Derrida aligned himself . . . not without some reserve—with Sartre. Then . . . . when existentialism had run its course, he embraced the ‘scholasticism’ of the period, the careful rereading of Husserl and Heidegger that marked a collective exorcizing of Sartre from the French academic scene.” And when Structuralism made itself felt, “[i]t was a vehicle that carried Derrida’s ideas to the broadest possible audience and allowed him to contribute to debates about Marxism, psychoanalysis, and ethnology” (Baring 2). The reader may come away thinking that Derrida either went with whatever philosophical movement dominated the day or that he lacked core philosophical principles, but such a reading would be unfair to Baring, let alone Derrida. Quoting from Derrida’s student essays and the written responses from his teachers at the lycée he at-
tended in Algiers and then at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris, Baring demonstrates the hold of Sartre upon Derrida, although this does not mean Sartre escaped Derrida’s criticism (Baring 50). In drawing attention to the Christian sources for the young Derrida’s thoughts—most prominent among them were Simone Weil, Gabriel Marcel, and René le Senne—Baring is careful to warn that drawing upon such thinkers “does not make his philosophy doctrinally ‘Christian,’ and it in no way implies that Derrida accepted Christian doctrines personally; we should beware of mistaking philosophical genealogy for religious identity” (Baring 6–7). What is unmistakable is Derrida’s emphasis on morality and his conviction that “the necessary limitations of human knowledge should lead us to recognize what exceeds it: belief” (Baring 61). While Baring does not comment in any detail upon Derrida’s later philosophy and does not read the early writings for their anticipation of his mature thought, he provides much evidence that Derrida’s so-called later turn to religion and ethics was not a shift in interests but a renewal, in a different form, of his early beliefs in human limitation, his rejection of nihilism, and his efforts to reaffirm “transcendent Value” without endorsing either Sartrean or Heideggerean ontology (Baring 79).

Baring’s study is remarkable for the documentary evidence he so carefully employs in placing Derrida’s thought within the context of post-war France. The fruit of this historical research comes in the analyses of Derrida’s student thesis, his Mémoire, and key works leading up to Of Grammatology. In the case of the former, Baring argues that in changing the title from “Studies on the Notion of Genesis in Husserl” to “The Problem of Genesis,” Derrida reflects Gabriel Marcel’s concept of problem as a mystery beyond which intellectual inquiry cannot go (Baring 114). In his account of the mysterious in Marcel, Baring says the problem exists in conjunction with the desire to go “beyond the heterogeneous multiplicity of experience [to] the possibility of higher unity.” Therefore, the obstacle of the mystery serves as a spur to understand further (Baring 66). However, contrary to Baring’s suggestion “that the mysterious was both the condition of the possibility and the condition of the impossibility of science” (115), the original thought of the mystery stays within a strand of Christianity that is quite different from Derrida’s later formulation of the impossible conditions of possibility. Whereas the former rests upon the desire for an ultimate transcendent value, God, the search for conditions of possibility has a philosophical lineage that is most notably descended from Kant’s critiques and Heidegger’s ontology. Derrida does not, however, simply continue this search for a more original “origin” for what is, as his concept of impossible conditions of possibility suggests. These conditions refer to what Lawlor calls a “non-Greek” foundation beneath the Greek foundation or
what can also be described as the other that inhabits and contaminates conditions of possibility. As Rodolphe Gasché remarks, the “infrastructural laws” (“trace,” *différance*, “mark”) “establish . . . that any ideality, identity, or generality, hinges on a prior doubling, pointing away from (self), and referral to an Other—in other words, on a prior singularization.”

The Other is not without connection to the mysterious but it would be more accurate to say that Derrida’s early attraction to the mysterious underwent a transformation as he rigorously pursued, first, the problem of genesis in Husserl, then the problem of origins, and ultimately, the problem of signification. In this development, he demonstrated something of the quality he praised in Husserl: “The admirable thing with this philosopher is that faced with all these apparently insurmountable difficulties [here he is referring to “access to an *alter ego*”], he never gives up or resigns himself to it; he tries to adjust his analyses scrupulously, maintaining his axiomatics and methodology for the longest possible time. . . . What we have there is a respectable example of philosophical responsibility.”

But rather than maintain axiomatics, Derrida adhered to his early insight expressed in the term *difference* and the implications that followed from it, which meant a vigilance in questioning all axiomatics.

Baring’s work is focused on the historical and institutional context of Derrida’s thought. Therefore, he places *The Problem of Genesis* within the context of Husserl studies and, above all, Tran-Duc-Thao’s Marxist appropriation of Husserl and Jean Cavaillès’s formal dialectic as correctives to Husserl’s subjectivism. Like Lawlor, Baring argues that Derrida’s dialectic addresses the problem of genesis in Husserl’s attempt to account for the passage between passive experience and constituting sense or the empirical and ideal. Contrary to Tran-Duc-Thao’s materialist explanation of the genesis of consciousness, “Derrida’s dialectic was the meeting and mutual implication of activity and passivity, the transcendental subject and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, philosophy and history” (133). This focus on context leads Baring to confine his perspective to what Derrida achieved within contemporary philosophical debates rather than how his engagement with his contemporaries led to his mature philosophy. Lawlor, on the other hand, is concerned with the development of Derrida’s philosophy and how these early works lay the grounds for deconstruction. Consequently, he is more attentive to Derrida’s development and gives more credit to Derrida’s insight that the reversibility between passive and active synthesis means “that Husserl’s most basic descriptions of constitution flounder on something ‘already constituted.’” The “‘always already there,’” he argues, “will become for Derrida the trace.” The two readings do not contradict one another, and one should keep in mind that Baring writes as a histo-
rian, not a philosopher (although he is quite at home with philosophy). Nevertheless, the issue raised goes beyond history versus philosophy to what the genres might be able to tell us about the question of singularity, of “Who signs?”

The social and institutional contexts of Derrida’s thought receive their fullest treatment to date. Furthermore, Baring gives a fine account of Derrida’s place in the debates surrounding Marxism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology. He gives a particularly interesting account of Derrida’s intervention in the debate between French psychoanalysts over Freud’s conflicting topographical and economic models for the difference between the conscious and unconscious. Students of Lacan insisted that the unconscious followed syntactical laws independent of organic drives, whereas more traditional psychoanalysts sought to retain a place for biological drives, a view that was defended by André Green (208–09). Derrida sided with Green’s argument that “a phonocentric model . . . neglected pulsional energy,” but he departed from Green’s model that supplemented the linguistic view by including biological elements of the drive (212). Length does not permit me to summarize the debate, but Baring’s suggestion that Derrida’s neologism “difference” developed as “an alternative to Lacan’s objet (a) and was indebted to Green adds to our picture of Derrida’s complex relation to Lacan (219).

The book is invaluable and should spur further research in the Derrida archives. And while I, for one, am glad that neither Baring nor Peeters attempts to write a Derridean history or biography, whatever that might be, the question remains whether such genres in themselves can answer Derrida’s call for “a new analysis of the proper name and the signature.” While both works avoid reducing the life of the philosopher to “a corpus of empirical accidents that leaves both a name and a signature outside a system which would itself be offered up to an immanent philosophical reading,” they do not explicitly question “the dynamis of that borderline between the ‘work’ and the ‘life,’ the system and the subject of the system,” although their archival work brings to light much that questions this borderline. Derrida proposes that this dynamis “is neither active nor passive, neither outside nor inside. It is most especially not a thin line, an invisible or indivisible trait lying between the enclosure of philosophemes, on the one hand, and the life of an author already identifiable behind the name, on the other. This divisible borderline traverses two ‘bodies,’ the corpus and the body, in accordance with laws that we are only beginning to catch sight of.”

I want to follow up on this notion of a dynamis or borderline traversing two bodies, the corpus and the body. On the one hand, this dynamis calls into question traditional treatments of the life and work—the life is something other
than a source for the work. It will not do to say to understand the works one must understand the life, a notion that still plagues most biographies. More importantly, to question the borderline asks us to think the relation between the two bodies as “contaminated” by one another. To address this notion of contamination we must, therefore, return to Derrida’s early work on Husserl and the problem of genesis.

The importance of the problem of genesis lies, as Paola Marrati proposes, in Husserl’s attempt “to think the autonomy of sense and truth and their birth in time[.]” How is it possible to account for the absolute origin of sense? As an ideality it is not dependent on something preceding it, and its temporal character as becoming makes it intraworldly and dependent upon the past. For Derrida, says Marrati, the problem of genesis is defined by Husserl’s rejection of a Kantian formalism that separates history and the transcendental. If genesis is to be a radical origin, it must be transcendental, but if the transcendental is not to remain formal, then it has to take on a passive synthesis: something must be given beforehand; a real genesis is entangled in the transcendental. We can sum up the problem Husserl confronts as that of the historicity of sense. As Lawlor and Marrati demonstrate—or rather, as they demonstrate that Derrida demonstrates—Husserl is unable to maintain the separation between an ideal genesis and the already constituted. For Husserl, “[R]espect for originary lived experience requires that the transcendental be envisaged as the constituting origin of experience; if not, it becomes logical and formal and ‘no longer a constituting source but the constituted product of experience.’”

Husserl’s efforts to construct a transcendental ego that rejects both Kantian formalism (the I is a form accompanying experience) and empiricism rest upon the irreducibility of temporal experience. However, the “inclusion of retention implies that the constituting is always preceded by a constituted” since retention is a constitutive part of the present. This presupposes that, as Lawlor says, “intentionality is already actual; supposedly original, consciousness is already invested with a sense; supposedly sense is already there. The reduction, therefore for Derrida, cannot capture, within temporal lived experience, the absolute constituting source: genesis.”

This problem is taken up again by Derrida in his introduction to Husserl’s The Origin of Geometry and yet again in Voice and Phenomenon, each time with an increasing depth as he comes to determine the “origin” as différance. What must be recognized is that in doing so Derrida remains faithful to the Husserlian principle of principles, experience. In the introduction, he establishes “that phenomenology, the metaphysics of presence in the form of ideality, is also a philosophy of life” precisely because as “the mastery of presence in repetition,” ideality
excludes death “as having nothing but an empirical and extrinsic signification.” Derrida concludes that the relation between the transcendental life and the empirical life is “a relation of parallelism.” At bottom, the relation described by this parallelism is between life and ideality, a relation between the existent and the movement of idealization opened by repetition to infinity (VP 8). What makes this notion of parallelism “enigmatic,” says Derrida, is that “[t]he one inhabits the other . . . .” A “nothing” distinguishes transcendental life from empirical life or transcendental consciousness from psychological consciousness. If nothing separates the two, then what is the difference between the two? Nothing. The transcendental subject is nothing other than the empirical subject. But without this nothing that distinguishes the parallels, “no language[ ] would be able to develop freely in the truth without being distorted by some real milieu. . . . this nothing arises, if we can say this, when the totality of the world is neutralized in its existence and reduced to its phenomenon” (VP 11). For Derrida, the possibility of transcendental phenomenology rests upon the distinction between the eidetic and phenomenological reductions. It is what allows us, as Husserl asserts, to “think a consciousness without a body and, as paradoxical as it may seem, without a soul” (VP 11). The paradox lies in Husserl’s efforts to distinguish between the spiritual life and the corporeal while simultaneously maintaining that “mundanity . . . is capable of bearing and in some way nurturing transcendentality” (VP 11). Therefore, Derrida concludes that “transcendental consciousness is nothing more or other than psychological consciousness”; the distance between the two has no reality: this difference lies in language (VP 12). What unites the two is the sign, which is both formal or non-mundane and structural, mundane and genetic. Remarkably, Derrida concludes, “this strange unity is life. One sees in fact very quickly that the sole kernel of the concept of psyche is life as self-relation, whether the relation is produced or not in the form of consciousness. . . . But if this ultra-transcendental concept of life allows us to think life (in the everyday sense or in the sense of biology) and if it has never been inscribed in any language, this concept of life perhaps calls for another name” (VP 12–13). One is tempted to say this other name is “deconstruction.”

What emerges in Derrida’s analysis of the sign in Husserl is that non-presence must inhabit presence; non-sense must be co-extensive with sense. This necessity is contained in the term “différance.” Derrida accepts Husserl’s privileging of the living present: “we never leave the present, which never leaves itself, and which no living thing every leaves.” However, self-presentation, auto-affection, is temporal, which means negativity or death inhabits the living present. If I am powerless to leave the present, the now, and if only a non-living thing may leave the now,
then the deconstruction of the living present marks the limits of life/death. If sense is to survive, that is, live on beyond the now, it must be iterable, which means it must be “a graphic possibility” and it must also be transcendent. The concepts of différance and the trace (“an experience of the temporal difference of a past without a present past or a to-come that is not a present future”) are born from Derrida’s analysis of the problem of genesis in Husserl. The always already there of sense cannot accommodate active genesis. This is the aporia that Baring calls, after Derrida, “mystery.” It is also the grounds for approaching Derrida’s call for putting biography back in the picture. In our examination of the passage on parallelism in Voice and Phenomenon, we find Derrida continuing and deepening the investigation of the relation of writing to ideality that he took up in his introduction to “Origin of Geometry.” There, we find that the distinction between transcendentality and psychology, spirituality and mundanity, the transcendental and the empirical is maintained by writing. Whereas parallelism serves to distinguish what turns out to be implicated in one another, in this earlier text, writing assures the “absolute Objectivity—i.e., the purity of its [the object’s] relation to a universal transcendental subjectivity” by virtue of intentionality. Without writing, “all language would as yet remain captive of the de facto and actual intentionality of a speaking subject or community of speaking subjects” (IOG 87–88). Writing frees absolute Objectivity because it still functions with the death of the empirical subject by virtue of de jure intentionality: “Thus a subjectless transcendental field is one of the ‘conditions’ of transcendental subjectivity” (88). It is why we can think a consciousness without a body. The text can dispense with the real subject and remain intelligible for a transcendental subject because it is “haunted by a virtual intentionality” (88). As Marrati points out, Derrida to this point is keeping close to Husserl’s analysis, but “he takes a further step, tying the absolute of de jure intentionality to the ineffaceable possibility of its failure, in which something like a transcendental sense of death is revealed.” If, as Derrida says, writing can “dispense with, due to its sense, every present reading in general,” that is, “if it is not haunted by a virtual intentionality,” it would merely be “a chaotic literalness,” dead letters entombing “lost intentions and guarded secrets,” whose “illegibility . . . disclose[s] the transcendental sense of death as what unites these things to the absolute privilege of intentionality in the very instance of its essential juridical failure” (IOG 88). Rather than the notion that writing allows for the separation of “intentional animation from the graphic sign”—which would place writing outside language—as in Husserl, “Derrida looks to show their inseparability.” As graphic inscription without intentionality, writing is empirical death. Once sense is arisen in consciousness, it is, according
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to Husserl, indestructible. If all the real archives were destroyed, sense would be unaffected. Derrida, however, demonstrates that rather than forgetfulness and death being an accidental modification of sense, they are “an internal necessity.” Death is “indissociable from the ideality that writing itself renders possible.” Writing cannot be situated outside of language; the corpus, the mere body (Körper) cannot be situated outside the life or the spiritual body (Leib). This is why Derrida is attracted to literature: it is a writing that “is even destined to dispense with the present of its originary inscription, of its ‘author’ as one might say in an insufficient way.” To sign one’s name is to admit one is mortal. But this means that the autos, self-relation, that animates the “living” text can do so only by virtue of forgetting and death, which means we must turn to “the autobiographical design of memory.” Haunted by intentionality, inhabited by an absent presence, a specter, writing unites singularity with eternal recurrence.

This brings us back to his comments on autobiography and the desire to preserve everything, to gather everything in an archive. In A Taste for the Secret, he says it is not the “autobiographical genre” that interests him “but rather the autobiographicity that greatly overflows the ‘genre’ of autobiography.” Again, he speaks of a “wild desire to preserve everything together in its idiom.” That which exceeds the “autos [the self/same]” is the paradox or aporia of a gathering of everything, including what “by its very essence, defies all gathering,” the idiom or the experience of singularity.”[T]his autobiographical design of memory” attests to “the desire, while taking philosophical responsibility to its limits, to show that such responsibility cannot be other than the responsibility of someone.” It is a question, he goes on to say, of “who?” Who signs, who questions? At the limits of life/death, between the necessity of my words being present to me and the necessity of their survival “beyond my present,” lies a ghost, a specter that belongs to “a past without a present past or a to-come that is not a present future.” That is, writing as the “spiritual body” is what survives in me as different from me, as something that is extra-mundane—it is différent, a past without a present and must return to me, “must be made close once more.” What returns is a trace that becomes the present only to be “sent out again to another fulfillment.” Autobiography is a gathering that disseminates, that defies gathering. It is an experience of “that which in the autos disturbs self-relation, but always in an existential experience that is singular.” We can say then that deconstruction is the signature, the autobiography, of someone who has been true to the principle of principles, experience.

The question that remains is whether this fidelity can be realized, repeated, in genres that remain within an empirical-genetic framework,
as do the biographical and historical works of Peeters and Baring. What then would be a “Derridean” biography or a “Derridean” history? It would be something other than work written in the manner of Derrida, but would be something that troubles, as Derrida suggests, the dynamis or the borderline that separates the work and the life. Above all, it would have to be attentive to the very problem that Derrida made the focus of his early works: genesis. Although history and biography recount the genesis of their subjects, they do so in an empirical manner, which is basic to the genres and to the institutions that define them. These limitation or restrictions, however much they may adhere to their respective genres, are also those of the autobiographical signature. What deconstruction demands is that they account for alterity, that which sur-vives, lives on, not simply as the graphic remains that are signed Jacques Derrida but as what is infinite, the form of sense that, as we have seen, is constituted by iterability. As something singular and idiomatic, the signature, is related “to something as essential as the eternal return.” The signature is not the totality of being, an empirical fact standing upon “a great ontological structure,” but involves forces that inhabit the borderline between life and death, the work and the life.” As soon as it crosses the motif of the eternal return, then the individual signature . . . is no longer simply an empirical fact grounded in something other than itself.”48 The signature would be pledged to something other than itself, something that we might, for lack of a better name, call “life.”

Notes
1. The quotation is from “Others are secret because they are other” 145. I regret to report that the translation of Peeters’s biography is marred by numerous flaws. Quotations are occasionally dropped or paraphrased (see 22, 25, 230, 234; in original, see 34, 38, 287, 291–92, Derrida. Paris: Flammarion, 2010). There are errors in translation.”Le ton de ‘Force et signification’ vient d’on ne sait où sinon peut-être Maurice Blanchot” is given as “The tone of ‘Force and Signification’ comes from who knows where—perhaps from Maurice Blanchot?” The final phrase should be translated as “if not, perhaps, Maurice Blanchot.” Where Peeters is measured, Brown is flippant. Brown mistranslates “éléve” and turns Levinas into a “friend,” rather than a “student,” of Husserl and Heidegger (137). Elsewhere he has Derrida getting “to know” Blanchot in 1968 even though the passage in Peeters correctly states that they had exchanged “some letters since 1964” and writes “Derrida grew nearer (se rapproche)” to him (orig. 240, trans. 191). Brown’s frequent recourse to British slang not only is jarring but often inaccurately renders the sense of Peeters’s French. Whereas Peeters calls Derrida’s fulfillment of his military obligations by teaching at a school in Koléa, Algeria a “une vraie planque,” a “cushy job,” as compared to serving in the army (118), Brown calls it “a doodle,” which means “wasting time” (90). I cannot
tell if the following is a mistranslation or a misprint: “Rodolphe Gasché, whose son [for “who soon”] became one of his most reliable supporters” (212). The University of California at Irvine is listed as “Irvine University” in the index. The philosopher Jeanne Hersch is given as “Hirsch.” One hopes that these and the many other errors will be corrected in a second edition.

2. See Bennington, Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida 36–37. Peeters writes, “I am convinced of one thing: there are biographies only of the dead” (6). In his interview with Derek Attridge for the anthology Acts of Literature, Derrida offers “autobiography” as “perhaps the least inadequate name” for his kind of writing and goes on to describe it as a desire for “totalization or gathering up” (34).

3. See Derrida, “This Strange Institution Called Literature” 35.

4. See Marrati, Genesis and Trace: Derrida Reading Husserl and Heidegger 143. For this part of her analysis, Marrati focuses on “The Theme of the Analytic of Dasein” in Being and Time 67–71. I am quoting from pp. 67, 68.

5. See Marrati, Genesis and Trace 143.


7. On the problem of genesis as the problem of phenomenology, see Lawlor, Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology 21–22, 77.


12. See Husserl, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book 44.


17. There have been two books that have presented themselves as biographies but one is, in fact, a survey of his work and the other an evaluation of major essays. Jason Powell's Jacques Derrida: A Biography relies for its biographical facts on the “Curriculum Vitae” to be found in Derrida and Bennington, Jacques Derrida 325–36, as well as on interviews and Malabou and Derrida, Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida. It sets Derrida’s work in a biographical context but is largely devoted to brief synopses of the major works and as such, does not offer much in the way of detailed analysis or originality. Readers seeking an introduction to Derrida would be better served by Geoffrey Bennington's “Derridabase” in Jacques Derrida, the many interviews
with Derrida, or even by Christopher Norris’s first book, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. A more technical introduction to deconstruction is provided by Leonard Lawlor in his introduction to his new translation of *La voix et le phénomène, Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*. David Mikics’s *Who Was Jacques Derrida? An Intellectual Biography* is notable not so much for its failure to tell us who was Jacques Derrida as it is for its misconceptions and misunderstandings of Derrida’s thought and writings. Mikics argues that Derrida was a skeptic who disregarded the “human psyche”—our basic passions, desires, and characters—even when he took up ethics, via Levinas. I would send readers not only to Peeters and Baring for corrections of this view, but to Derrida’s works themselves, which Mikics misrepresents with a consistency that makes one believe that his publisher deliberately avoided having the manuscript vetted by anyone acquainted with Derrida’s writings in order to publish a book intent upon diminishing his place in philosophy. I will let two errors stand for the many to be found in this book. In his introduction, he writes, “Derrida saw as Freud’s great discovery the fact that the unconscious is linguistic in nature” (3). He apparently confuses Derrida with the other Jacques, Lacan. Derrida’s “Freud and the Scene of Writing” is concerned with the determination of consciousness by the metaphysics of presence. To say Derrida argues that the unconscious is structured like a language not only ignores his debate with Lacan but it mistakes the meaning of writing in Derrida’s work. Freud’s recourse to graphic metaphors to represent the unconscious constitutes a “recognition” that selfhood, presence, is conditioned by the threat of absence, deferral, and alterity. Derrida’s argument is structural, to some extent, and phenomenological, not linguistic à la Lacan, and certainly not skeptical. Mikics’s misconceptions about Derrida are most evident in his account of the essay on J. L. Austin, “Signature Event Context.” Mikics dismisses Derrida’s argument that Austin requires intention to animate the performative utterance, hereby confusing psychological intention with phenomenological intentionality. In keeping with his theme that Derrida ignores psychology and, therefore, human reality, Mikics defends Austin on the grounds that character, or “the state of the soul plays . . . a central role in Austin’s thought.” In making promises or excuses in good faith and in accordance with rules governing ordinary language, we achieve “something that tells of the depth of our lives in language” (164). Mikics opposes this version of sincerity against what he believes to be Derrida’s sophistical argument. Rather than arguing that the unsuccessful performative means that no performative works or is successful, Derrida proposes that the conditions for the successful performative rest upon iterability, repetition in other contexts, including the staged or literary citation of a performative (as when an actor says, “I do,” when playing a groom in a wedding ceremony). This structure of iteration belongs to all performatives and “a priori introduces an essential dehiscence and demarcation” (“Signature Event Context” 326). Therefore, the successful performative cannot exclude as a condition of its functioning the possibility of citationality, difference, etc. that Austin would exclude. This is a far cry from saying, “Any wedding could turn out to be a stage play, any groom a bigamist” (Mikics 162). Mikics’s book is for those who do not read Derrida and have no wish to do so because they dismiss him out of hand. Readers will know more
about “who was Jacques Derrida” if they avoid this book. They may not read anything by or about Derrida, but at least they won’t take Mikics’s errors and falsifications for facts and truth.


20. See Bennington, “A Life in Philosophy,” in Other Analyses: Reading Philosophy, electronic text available at http://bennington. zsoft.co.uk. Cited by Peeters, 6. Bennington suggests an approach to biography that “would escape the totalising and teleological commitments which inhabit the genre from the start[.]” No biography, however scholarly and exhaustive its research, attains totalization. As my introductory remarks suggest, biography is motivated by the desire for totalization but this desire is founded upon a lack or absence. What biography needs to avoid is the Sartrean claim “to be giving ‘the keys’ to the-man-and-the-complete-work, their ultimate psychoanalytico-existential signification” (Peeters 260; he quotes from Derrida’s Glas 29).

21. For a response to some historians’ charge that deconstruction is relativism, see my “Derrida, History, and Truth: A Prolegomenon.”

22. In a 1983 interview with Catherine David, “Unsealing (‘the old new language’),” Derrida dates the influence of Sartre to his adolescence in Algiers, before he even heard of the École Normale. He says, “he [Sartre] played a major role for me then. A model that I have since judged to be nefarious and catastrophic, but that I love; no doubt as what I had to love, and I always love what I have loved; it’s very simple. . . .” [ellipsis in original]. He goes on to say that it was through Sartre, he “discovered Blanchot, Bataille, Ponge.” However, he notes, “I now think one could have read [them] otherwise. But finally, Sartre was himself the ‘unsurpassable horizon!’ Things changed when, thanks to him but especially against him, I read Husserl, Heidegger, Blanchot, and others.” Finally, he condemns Sartre’s “incredible misreadings of Heidegger, sometimes of Husserl” and his misunderstanding of so many theoretical and literary events of his time . . . psychoanalysis, Marxism, structuralism, Joyce, Artaud, Bataille, Blanchot.” He asks, “What must a society such as ours be if a man . . . who accumulated and disseminated incredible misreadings . . . could come to dominate the cultural scene. . . . ?”


24. See Derrida, “‘Others Are Secret Because They Are Other’” 144–45.

25. See Lawlor, Derrida and Husserl 54.

26. Derrida states in his preface to the dissertation, The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy, that Husserlian phenomenology “simultaneously takes as a theme the demand for absolute beginning and the temporality of lived experience as the ultimate philosophical reference.” (xviii). Consequently, “the
theme of genesis . . . drives all Husserl's concerns” (xviii). Genesis, the process by which something comes to be constituted with the particular sense that it has, is split into active and passive. Active genesis involves the ego, whereas passive genesis does not involve the ego; things have the character of being already constituted. Derrida investigates the contradictions that arise between genesis as “absolute origin,” a production that “makes its appearance and takes on meaning by transcending what it is not,” and genesis as immanent, as enclosed “within a temporal and ontological totality” (xxi). He asks, “How can the originarity of a foundation be an a priori synthesis? How can everything start with a complication” (xxv)?

27. See Lawlor, Derrida and Husserl 86.


29. See Marrati, Genesis and Trace 3.

30. See Derrida, The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy 100, 141.

31. See Marrati, Genesis and Trace 5. She is quoting Derrida, The Problem of Genesis 10.

32. The “now point” of a present perception is characterized as being “thick” or containing an immediate memory of the now that has passed. Husserl calls this form of memory “retention.”

33. See Lawlor, Derrida and Husserl 81.

34. See Derrida, Voice and Phenomenon 9, 8. Hereinafter cited in text as VP.

35. See Marrati, Genesis and Trace 51. Eidetic reduction is the bracketing, or setting aside, of natural or lived experience to discover the invariant, the eidos, in a unique experience. Phenomenological reduction evokes the concreteness of lived experience by setting aside all theoretical meaning.


37. See Derrida, “Others Are Secret Because They Are Other”” 144.

38. See Lawlor Derrida and Husserl, 5.


40. See Marrati’s superb discussion of this crucial passage in the introduction in Genesis and Trace 35–39. The quotation is from p. 36.

41. See Marrati, Genesis and Trace 36.

42. See Marrati, Genesis and Trace 37.

43. See Derrida, “A “Madness” Must Watch Over Thinking”” 346.

44. See Derrida and Ferraris, A Taste for the Secret 41.

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46. I quote from and am indebted to Lawlor’s discussion of the double necessity of \textit{différence} in \textit{Derrida and Husserl} 4–5.

47. See Ferraris, \textit{A Taste for the Secret} 41.

48. See Derrida, \textit{The Ear of the Other} 46.

Works Cited


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Writing in the Kitchen: Essays on Southern Literature and Foodways. Edited by David A. Davis and Tara Powell; Foreword by Jessica B. Harris. University of Mississippi Press, 2014. 245 pp. $30.00 (paper).

When reading a book about food, a reviewer is tempted to use food metaphors in writing the review. I begin, then, by asserting that Writing is the Kitchen is a hearty meal of appetizers, main courses, and desserts. Indeed, with the Foreword, it might be considered a “baker’s dozen” of critical commentary. It will surely provide sufficient sustenance for anyone looking for commentary on southern literature, foodways, the intersection of the two, and the convoluted histories that inform where any one of these is today. David A. Davis and Tara Powell have succeeded in gathering an impressive group of scholars whose knowledge of food, foodways, southerners, and southern literature extends from the early days of the Republic to twentieth century Vietnamese, Appalachian, and Native American writings—in addition to African American and white offerings. The volume is one that will invite readers to ask of some of the essays, “Why didn’t I know this before?” For others, the reaction might simply be, “Oh, that explains it.”

Broadly arranged chronologically, the text begins with a discussion of Thomas Jefferson’s fascination with farming and crop rotation, moves through exploration of the almanacs that governed early planting ventures, explores traveler comments on southern food (such as Swedish Fredrika Bremer, British Eliza Lucas Pinckney, and English Fanny Kemble), and roughly ends the nineteenth century portion with a focus on Mammy Cookbooks, which both white and African American women wrote, before venturing into the early twentieth century and literary narratives that focused on food and its preparation. Food and literature are intricately intertwined in the southern landscape as writing itself becomes crucial to the cultivation of food. These essays make clear to contemporary readers that readers of such materials as those Jefferson produced waited as eagerly for them as twentieth century readers probably waited for various installments of the Harry Potter series. With basic survival as the impetus, it is understandable how early Americans were so fascinated with techniques that would make the yields of their crops sufficient for their families and workers.

I found all of the essays to be informative, exceptionally well researched, and strikingly well written. Still, a few stood out for me, including Sarah Walden’s essay on how African American women used...
the written word and the publication of cookbooks to assert their middle class status in the late nineteenth century when prevailing white notions wanted to remand them to the kitchen; Ruth Salvaggio's meditations on food as poetry in New Orleans; Psyche Williams-Forson's discussion of Ann Allen Shockley's use of food for a variety of race, class, and erotic purposes in *Loving Her* (1974); Lisa Hinrichsen's essay on Vietnamese writers and their depictions of the intersections of southernness and food—even to sometimes fatal conclusions; and Melanie Benson Taylor's commentary on Native Americans and the complexities of their negotiations of food as it relates to Native, national, and southern identities. Essays also treat food and its significance in Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), Lee Smith's *Oral History* (1983), Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven* (1987), Ellen Douglas's *Can’t Quit You, Baby* (1989), Minrose Gwin’s *The Queen of Palmyra* (2010), Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help* (2009), Lan Cao’s *Monkey Bridge* (1997), Monique Truong’s *Bitter In the Mouth* (2010), several other fiction works, and poetry by Yusef Komunyakaa, Roy Blount Jr., Michael McKee, James Applewhite, Honorée Jeffers, Kevin Young, and Nikky Finney. As a result of the richly-layered essays included in this volume, I now have a new list of “must-read” literary texts.

A reader hopes that any published scholarly work will yield something new, something refreshing, and something that evokes an “Ah ha!” moment. *Writing in the Kitchen* does all of that. It is to the credit of Davis and Powell that a panel session at an annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Southern Literature (2010 in New Orleans) evolved into this gem of a collection. Not only is it a must-read for scholars of southern studies, but it holds treasures for anyone interested in food, the friction that it sometimes causes in terms of cultural heritage, identity, ethnicity, assimilation, upward mobility, tourism, politics, and basic survival, and how these issues get expanded and complicated on southern United States territory.

**Trudier Harris**

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Drawing on the concept of “prophetic remembrance” to name the impulse by which black cultural trauma is recalled and represented in a temporally complex manner, Erica Still traces how black subjectivity engages with pain in a way that is both retrospective and prospective, repetitious and yet open to the possibilities of the yet-to-be-determined. In reading contemporary African American neo-slave narratives and South African post-apartheid texts alongside one another, she focuses on how these stories of prophetic remembrance create and sustain a black diasporic imagination by articulating across space and time paradoxical tales that “take[us] beyond either/or solutions to the problem of the past’s relation to the future, compelling us instead to wrestle with both/and possibilities” (7). Through emphasizing how traumatic memory is irreducible to one temporal location, forming a condition of futurity as well as a record of history, Prophetic Remembrance: Black Subjectivity in African American and South African Trauma Narratives delineates how literary work can mark black identity as a site of possibility, offering creative possibilities for remembrance and mourning.

Noting that neo-slave and post-apartheid literature are different in form, scope, and political agenda, despite being bound by what she calls a “common effort to reckon with . . . traumatic national histories” (7), Still delivers a comparative approach that responsibly elicits affinities without overstating them. In examining a variety of narratives written in the last twenty-five years, including texts by Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson, John Edgar Wideman, David Bradley, Sindiwe Magona, K. Sello Duiker, and Zakes Mda, Prophetic Remembrance, while fundamentally a literary project, is grounded in cultural and political aims related to the concept of a black diasporic imagination that it articulates. Indebted to Paul Gilroy’s idea of the black Atlantic and Brent Hayes Edwards’s black internationalism, as well as more recent work on diaspora that focuses on its discursive nature by Percy Hinzten and Jean Muteba Rahier, Still emphasizes how black diasporic identity is produced discursively, focusing on the way literary objects are shaped by and in turn reshape imaginative possibilities. She connects her commitment to close reading and aesthetics with a range of theories. In drawing on trauma theory, particularly recent work by Michelle Balaev, Jeffrey Alexander, and Ron Eyerman that works to move beyond an individualized and static notion of trauma; scholarship on Hebrew prophecy and black theology; and a plethora of scholarship on African
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American and South African literature, Still inventively contributes to key theoretical discussions by drawing together discourses and primary texts not synthesized elsewhere.

While engaged with theory, Prophetic Remembrance also takes as an organizing principle a more poetic tack, revolving around four primary metaphors or images of prophetic remembrance: ruptured wounds, fugitive spaces, artful mourning, and resurrection scars. In tracing these metaphors across space and time, Still demonstrates how prophetic remembrance can be both the object of analysis and a means of analysis. Chapter one focuses on images of the ruptured wound, an evocative image that represents the ongoing woundedness of black subjectivity, in Toni Morrison’s Beloved and Sindiwe Magona’s Mother to Mother. Tracing how these texts resist closure by engaging with rupture, Still unfolds how Morrison and Magona represent an always interrupted healing connected to female corporeal experience and maternal sorrow. Chapter two turns to the black male body’s association with flight, examining Charles Johnson’s Middle Passage and K. Sello Duiker’s The Quiet Voice of Dreams and analyzing their rendering of conditions of black spatial belonging in what she terms “fugitive homes,” or “unauthorized sites of belonging [that] exist right at the core of the structures that officially deny them” (83). These fugitive homes signify “a conditional belonging that invites the black subject to establish roots and find safety without sacrificing mobility” (39). Her third chapter examines David Bradley’s The Chaneysville Incident and and Zakes Mda’s Ways of Dying to comprehend how black subjectivity responds to social death through the act of “artful mourning.” Emphasizing the ways that mourning can be generative, Still illustrates how these texts reposition grief as evidence of black subjectivity and perform ways of aestheticizing sorrow so that it is manageable. The final chapter of Prophetic Remembrance examines John Edgar Wideman’s The Cattle Killing and Zakes Mda’s The Heart of Redness to look at issues of futurity and agency as rendered in “resurrection scars,” which bear witness to the traumatic past but allow for futurity. Resurrection, as she notes, breaks with conventional notions of teleology, creating a cyclical time that simultaneously honors the past and opens the possibility of forward movement. A brief coda positions the project within current critical debates about the necessity of black subjectivity as a category of identity. In opposition to calls for a nonracial humanism (Gilroy), or Kenneth Warren’s emphasis on the “was” of African American literature, Still argues that there is no “before” race as well as no “after.” She advocates for the need to maintain it as a relevant framework for analysis and positions prophetic remembrance as a means by which race can ethically be remembered: “Because it requires both remem-
brance and choice, prophetic remembrance allows us to keep always present an account of race along with the opportunity and obligation to act affirmatively toward the future” (203-04).

A study useful to those interested in trauma theory, literature and theology, black diasporic literature, and the literature of the global South, Prophetic Remembrance: Black Subjectivity in African American and South African Trauma Narratives is an impressive contribution to an ongoing dialogue on black memory, past, present, and future.

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Doreen Fowler’s Drawing the Line begins with questions that have long been central to the humanities: what does it mean to identify with a racial or gender group? What does it mean to identify with another person, particularly one who falls into different identity categories? And, as Fowler puts it, “How and when is it permissible for one to say ‘we’ so as to express solidarity with those of different ethnic, gender, and racial configurations?” (2). She addresses these questions by analyzing the role of father figures in work by William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Flannery O’Connor, and Toni Morrison. As Fowler puts it, father figures mediate the boundary between identities; they link families across time even as they signal difference. For the authors in her study, who “write across racial and gender boundaries,” “father figures introduce new subjects to boundaries that both divide and attach, and these porous boundaries enable an individual to have commerce with others while still maintaining a different ethnic, raced, and gendered subjectivity” (5). Although Fowler largely sets aside her questions about how critics should negotiate their own bounded identities after the introduction, her work offers an intriguing model for thinking about how boundaries both demarcate and unite (a point that, as Fowler notes, Gloria Anzaldúa made some thirty years ago) and, more-
over, offers an approach to the symbolic power of fatherhood that does more than rehearse the violence of patriarchy.

Fowler’s approach to boundaries is indebted to Julia Kristeva, and she convincingly emphasizes the familial structures at play in Kristeva’s theory of abjection. For Kristeva, the father figure acts as a third party that mediates the relationship between mother and child and guides the child toward individuation from the mother. Across the four novels she analyzes, Fowler tracks “the father’s role in negotiating the fearful self-other border relation” (12). Although the father figure takes a different shape in each literary work she analyzes, Fowler claims that such a third-party mediating figure is necessary for moving literary characters into multicultural community.

In her reading of Faulkner’s *Intruder in the Dust*, Fowler focuses on Lucas Beauchamp as a liminal figure. A father figure to Chick Mallison, Beauchamp is also racially indeterminate, refusing the boundary between black and white, and, thus, the broader myth of racial difference. Beauchamp’s indeterminate identity is so threatening to the boundaries that maintain white supremacy, in fact, that he is nearly lynched. Faulkner disrupts a wider structure of identity and sociality when Mallison aligns himself with Beauchamp and saves him from the tree. By linking Beauchamp’s racial indeterminacy to the boundary-patrolling of the lynch mob, Faulkner demonstrates “that the boundaries that support self-identity—in particular, white, male identity—appear to be insecurely secured by the dialectics of domination” (21).

Scholars of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* are divided on the question of Bigger Thomas’s violence: in murdering Mary and Bessie, does he symbolically break free from the oppressive strictures of white supremacy, or does he succumb, finally, to full psychic death? Fowler stands in the former camp, stating that “Bigger feels empowered when he kills Mary and Bessie because they threaten him, but we readers have not accurately assessed the threat that each woman poses to him” (49). Building on his interest in psychoanalysis and revising Freud’s theory of the death drive, Wright creates female characters that “figure a pull toward a breakdown of alterity” akin to abjection. This threat, which would also threaten his sense of racial and gender boundaries, is what Bigger responds to when he kills Mary and Bessie. Although feminist critics in particular have presumed that the two murders mark the limits of Wright’s progressive project, where he turns to misogyny in the service of black male liberation, Fowler reframes the relationship between Bigger and the women to show how the novel actually emphasizes the need for alliance across racial and gender lines. Bigger’s lawyer, Max, is the father figure with the most potential to bring Bigger across this psychic and social threshold, but the violent othering of
people of color “increases the racialized subject’s yearning for an outlawed inclusion even as it instills a warping, murderous fear of this forbidden desire” (71).

Fowler also intervenes in a central tension in scholarship on Flannery O’Connor: the pervasive violence of O’Connor’s fiction seems to be at odds with her devout Catholicism, but violence, as Fowler contends, brings characters into grace. Violence arrives with third party figures—Manley Pointer, The Misfit, Mr. Greenleaf’s bull—and forces characters into “grace,” which “is an experience at the border of the self, the borderline place that is dual, where self and other or human and divine make ‘contact’” (73). Through readings of “The Artificial Nigger” and “Greenleaf,” Fowler aligns O’Connor’s violent “grace” with Kristeva’s theory of abjection and demonstrates that both stories are centrally concerned with difference and doubling. In a final section of the chapter, Fowler shows that prophet figures in The Violent Bear It Away function as third-party figures by leading characters through the dissolution of boundaries. Drawing connections between the prophet figure in Violent and similar third-party figures across O’Connor’s oeuvre, Fowler reframes “grace” in terms of the violent shattering of ego boundaries that must happen in order for growth to take place.

A fourth chapter on Morrison’s Beloved returns to the notion that third party figures enable connection between others without erasing racial and sexual difference. Paul D and Amy Denver mediate between Sethe, Denver, and Beloved and lead the women of 124 from the near-death state produced by slavery into the social world of freedom. In comparison with Intruder and Native Son, Beloved offers the most optimistic and complete vision of how the father figure can “form boundaries that both distinguish an autonomous subject and allow for alliances with others” (94). In a compelling analysis of Paul D’s relationship with the women of 124, Fowler shows that the novel enacts both the “narcissistic regression” (103) of the undifferentiated mother-child relationship and the father figure’s essential role in creating boundaries of subjectivity (102-03). In this chapter, Fowler marries her psychoanalytic approach with an attention to history and material culture, tracking the paternal function’s role in bringing socially-dead ex-slaves into social life. Fowler thus modifies the critical focus on “community” in the novel by demonstrating that social life is dependent upon borders that both differentiate and connect.

In the final chapter, Fowler examines cultural phenomena in which threshold figures do not mediate between racial boundaries, but instead reinscribe them. Here, Fowler shifts from literary representation to material culture. She also moves away from the father figure to a different conception of liminal figures, ones who attempt to move across
racial lines, but in doing so, only succeed in shoring up those boundaries. The decision to end with a discussion of material culture that “solidifies social hierarchies of dominance and subjection” in contrast with literary texts that narrate “an authentic blurring of cultural differences” might chafe some readers with its suggestion that only literature—and not popular culture—can mediate racial difference the “right way” (111). Indeed, Eric Lott’s work on blackface minstrelsy, which Fowler engages at length, would seem to complicate the ethics of representation and border-crossing that, for Fowler, are straightforwardly “wrong.” However, in her discussion of John Howard Griffin’s *Black Like Me*, Fowler traces the way a border crossing might initially strengthen hierarchies, but then ultimately break them down. Fowler argues that in passing for black, Griffin initially takes on a racial masquerade that is analogous to minstrelsy, but he manages to carry himself across the threshold by living among black people, thus becoming “a liminal, two-in-one figure who bridges a racial divide and can serve as an interpreter between white and black America” (124).

In a cultural moment marked by questions about identity and borders—Rachel Dolezal’s racial passing, Laverne Cox on the cover of *Time* and Caitlyn Jenner in *Vanity Fair*, and the violently rigid borders evidenced in Ferguson, New York, and Baltimore—*Drawing the Line* offers a hopeful sense that we can be simultaneously different from one another and dependent on one another. Although not everyone will buy into Fowler’s committed psychoanalytic methodology, even materialist, historicist, and formalist scholars should take note of her approach to the dilemma of identity and interpretation.

Anna Ioanes
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*Martin Luther King, Jr., Heroism, and African American Literature*. By Trudier Harris. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2014. 200 pp. $49.95 (hardcover).

In this highly approachable and scholarly book, Harris demonstrates that literature is the site where written historical biographies and oral folk traditions meet. This study traces appearances of King (or his in-
direct influence) across a wide range of genres and authors by spotlighting some neglected works that cover moments in time from King’s assassination in 1968 to the present. These representations of King demonstrate anger at his assassination, calls for militancy to replace nonviolent approaches, and solemn depictions of both his perceived moral errors and noteworthy heroism. This study documents how King was not only martyred, but also how he has been constantly reshaped and ultimately reclaimed by literature. It succeeds most when it consistently highlights the importance of gender and offers illuminating (yet restrained readings) of works by Gwendolyn Brooks and Katori Hall.

With remarkable range, Harris contextualizes all her close readings not just in reference to biography and folk stories but also in reference to works by James Weldon Johnson, Randall Kenan, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Robert Frost, and Emily Dickinson. Leaving no narrative unexplored, she even references films featuring Clint Eastwood and Denzel Washington.

The book’s historical biographical details of King are drawn primarily from the noteworthy contributions of King biographers Taylor Branch and David Garrow, but Harris widens the biographical narrative by incorporating folk figures such as Brer Rabbit, Stackolee, and Railroad Bill. Anyone not familiar enough with these figures is treated to the humorous exploits of their oral narratives in the introduction. Black ministers are simultaneously revered and jeered through jokes that sometimes feature bawdy humor. As the chapters continue, the book uses all of these figures (and more) as touchstones for the way King acted as a historical figure and as a literary creation in the minds of authors that range from playwrights such as Ed Bullins, Joseph White and Katori Hall, the novelist Charles Johnson, and poets that include Margaret and Alice Walker, Gwendolen Brooks, and Nikki Giovanni.

Two plays—Ed Bullins’s *The Gentleman Caller* (1969) and Joseph White’s *The Leader: A One-Act Play* (1968)—are treated here in such a way as to serve as invitations to want to read or see them re-staged. As he tries to turn the minister into a militant, Bullins’s work nears the Marxist ideals of many Black Militant writers who demonstrated that art is but a weapon in the war being waged to achieve a classless society. White offers the Reverend Abraham Lincoln Brown as a stand in for King. He is the self-promoting media hound King was often accused of being by SNCC workers during his lifetime. Unlike the historical optimism captured in Langston Hughes’s portrayal of King as the continuation of a long history of black resistance offered in his 1964 play *Jericho-Jim Crow*, or his poem “Brotherly Love” (1956), each of these playwrights has highlighted what they see as necessary symbolic correctives in light of King’s later years and assassination.
The chapter on Charles Johnson features two of the author’s works. It begins with the novel *Dreamer* (1998) and concludes with the short story collection (and title story) “Dr. King’s Refrigerator and Other Bedtime Stories” (2005). The section on *Dreamer* is the rare lengthy section of plot summary absent from all the rest of the book’s otherwise close and compressed readings. The effect is to make you want to reteach this novel again in your own classroom. And when the study gets to the sacrifices of King, the histories of Bessie Smith and Henrietta Lacks provide welcome contexts. Johnson’s use of the narrator Matthew conjures connections to the gospel writer himself even while the story of Cain and Abel serves as a more important biblical doppelganger for King and Chaym. The sections devoted to the story “Dr. King’s Refrigerator” contain more admirable understandings of King’s biography. The idea of Dr. King gaining inspiration as he stares into his open refrigerator and considers the places from which his food or drink has originated has remarkable overtones, not only for King’s famous “Vision in the Kitchen” moment from 1956, but also for direct elements used in many of his speeches about the interrelatedness of the world, including the very accessible “A Christmas Sermon on Peace” delivered December 24, 1967.

While noting that poetic engagements with King abound, approximately fifteen different poems are considered here, beginning with Margaret Walker’s “Amos, 1963” (1970). Where Margaret’s poem connects the preacher King with his role as a prophet, a 1972 speech by Alice Walker confirms the appreciation felt by these two rare young writers of the era who honored King. Several other poets considered here actually mimic King’s own ability to rewrite scripture. Extensive and necessary space is devoted to Nikki Giovanni’s poetry, and Giovanni is called the “one poet who has made King a consistent part of her poetic creations” (82).

Harris never spends too many words over-synthesizing what all these portrayals should collectively mean. In short, the overall trajectory suggests that within these literary portraits of King rest latent elements of historical and folk traditions, and they generally move from anger at his assassination or lack of militancy to tolerance of what might be defined as vices among men (but mere prerequisites for tricksters). In literature, King has been less a historical figure and more of a successful folk hero.

The book is indispensable in the way it brings gender to bear on two close readings of works by Gwendolyn Brooks and Katori Hall. In commenting on Brooks’s poem “Riot: A Poem in Three Parts” (1970), Harris offers a convincing and restrained explanation for the puzzling ending of this poem by suggesting the possibility that the dialogue
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captures the brief and unsustainable moment of sexual integration between a white female and her black lover. This engaging reading is superseded only by the way that gender is used to frame the role of women in Katori Hall’s play The Mountaintop (2011). By amplifying the roles of King’s offstage wife, the angel Camae, and a feminine God, this play can be understood as reclaiming the too often forgotten roles played by women throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Here, Jo Ann Robinson, Mother Pollard, and countless other women remind both historian and readers of literature that King “would have come to naught but for the women in his life” (125). For this, and so much more, representations of King also remind us that literature can lead to a return to the history we’ve rarely written or an amplification of the folk tales we’ve nearly forgotten.

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In the Prologue and Introduction of Michael Dowdy’s book Broken Souths: Latina/o Poetic Responses to Neoliberalism and Globalization, the author sets out clearly for the reader his intent to address Latino poetics from the perspective of its response to neoliberalism, globalization, and their side effects, as well as the conceptualization of space and time as used by the writers in addressing these issues. Divided into an Introduction, six chapters and a Coda, Broken Souths emphasizes the “commonalities and differences across national groups” (x). Principally focusing on Latino poets in the United States, Dowdy also includes Latin American poets as a secondary grouping.

Chapter One (“Hemispheric Otherwises in the Shadow of ‘1968’: Martín Espada’s Zapatista Poems”) focuses principally on Martín Espada who Dowdy proclaims as his “leading Latino guide to inter-American historical geographies “under the neoliberal sign”” (13). The introduction to the chapter discusses Espada’s poem “Imagine the Angels of Bread,” which seeks a different freedom than that sup-
ported by a classist society, globalization, and capitalism. The initial focus on the struggle for survival in the Americas leads the reader to the three chapter divisions in which two of Espada’s poems and one of José Emilio Pacheco’s are explicated. Espada’s “Sing Zapatista” is examined through the lens of place and space, his “Circle Your Name” is discussed with regards to Inter-American solidarity, and Pacheco’s theme of the blank page in his poem “1968” provides a smooth transition to the next chapter.

Proclaimed “the voice of the overall Chicano experience” (61) by Francisco A. Lomeli, the focus of chapter two, Juan Felipe Herrera, is contrasted with Espada. In this chapter entitled “Molotovs and Subtleties: Juan Felipe Herrera’s Post-Movement Norteamérica,” Dowdy focuses on the following works by Herrera: Notebooks of a Chile Verde Smuggler, Mayan Drifter, “One Year Before the Zapatista Rebellion,” “Norteamérica, I Am Your Scar,” and “A Day Without a Mexican: Video Clip.” Dowdy divides his discussion of these works thematically into three sections: the Chicano movement, Indians, revolutions and the problems with writing about Mexico from the US, and reconciliation.

In chapter three (“Against the Neoliberal State: Roberto Bolaño’s ‘Country’ of Writing and Martín Espada’s ‘Republic’ of Poetry), Dowdy analyzes Bolaño’s work from the perspective of the September 11, 1973 Chilean coup and compares his poetry on this theme to Espada’s Chilean poems. Ariel Dorfman’s writings on the coup serve as a point of analysis as well. The chapter is structured with an introduction and two additional sections entitled Bolaño’s Library-as-Nation and Espada’s “Republic of Poetry.” The analyses and comparisons are interesting and well developed. I found particularly interesting the use of transportation images by both poets for sociopolitical commentary. Transportation appears to be a common image in many of the poems discussed in Broken Souths.

Marcos Villatoro and Maurice Kilwein Guevara, the poets central to chapter four (“Andando entre dos mundos”: Maurice Kilwein Guevara’s and Marcos McPeek Villatoro’s Appalachian Latino Poetics), represent a region not usually associated with Latino literary expression: Appalachia. The chapter’s introduction describes Appalachia’s similarities with Latin America with regards to poverty and resource exploitation. Dowdy dedicates a subsection to each of the poets highlighting the authors’ contributions to expanding the geography of Latino representation in literature as well as their poetic innovation.

Chapter five (“‘Migration . . . Is Not A Crime’: Puerto Rican Status and ‘T-shirt solidarity’ in Judith Ortiz Cofer, Victor Hernández Cruz, and Jack Agüeros”) discusses Puerto Rican culture as well as the migration between the island and the mainland so easily accomplished due
to political status. The chapter’s introduction, in which Dowdy draws a socioeconomic parallel between Puerto Rico and Appalachia, leads the reader to the three subsequent chapter subdivisions, which focus on Judith Ortiz Cofer’s *The Latin Deli*, Victor Hernández Cruz’s *ecopoetic essays*, and Jack Agüeros’s *Sonnets from the Puerto Rican*.

The introduction to chapter six (“Godzilla in Mexico City: Poetics of Infrastructure in José Emilio Pacheco and Roberto Bolaño”) employs pollution, overpopulation, and urban migration to Mexico City as the central themes framing the analysis of José Emilio Pacheco’s works “Mercado Libre” and “H&C,” with regards to access to food and water and their comparison to Roberto Bolaño’s “Godzilla in Mexico” and the issue of urban space and human dignity.

Dowdy’s final chapter coda (“‘Too much of it’: Marjorie Agosín’s and Valerie Martínez’s Representations of Femicide in the *Maquila Zone*”) focuses on the representation and analysis of the feminization of the labor force in the *maquila* region on the northern Mexican border. Particular emphasis is placed on Agosín and Martínez’s treatment of femicide as well as the violence resulting from the perceived threat that financial independence and changing social mores have unleashed against women. The chapter serves as an explication of the role of these two poets as a voice for those who lack their own.

*Broken Souths* is well researched and an exceptionally interesting read. Dowdy’s discussion of relational tensions across the hemisphere (14) set against the backdrop of neoliberalism and its consequences provides a strong foundation for his analysis of the poetry presented in the text. His work highlights the role of literature in bringing problems to the forefront in a manner that stimulates discussion leading toward solutions.

**Michele Shaul**

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Years ago, in his introduction to *Film and Literature*, Robert Stam called on readers to invent new metaphors for the process of adaptation. “One might easily imagine any number of positive tropes for adaptation . . . .” he wrote (3). And yet, he continued, we tend to see it in terms of loss—as a “betrayal,” a “violation”—rather than gain.

Metaphors not only vivify our thoughts but also structure our perceptions and understanding. Poet Jane Hirschfield describes them as “handles on the door of what we can imagine.” Inventing new metaphors for adaptation, then, can mean a radical shift in how we think about the process, as Stam well knew.

In her provocative and energetic study, Julie Grossman employs the central metaphor of “hideous progeny.” She borrows the phrase from Mary Shelley, who used it to conclude her preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*. “And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper” (xxvi). Earlier in the preface, in a tantalizingly cryptic sentence, Shelley declares that “Invention. . . . does not consist in creating out of the void, but out of chaos” (xxiv). “Invention,” that is, springs from the vast and unformed mass of knowledge we acquire from books, events, ideas. It is sewn of many parts, some of them acquired in places we’d rather not admit to visiting. Creation is thus *always* a monstrous act of adaptation, just as adaptation is always an act of creation. This fundamental premise shapes Grossman’s study, as it does the very best work in adaptation studies.

Grossman’s use of the metaphor suggests any number of additional points about adaptation. It implies that adaptations, like Frankenstein’s creature, tend to be judged rashly and dismissively. It clarifies how adaptations possess both a rebellious and a loving spirit, as any child does toward his parent. And it reveals the ache, the desire, which underlies all adaptations. It’s the desire—embodied in *Frankenstein’s* narrator, Walton—to retell a story as a way of paying respect to the dead and making sense of your own creative journey through the world.

Any author who chooses “hideous progeny” as her book’s central metaphor is not going to write about traditional adaptations. Jane Austen doesn’t come up once in this book. Nor does the BBC. Instead, Grossman writes about experimental, even audacious adaptations that span a range of genres and mediums. “The most provocative adaptations,” she claims, “not only create initial dissonance for us as viewers/readers, just as avant-garde works do, “but they also train our eye on cultural progeny rather than on origins” (3). Provocative adaptations
make us look ahead rather than backward, make us think in terms of gain (anticipation) rather than loss (nostalgia). Grossman’s choice of texts—along with her lively analysis—also conveys an author who seems broadly curious, voracious, hip. Possessed of taste that veers from Joseph Conrad to The Simpsons, she comes across as someone you’d love to have as a colleague.

Containing nine short chapters along with an introduction and epilogue, the book is structured to move briskly. Part I, “Journeys and Authorship,” begins with cinematic revisitings of biographical novels—Gods and Monsters and Hugo—as it considers how issues of authorship inscribe the adaptation process. Part I also includes a discussion of Hearts of Darkness, a documentary about the most troubled adaptation in cinematic history: Apocalypse Now. And it ends with a look at Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?, in which Grossman discusses the Coen brothers as flagrant, flamboyant adaptors who disparage the whole notion of originality. Part II, “Textual and Marginal Identities,” considers the multiple versions of Imitations of Life as it asks us to ponder how racial “passing” functions as a form of adaptation; it analyzes the largely forgotten but brilliant film, Safe, as a “quiet adaptation” of Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper;” and it spotlights the surprising number of musical plays—including Dogfight and Far from Heaven—that have recently adapted independent films. Part III, “Immersive Theatre and the Monstrous Avant-Garde,” explores how immersive theatre is adapting classics like Alice in Wonderland and The Great Gatsby; it provides a close look at Chris Marclay’s The Clock, a 24 hour, participatory adaptation of myriad scenes from Hollywood cinema; and it concludes with a look at Mr. Burns, a post-modern mash-up of film, television, and theatre that adapts The Simpsons.

Most readers will not know all of these texts. I certainly didn’t. But Grossman isn’t interested in revisiting familiar works; she wants to introduce us to offbeat ones that raise new questions about adaptation. And for all its intelligent, thoughtful analysis of specific texts, it’s the questions raised by the book that are its strongest contribution. Her discussion of Hearts of Darkness, for example, poses this implicit question: can we reconcile notions of auteurism with the implicitly communal, collaborative spirit of adaptation? Her look at Gods and Monsters asks how actual deaths—the deaths of authors, filmmakers—informs both the production of adaptations and their reception. Her chapters on immersive theatre invite us to consider how adaptations can bring together works and authors—such as Shakespeare and Hitchcock—whom we otherwise might see as strange bedfellows. And her discussion of the musical play, Hamilton, presents this timely question: how
can adaptation empower marginal groups by allowing them to take on the racist texts that have held such sway over Western culture?

In every sense of the word, Grossman’s book is a “vital” contribution to the field of adaptation studies. It reanimates those texts we thought we knew; and, through its engaged analysis, nurtures those strategies in adaptation that are just developing. Most important, it takes on a field that not too long ago was considered dead—predictable, uninspired, parochial—and infuses it with life. Like other excellent scholars in the field of adaptation studies, Grossman is creating a monster—and for those of us who teach and write about the process, this is thrilling stuff indeed.

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The Tennessee Williams Annual Review invites academic writing on all aspects of the Williams oeuvre, including his plays, poetry, prose, and correspondence. Studies of the productions of his plays and technical analyses of stagecraft and institutional issues are also welcome. Founded in 1998, the journal routinely publishes brief texts that emerge from the ongoing examination of his literary records (usually draft versions of plays). Of particular interest is the history of the reception of Williams’s work—and the public persona cultivated by the author—in the postwar Broadway renaissance and in the period roughly from 1940 to 1980, in the US and abroad. Also of interest are the lasting effects of Williams’s work on the cinema of the 1950s and after. The editors are also eager to consider work devoted to present-day productions of recently discovered and newly edited texts.

In addition to work that focuses primarily on Williams, the journal is interested in studies of his contemporaries—of playwrights and other creative personnel as well—and of relevant issues (e.g., the queer history of the period). Especially welcome is scholarship that draws on archival sources and helps illuminate the material history of Williams’s literary output, as well as the culture his work and public persona both reflected and shaped.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All submissions should be 4,500 to 9,000 words long, including notes and works cited, and should follow the most recent MLA guidelines.

Please prepare submissions in a recent version of Microsoft Word and send them as email attachments to R. Barton Palmer, editor (PPalmer@Clemson.edu), and Margit Longbrake, managing editor (Margitt@hnoc.org).

All submissions must carry assurance that they have been submitted exclusively to the Tennessee Williams Annual Review. For full submission guidelines, visit tennesseewilliamsstudies.org
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